

AS YE SEE THE DAY APPROACHING

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

The beginning of a new year is an appropriate time to “take stock” of where one is, from both a personal perspective and a global perspective.

From a personal perspective it is good to consider the year just past, and to recall the blessings one has received—in the very least the blessings of the physical strength and health that have enabled one to survive the last twelve months, and the spiritual faith and strength that have enabled one to continue to rejoice in the knowledge of God’s plan of salvation.

From a global perspective, reflection on the events of the past year, and their correlation with Bible prophecy, strengthens one’s faith, as Jesus told His disciples: *“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). Jesus’ statement would be meaningful to them only if they observed the events He had told them about and they recognized them as being those events.

Likewise with Hebrews 10:25: the verse is meaningful only to those who are aware of world events and who recognize them as signs that “the day” is “approaching”.

However two questions arise: to which day does Hebrews 10:25 refer, and what were the Hebrews to see that would tell them the day was approaching?

The day

The Scriptures refer to several days (or periods of time), some of which are:

- The day of the Lord (Ezek. 30:3; Joel 3:14; Obadiah 1:15; Zeph. 1:14);
- The day of the Lord’s anger (Zeph. 2:3);
- The day of judgment (Matt. 10:15);
- The day of wrath (Rom. 2:5);
- The day of trouble (Psa. 50:15; Jer. 51:2; Ezek. 7:7; Nahum 1:7; Hab. 3:16);

- The day of darkness (Joel 2:2);
- The day of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7);
- The day of mourning (Zech. 12:11).

The importance of identifying which day the writer to the Hebrews had in mind is emphasized by the fact that the adjective “the” is the definite article, that is, it refers to a specific day, and hence the reference was not merely a general expression.

Periods of time

The Greek word translated “day” does not always mean a period of 24 hours, although that is its primary meaning. Dr. Strong defines “hemera” (#G2250) as meaning “tame, that is, gentle; day, that is, (literally) the time space between dawn and dark, or the whole 24 hours (but several days were usually reckoned by the Jews as inclusive of the parts of both extremes); figuratively a *period* (always defined more or less clearly by the context)”. It is variously translated by the English words “day”, “judgment”, “time”, “while” and “years”.

The first of Dr. Strong’s definitions of “hemera” is that it refers to the time interval between dawn and

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dark, and that is its meaning in Matthew 4:2: “*And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred*”. Jesus had fasted for 40 time periods between dawn and dark and 40 time periods between dark and dawn—40 days (of daylight) and 40 nights (of darkness).

Likewise Jonah was in the whale’s belly for 3 time periods between dawn and dark, and 3 time periods between dark and dawn: “*For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly...*” (Matt. 12:40). Jonah was not ejected from the whale’s belly each night, so the term “day” applies to the period between dawn and dark only—a part of 24 hours.

Another example is in John 11:9: “*Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day?*”—12 hours is only part of 24 hours.

Whole 24 hours

The second definition of “*hemera*” given by Dr. Strong is “the whole 24 hours”. Matthew 6:34 justifies that meaning: “*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*”. The comparison in this verse is between the day when Jesus spoke and the following day, the morrow—each was a period of 24 hours.

Likewise Lazarus was in the grave for four days—four periods of 24 hours: “*Jesus said, ‘Take ye away the stone’. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, ‘Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days’*” (John 11:39).

Greater than 24 hours

Finally “*hemera*” is used to refer to a period of time greater than 24 hours: “*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king...*” (Matt. 2:1). The word “days” is from the same Greek “*hemera*” without any indication that it is plural. Herod was not king for just one day—one 24 hour period—and so in this verse “*hemera*” refers to the period of Herod’s reign—more than 24 hours.

Likewise in Luke 1:7 and 18 “*hemera*” is translated as “years”, and in Luke 23:7 and Acts 8:1 it is translated “time”, both of which refer to periods of time greater than 24 hours.

In his definition of the meaning of “*hemera*” (when it applies to periods of time greater than 24 hours), Dr. Strong puts the onus on the reader to decide for themselves the meaning of “*hemera*” (that is, the length of the day), based on the context. However there is no clue in the context of Hebrews 10:25 that gives any indication of the length of “the day”, hence it may be understood to mean any of length of time.

However, regardless of the duration of the time period ascribed to the term “day”, the events which the Hebrews were to “see” were future from when the book of Hebrews was written—but just how far into the future those events were is not clearly stated: the record simply states the day was “*approaching*”.

Approaching

The Greek word translated “approaching” is “*eggizo*” (Strong’s #G1448) which Dr. Strong defines (in its simplest sense) as “to make near”. In the King James Version it is translated by several different expressions:

- “*Sell that ye have... provide yourselves bags which wax not old... that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth*” (Luke 12:33);
- “*And saying, ‘repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’*” (Matt. 3:2);
- “*And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh*” (Luke 21:20);
- “*And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him*” (Luke 18:40);
- “*And it came to pass, when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called the mount of Olives...*” (Luke 19:29);
- “*Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him*” (Luke 15:1);
- “*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you...*” (James 4:8).

The above examples illustrate that the Greek word “*eggizo*” is descriptive and not definitive, that is, it does not specify how much time would elapse before the day would arrive.

The Gospel Age

The book of Hebrews was written at the beginning of the period of time commonly referred to as the Gospel Age, that title being derived from the message of the angels when Jesus was born: “*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord*” (Luke 2:8-11). The news of Jesus’ birth was “good tidings of great joy” because it was He who would save the people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), and give them the opportunity of life after death: “... I am come that they might have life...” (John 10:10).

And so Mark wrote: “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*” (Mark 1:1). Mark goes

on to recount the circumstances of Jesus' birth and to record Jesus' early ministry: *"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the **gospel of the kingdom** of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and **the kingdom of God is at hand**: repent ye, and believe **the gospel**"* (Mark 1:14-15).

Thus the Gospel Age was "at hand" when the book of Hebrews was written, and so the Hebrews were to be aware of it, just as Paul wrote to the Romans: *"And that, **knowing the time**, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep... the night is far spent, **the day is at hand**..."* (Rom. 13:11-12).

The evidences that were available to the Hebrews were different from those presented to those who were in personal contact with Jesus, as Jesus conveyed to John the Baptist: *"Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them"* (Matt. 11:2-5). Jesus declared that the miracles He performed were a sign that His day had come, and just as John the Baptist was to be aware of the significance of the events of his day, so the Hebrews were to be aware of the events that were occurring and would occur during "their time".

The day of Christ

While the miracles Jesus did were a sign that the world's redeemer had come, it was also necessary for the believers to realize it was not yet *"the times of restitution of all things spoken of by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began"* (Acts 3:21). In similar vein Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: *"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ... that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, **as that the day of Christ is at hand**. Let no man deceive you by any means: for **that day** shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way"* (2 Thess. 2:1-7). Paul introduced them to the reality that several events were to transpire before the *"day of Christ"*; as he had previously told them.

The day of Christ

One yearning of Jesus' disciples was the restoration of Israel's glorious kingdom: *"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost (Spirit) is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"* (Acts 1:6-8). Jesus told His disciples that it would be some time before He would restore the kingdom to Israel—sufficient time for them to be witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth.

2013

The year 2013 A.D., as notated by the Gregorian calendar, is approximately 1950 years after the book of Hebrews was written, and there are numerous signs in the world today that indicate that the times of restitution—the day of Christ—is near.

One sign is that the Jews are being gathered into their own land: *"... Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land"* (Ezek. 37:21). Israel's gathering from among the heathen does not refer to their re-gathering after their bondage in Egypt, nor their captivity in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar—both of those events were past: *"Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that **it shall no more be said**, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers"* (Jer. 16:14-15).

There are several characteristics of Western Societies today that indicate the day of Christ is at hand: *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God"* (2 Tim. 3:1-4). To those characteristics may be added the derision of the scoffers regarding the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ—indeed, *"when the Son of Man cometh will He find faith on the earth?"* (Luke 18:8). Thus it is incumbent on all Christians in 2014 to not forsake assembling together **as they see the day approaching**, regardless of how they individually understand the words and context of Hebrews 10:25.■

THREE AMAZING PROPHECIES

The article below is published with the kind permission of Rev. Gerald Rowlands, O.A.M. the author of several books. In giving permission, Rev. Rowlands asked that the address of his internet website be published. The address is:

<http://www.israelspropheticfuture.org/>

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Zechariah 12 contains three amazing prophecies whose fulfillment is imminent, and whose fulfillment will transform the world forever. It predicts events that will happen in the Last Days, approximately 2,400 years after the prophecies were given.

The predicted time of their fulfillment, which the Bible calls “The Day of the Lord” (Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10), is evident today: Israel is surrounded by would be conquerors.

The absolute accuracy of these events predicted in Psalm 83 and Zechariah 12 is vital for the validation of the accuracy of the Bible and the righteous truthfulness of God Himself. If the enemies of Israel were successful, the Bible would be seen to be inaccurate and totally unreliable.

The battle prophesied in Zechariah 12 will constitute a great overt demonstration of the power of Yahweh and that of His enemies. How amazing and challenging is the possibility that these powerful prophecies could well be fulfilled very soon in this, the generation now living. Once the predicted attack is launched, the further prophecies concerning Israel's victory and the Holy Spirit's visitation to the nation will also happen. We need to prayerfully prepare ourselves for these ultra-important events.

Prophecy Number One - The Attack On Israel

“Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem” (Zech. 12:2).

In the “Last Days” all the nations surrounding Israel will attack (lay siege against) Israel. The nations surrounding Israel today on all her borders are Islamic

nations with a deep, long standing, bitter hatred of Israel and a determination to conquer and subjugate it for the honour of Allah. They seriously plan to form a new international Caliphate with Jerusalem as its capital city. Their plans and preparations have been in progress for many years now. This has been true particularly since the formation of the Jewish State in 1948. Several attempts have been miraculously defeated by Israel but now, with access to many weapons of mass destruction, the Muslim nations are growing in confidence that they can finally achieve their goal of conquering the Jewish State.

The present threats of destruction are being fostered by Iran and also aided by Russia. The preparations are daily in the International news media.

Syria and events there are a vital indicator of what could easily erupt any time. When threatened attacks are launched, Israel will be forced to take strong retaliatory action which will cause a severe international reaction affecting every nation. At the time that these prophecies were given, Jerusalem was like a tiny village compared with the cities of this present day. The fact that one day this very city and the land on which it stands would become the focus of world attention seemed highly unlikely if not impossible. But in this 21st century the ears and eyes of the whole world are focussed upon this tiny strip of land. Events transpiring there threaten the destabilisation of the whole world. Most people are beginning to realise that what happens there will certainly affect every nation on earth. However, the nations do not yet realise exactly all that will happen as a result of this devastating attack.

Prophecy Number Two - Israel's Amazing Victory

“And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the LORD of hosts their God. In that day will I make the governors (Alluphim, that is, Military Generals) of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem. The LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah. In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem” (Zech. 12:5-9).

Although Israel has one of the smallest armies in the world, yet it has proven to be one of the most effective. However, the broad and intense ferocity of the attack from every border may prove too great for Israel to cope with alone. Basically the whole world is against Israel, blaming it for all the troubles in the Middle East. Israel will realise their desperate need for divine intervention.

In the face of such potentially powerful enemies, from a “natural” viewpoint, a huge devastation appears inevitable. Israel will be forced to call on their God Yahweh to come to their rescue. If the Muslim intention was realised and Israel was no longer the homeland of the Jewish people, the Bible would become obsolete, together with the validity of all its predictions and prophecies. If Israel could be destroyed, vast sections of the Middle East could also be destroyed during the conflict.

Zechariah predicts that the Lord Himself, through the power of “the Angel of the Lord”—the promised Messiah—will personally intervene, leading Israel to an amazing supernatural victory.

Prophecy Number Three - Outpouring of the Holy Spirit On Israel

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; The family of the house of Levi apart...” (Zech. 12:10-12).

This part of the prophecy is possibly the hardest one to believe. It predicts that following the amazing victory that God achieves for Israel, God will pour out the Holy Spirit of grace and supplication upon the whole nation. The recipients of this outpouring will respond in repentance, recognizing their deliverer as the One who once was pierced in the city of Jerusalem. This amazing event will completely transform the nation spiritually. The transformation will not happen in one literal day, but probably over a relatively short period of time.

Of these three predictions, the first one describing the attack on Israel is the easiest one to believe. Intense preparations and bold declarations are happening right now before the eyes and ears of the world and hence the possibility of such an attack upon Israel is

highly feasible and possible. Fanatical religious fervour is obviously capable of launching this predicted attack. Weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Israel's fanatical satanically driven enemies, obviously affords great confidence that tiny Israel can finally be conquered.

The second prophecy, that Israel will achieve an amazing victory over their vicious enemies, requires a greater measure of faith. The idea of God personally intervening so powerfully in this conflict will test the faith of many. The possibility of such direct supernatural intervention into this situation will astound many people, including many Bible believing Christians. The whole world population will stand amazed to witness this overtly supernatural intervention by the God who calls himself “The Holy One of Israel.”

However it will be the fulfillment of the third prophecy that will be the most amazing of all, when the whole nation of Israel recognises their Jewish Messiah. The spiritual transformation of the whole nation is predicted in Romans 11:25-27: *“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. 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”.*

The Jews, as God's chosen people, have suffered so much throughout their long turbulent history but they have remained largely true to their unique ancient identity. Despite all their many trials many of them have remained faithful to the commandments that God gave them so many centuries ago.

However the suffering, discrimination and hurt they have sustained, often at the hands of so called Christians, has confirmed their reluctance to believe in Yeshua. When finally the whole nation sees and recognizes the true identity of their nation's Deliverer—as the One who saved them from total destruction—is also the very One who died in ancient Jerusalem, how glorious that recognition will be!

The big picture

Zechariah 12 must be recognized as one event in three stages. The first of these stages—the predicted attack on Israel—appears to be inevitable in the very near future. It could explode at any time. Once this happens, it will culminate with the fulfillment of the second stage, an astounding supernatural victory for Israel. We can be sure that this dramatic victory will shock the whole world, clearly revealing the reality

and omnipotence of Yahweh, the true God of the universe. Of the three stages, in one sense the most difficult to imagine or believe may be the prediction of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Israel and the subsequent recognition of the true identity of their deliverer. Israel will actually look upon their Messiah: *“And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation”* (Isa. 25:9).

It is also interesting to read from whence the deliverer will come.

It is possible He will come out of Jerusalem as indicated in Romans 11:26: *“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”.

At this time, in response to supplications made to Him, the Messiah will *“take away all their sins”* (Rom. 11:27). The people of Israel will be transformed into a Messianic nation and together with Gentile believers will then constitute the One New Man that Paul predicted in Ephesians 2:15. This will be a remarkable proof of the validity and authenticity of the Bible and the plan of God to establish an earthly Kingdom with Yeshua HaMashiach as the King, ruling the nations from the throne of David in Jerusalem. How glorious will the world become under the righteous rule of the Messiah!■

WHAT GOD HAS PROMISED

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”*.

The first part of the definition is that faith is the “substance”, or underlying principle, of hope. In other words, faith is dependent on hope—if one does not have any hope, one cannot have faith; there is nothing in which one can exercise faith. However the question arises: are their hopes assured or are they merely wishful thinking?

Faith is also the *“evidence of things not seen”*. “Evidence” means conviction, that is, being fully convinced that one’s hopes will be realized, even though, as yet, such events have not been seen.

Hence faith applies only if one hopes for something and is convinced their hopes will be realised.

Abraham exemplified faith on two special occasions, firstly when God told him Sarah would have a son: *“And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her”* (Gen 17:15-16). No woman had previously conceived a child when she was 90 years old, but Abraham *“staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform”* (Rom. 4:20-21).

Abraham’s faith was demonstrated again when God told him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham’s conviction

that God would honour His promise and Sarah would be *“a mother of nations”* was so strong that he reasoned God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill His promise: *“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure”* (Heb. 11:17-19). In that context it is understandable why God counted Abraham’s faith for righteousness.

The Christian faith

The “Christian faith” is comprised of those same two components: for a Christian to have faith they must have a hope for things to come in the future, and not only have hope but be fully persuaded that what God has promised He will perform.

When seen in that light it is apparent that the Christian must be aware of what God has promised, and be convinced that God will fulfill His promises. However many of God’s promises are very different from what mankind has historically experienced so that many regard the promises as “pie in the sky”.

Wars to cease

One of God’s most remarkable promises is that He will *“make wars to cease”* (Psa. 46:9). And not only will He stop wars but the nations will destroy their weapons: *“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. 2:4). When viewed in the light of history this

promise seems implausible—impossible—and so to believe the promise requires total conviction that He will bring it about.

Consistent with God stopping all war is the promise that no nation will plunder another, and specifically that the nation of Israel will not be plundered: *“And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands”* (Isa. 65:21-22). This promise is challenging because Israel has disobeyed God many times, has been captured and bound in slavery, so that many have lost faith (conviction) that God will yet establish Israel as He has promised.

Going even further, the promise is that, at some time in the future, nothing shall hurt nor destroy any other creature. So comprehensive will the implementation of that promise be that there will be complete harmony between all the animals and between mankind and all animals: *“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. 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. 11:6-9). In view of the “law of the jungle” that now exists, it requires great faith to believe this promise. The Christian must be convicted.

World conversion

Isaiah 11:9, just quoted above, also promises that all mankind will know the Lord, *“for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”*. That situation will be in stark contrast to the situation that prevails today when only those whom God has chosen are able to understand the mysteries of His will, *“... 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 what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God... But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them,*

because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:9-14). When one considers the diligent but largely unsuccessful efforts of so many evangelists throughout the centuries since Christianity was born, it is a test of faith that God will bring about such a universal covering of faith in the earth.

Of particular note is that all in Israel will be included—indeed, from the least to the greatest: *“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”* (Jer. 31:31-34). Yes indeed, what a change: *“The earth shall be filled with a knowledge of the Lord”* (Hab. 2:14). Who can believe it?

No more sadness

Consistent with the glorious conditions that will then prevail on the earth, there will not be any sorrow, sighing, crying, sickness or death; on the contrary *“the lame man shall leap as an hart”, “the eyes of the blind shall be opened”, “the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped”* (Isa. 35:5-6); and *“death shall be swallowed up in victory”* (1 Cor. 15:54).

Prosperity

God has promised there will not be any droughts, but that *“... he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody”* (Isa. 51:3). Yes, *“the earth shall yield her increase”* (Psa. 67:6) and *“the desert shall blossom as the rose”* (Isa. 35:1). In view of the history of the climatic conditions that have existed in the earth for so many centuries, beginning in the days of Abram when drought (famine) caused him to continue to Egypt (Gen. 12:10), it is a test of faith to believe these promises will be fulfilled.

Nevertheless there is no doubt these promises will be fulfilled because God is all-powerful: nothing is too hard for Him, and *“He is faithful that promised”* (Heb. 10:23)—*“there is no variableness nor shadow of turning with Him”* (James 1:17).■

BE THOU AN EXAMPLE

"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).

Examples are a powerful teaching medium in all fields of learning. The ability of students to copy, create or reach a defined standard is enhanced if they can see an example of whatever it is they are trying to achieve. The principle is applicable to Christians also: they are aided and encouraged by the example of those who display the characteristics of Christian maturity. Thus Paul encouraged Timothy to display the qualities of a mature Christian, so that he could better nurture those to whom he ministered.

Paul encouraged Timothy to also *"preach the word... reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine"* (2 Tim. 4:2). However before he could do so with authority he needed to be an example to those to whom he preached, otherwise he would be a hypocrite, as Jesus deemed the scribes and Pharisees: *"He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me"* (Mark 7:6). The scribes and Pharisees did not practise what they preached and so it was essential that Timothy practise what he preached, that is, he was to be one who demonstrated his faith by his works, as James also exhorted his readers: *"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works"* (Jas. 2:18).

As well as not being a hypocrite, being an example also provided his hearers with someone whom they could imitate, and it was in that vein that Paul exhorted his readers to follow him: *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"* (1 Cor. 11:1).

Christ our example

In exhorting the Corinthians to follow him, Paul was not setting a new standard but merely giving them a model of someone who followed the supreme example of Jesus Christ. God did not provide Christians with a book of instructions only, specifying how they should live, but He also gave them an example to follow: that of His own beloved Son, as Peter wrote: *"Leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps"* (1 Pet. 2:21).

Obedience

Obedience was the greatest example of Christ's perfect life—obedience to God, His Heavenly Father. Had He not obeyed God's will, all God's plans for salvation of the human race and the restitution of all things would have come to naught. As recorded in

John 6:38, Jesus said, *"I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me"*.

Likewise the Christian must be obedient to God's word: *"For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord... If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them"* (John 13:15-17)

Jesus' learning

One might think that, being God's accomplice in the creation of the world, Jesus would know about every characteristic of the human race. However Hebrews 5:8 reads: *"Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things he suffered"*. The concept of Jesus learning obedience by the things He experienced is valid in that it was not for His sake alone, but for the benefit of His followers as Hebrews 4:14-16 explains: *"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"*. Jesus experienced all the temptations that befall the human race and consequently He is an "inspiration" to all who follow in His footsteps.

Resistance

As well as providing His followers with an example of obedience and experience, Jesus also provided an example of resistance to temptation. God saw fit to test Jesus' obedience by allowing Satan to tempt Him in the wilderness. But the tempter's efforts were to no avail—Jesus had come to do His Father's will, and all that it involved, including persecution, loneliness, weariness, enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and finally the cruel death on the cross. His resistance to the wiles of the Devil was comprehensive and victorious—and reflection upon His example should provide the Christian with renewed determination not to yield to the devil's temptations. Such resolve is particularly necessary in these last days because *"... your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Pet. 5:8).

One tangible antidote for the devil's assaults is to realize *"that the same afflictions are accomplished in*

your brethren that are in the world" (1 Pet. 5:9). In other words the support of other brethren can assist in overcoming the assaults of the devil.

Compassion

One consequence of realizing that other brethren are experiencing the same temptations should be greater compassion for each other, as Peter exhorted: *"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous"* (1 Pet. 3:8).

Again Jesus left a perfect example of compassion for His followers to copy: *"Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother"* (Luke 7:12-15). Jesus emphasized with the grieving mother to the extent of performing a miracle.

Likewise the early church exercised the same compassion: *"For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance"* (Heb. 10:34). Their compassion was not in word only but was demonstrated by self sacrifice.

Humility

Jesus also exemplified humility. Perhaps there is no greater test upon the Lord's people than the test of humility. Maybe one consideration that will aid the Christian to develop humility is to recall who Jesus was before He came to earth and the mocking and ridicule He endured during His ministry: *"Who, being in the form of God... made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Phil. 2:6-8). There is no greater humility than for the One who was with God during the creation of the universe to come to earth and suffer despite from those whom He had created.

Forgiveness

There are many exhortations for Christians to be forgiving, and what greater example could there be than Christ's words just prior to His death, *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34). As Paul exhorted the Ephesians: *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you"* (Eph. 4:32). Indeed forgiveness is part of the prayer Jesus' taught His disciples: *"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"* (Matt. 6:12).

Surely there is no greater example for the Lord's people to follow than that of Jesus, and brethren everywhere do well to strive to emulate it just as Paul exhorted Timothy. ■

HORNETS

Arutz Sheva (www.IsraelNationalNews.com) reported on 10 April 2013 that hornets have killed dozens of people in China and injured more than 1,500 with their powerful venomous sting. The Asian giant hornet, known scientifically as *Vespa mandarinia*, carries a venom that destroys red blood cells, which can result in kidney failure and death.

Hornets are mentioned three times in Scripture:

- Exodus 23:27-28: *"I will send forth My terror before you, and I will throw into panic all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn tail before you. I will send hornet ahead of you, and it shall drive out before you the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites".*
- Deuteronomy 7:20: *"The Lord your God will also send a hornet against them, until those who are left in hiding perish before you."*
- Joshua 24:12: *"I sent a hornet ahead of you, and it drove them out before you".*

Insects generally do not discriminate between different races of humans—if they attack one they attack all—and so several Jewish Rabbis have pondered which physical criterion God used to cause the hornets to attack only Israel's enemies.

The fact that they cannot identify the physical criterion is another example of God's miraculous power and of Him using seemingly "natural forces" to accomplish His plan.

The miraculous nature of this event is emphasized by the fact that when God used the plague of locusts to "persuade" Pharaoh to release the Israelites (Exod. 10), God used the seemingly natural resource of an east wind to bring them (verse 13) and a west wind to disperse them (verse 19). However He does not seem to have used any such "natural" medium to bring the hornets. As creator of the universe God has all the "powers of nature" at His disposal. ■

THREE TEMPTATIONS

There is a sense of urgency in Jude's letter *"to them that are sanctified"* (verse 1): *"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ"* (verses 3-4). Jude's motivation stemmed from his awareness that *"certain men crept in unawares"*, had perverted the gospel, and as such presented a danger to his brethren.

He also reminded them the *"faith was once delivered unto the saints"*, which implies there were some who wished to vary the simple message, perhaps by what Peter calls *"cunningly devised fables"* (2 Pet. 1:16). Today additional doctrines have been added in such a way as to not be noticeable to many—hence they also are unaware—to which may be added the deceptions which Paul calls *"oppositions of science falsely so called"* (1 Tim. 6:20). Such deceptions are particularly powerful at this time because *"science"* occupies a prominent place in Western (developed) societies, affording many benefits such as medical care, many labour saving devices and convenient means of transport.

Jude's exhortation to *"earnestly contend for the faith"* is particularly relevant also because science appeals to the intellect, and hence there is a temptation to regard the simple gospel as antiquated and erroneous. Hence the challenge to the Christian is to hold firm to the faith that was delivered to the saints, and to resist the attraction of the man-made doctrines as being elements of progress in the faith.

Jude stresses the importance of his message by referring to several events recorded in the Old Testament, and relating how those events should forewarn Christians of the temptations which challenge their sanctification.

The exodus

The first example Jude quotes is the loss of conviction by the nation of Israel after they were freed from Egyptian bondage: *"I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not"* (verse 5). The loss of conviction by the Israelites was in spite of their nation having been in slavery for more than 400 years, having been required

to make bricks without straw, and their deliverance coming only after the Egyptians had been afflicted with several plagues, culminating in what, to the natural man, might have seemed highly improbable—that the blood of an animal on the door posts and lintel of their houses would protect their first born from the angel of death. Added to that was God's miraculous action in providing a way for them to cross *"the sea"* when they seemed to be trapped between the sea and the Egyptian army (Exod. 14). Yet it was only *"the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger"* (Exod. 16:2-3).

Jude's reminder of Israel's loss of faith during their exodus from Egypt was an exhortation to Jewish Christians who were living in his day, not in terms of their physical deliverance but of their deliverance from the yoke of bondage of the Law Covenant: *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage"* (Gal. 5:1).

His exhortation is relevant to Christians living in the 21st century because of the loss of faith arising from the seeming delay in the establishment of the kingdom, and hence the temptation to return to the flesh pots of the world. However the Christian is not to be surprised at the lack of faith: *"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"* (2 Pet. 3:3-4). The situation is indeed as Jesus told His disciples: *"...when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"* (Luke 18:8). Nevertheless the Christian must not lose faith that the promises will be fulfilled: *"For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry"* (Hab. 2:3).

Another factor which might be exacerbating the loss of faith is the *"success"* of many scientific inventions, such inventions giving the impression that mankind is master of his environment. It cannot be denied that many inventions have greatly eased the blight of the

condemnation inherited from Adam—developments in the fields of medicine, transport and many labour saving devices—nevertheless the Christian’s faith must not be based in such uncertain riches: *“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God...”* (1 Tim. 6:17).

The way of Cain

Jude also reminds his readers of the way of Cain (verse 11). The lesson to be learned from Cain’s example is explained in Hebrews 11: 4 and 1 John 3:12: *“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous...”*. The preference God gave to Abel’s sacrifice led Cain to slay Abel, and John explains that the Christian must develop love to the extent that it will overcome such jealousy: *“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous”* (1 John 3:11-12). One antidote for jealousy is to remember that it is *“God (who has) set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him”* (1 Cor. 12:18), and thus it is not for the individual to be jealous of the position to which God has appointed another: *“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). It is not the Christian’s province to dictate to God who should have pre-eminence.

The error of Balaam

Jude also reminds his readers to be aware of the error of Balaam. The account of Balaam’s misdemeanour is recorded in Numbers chapters 22 to 24.

Firstly he was confronted with a bribe from Balak—*“rewards of divination”*—which he did not reject immediately, but *“extended hospitality”* to Balak’s messengers and invited them to stay overnight (Num. 22:7-8). It seems Balaam should have known better because when God came to Balaam He asked: *“what men are these with thee”* (Num. 22:9). It is apparent God’s question was rhetorical because God would have known who they were, and hence asking that question implies Balaam had erred.

Although it is not stated in the book of Numbers, the Apostle Peter declares that Balaam’s love of riches was a powerful factor in the temptation: *“Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who*

loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:15). Jude expresses this temptation as *“the error of Balaam for reward”* (Jude 11). The lesson is that Balaam should have immediately rejected the messengers’ bribe and sent them away. The lesson for the Christian is that they must not be led astray by the temptation of wealth, which is a powerful temptation in these latter days of materialism.

The second temptation presented to Balaam was a position of prominence: *“And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people”* (Num. 22:16-17).

Although Balaam refused the bribes of money and prominence, he did invite Balak’s messengers to stay another night: *“And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more”* (Num. 22:18-19). Again Balaam’s offer to provide accommodation for the messengers could be interpreted as a praiseworthy gesture, but Balaam should have recognized their source and the dangers of accommodating them. In other words, the Christian’s prayer must not be one of words only, but they must demonstrate the sincerity of their prayer: *“Lead us not into temptation...”* (Matt. 6:13).

It was not until God opened Balaam’s eyes that he realized his ass’ obstinacy was the Lord’s direction: *“Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way... and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times... And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me...”* (Num. 22:31-34). The Christian must never forget the great blessing it is for God to have opened their eyes.

It was not until the third temptation that Balaam rejected the bribe outright: *“And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness”* (Num. 24:1). May the Christian be more aware of the Lord’s leading in all the affairs of their life and respond promptly and immediately to the Lord’s leading. ■

THROUGH THE EYES OF JOSHUA (PART 1)

"He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them. He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night. The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river. For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness: And gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the people; That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise ye the LORD" (Psalm 105:37-45).

I'm beginning to feel my age a bit. I had my 110th birthday last week, and my old joints are beginning to feel the strain! I've led a pretty active life, and I've been greatly privileged to work for the good Lord since I was quite a young man, and to witness – and take some part in – many of His mighty works amongst my people. There have been good times, and there have been not-so-good times, of course. But now, I sense that He'll be coming to take me home, quite soon; and I'll be ready for Him.

I've been asked to tell you something about my life-story, and I'll do my best, though I may be a bit pushed to compress it all into a few pages! I'm not promising to cover all the details, but I think I can give you a general flavour of what I've experienced, and I hope it'll prove helpful to all you young people who read my story!

Joshua is my name, son of Nun – 'Yehoshua', really, or sometimes 'Hoshea'. The name means 'God saves', or something like that – and that's a pretty important name to carry around with you for a century and more! But there were plenty of other young 'Joshuas' and 'Hosheas' around when I was growing up, so, in order to avoid confusion, I always seemed to be known as 'Joshua, the son of Nun'.

Some of the kids liked to pretend that 'Nun' was spelled 'n-o-n-e' – that I was 'the son of none', implying that I had no parents! I guess they were trying to suggest that I was illegitimate, but I would have been much too young to have understood the implications of that! Some of the other lads liked to spell it the correct way – 'N-u-n' – but then they would tease me by saying that 'Nuns shouldn't really have children, you know!' Anyway, I used to laugh it all off; and it's all a very long time ago, now.

My Dad, Nun – he was a fine man, but he and my dear mother both died when I was quite young, and I'm afraid you won't find anything about either of them in the Books of Moses, except, of course, where Nun is mentioned as being my father!

His father – my grandfather – was called Elishama, and – if you ask me really nicely – I could quote you

the names of all my ancestors, all the way back! All Israelite children are taught to recite their family genealogies, you know. My Dad came from the tribe of Ephraim, which – along with its fraternal tribe, Manasseh – sprang from Joseph, who had been the saviour of the Children of Israel when they had been starving, during the Great Famine; I'm sure you remember the tale of how Jacob's sons travelled down to Egypt to buy grain, without realising that the important man who was selling that grain to them was actually their brother Joseph, whom they had sold into slavery so many years before! That's a wonderful story in itself; but ultimately, of course, it led to the Israelites becoming enslaved in Egypt themselves for some 400 years, until God sent Moses to us, to bring us out into freedom.

I was born while my people were still in Egypt, and after the death of my parents I was brought up by uncles and aunts – the concept of 'family' is terribly important to us Israelites! I was in my early 'twenties' when the great 'Exodus' took place.

In the years leading up to it, times had been terribly hard for us. The Egyptians had embarked upon a massive building programme – temples for their gods, tombs and pyramids for their Pharaohs, plus major civil engineering projects of all sorts. They had some wonderful architects and engineers, but they wanted someone else to do all the hard work! – so we Israelites, who had entered their country as shepherds and farmers, soon found ourselves being recruited into their labour force, and terribly hard labour it proved to be. 'Make bricks without straw', they told us, at one stage – I'm sure you've heard all about that! (To be continued)■

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