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Ruth-A Woman of Excellence

The story of the life of Ruth is a favourite of many, especially Christian and Jewish women. Many of us know the account as recorded in the Book of Ruth. We observe how the Lord God dealt with His servants of olden times and find them refreshing and faith inspiring. So we aim to examine the story of Ruth and glean the meaning, lessons and examples for us to live by. This godly woman especially portrays the many graces that we are all to strive for in our consecration. Her life was blessed by God despite the severe hardships that she endured. We will note her special relationship with Naomi and Boaz, and we can meditate on several other passages of Scripture that are similar to the beautiful words in Ruth.

‘Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from following you, for wherever you go I will go, and wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me and worse if anything but death part you and me.’ (Ruth 1:16,17) These are the beautiful words of the Maobitess, Ruth, to her mother-in-law, Naomi. This is Ruth’s heart-devoted prayer to stay with Naomi in the land of Judah following the death of her husband and brother-in-law, and in this period Naomi’s husband had died also.

The account gives little hint of what caused the death of Eliminech, Mahlon and Chilion other than there was a severe famine in the land, perhaps affecting the whole region including the land of Moab where Eliminech had sojourned. It was in this neighbouring country to the north when the judges governed that Eliminech and Naomi and their two sons lived for about ten years. Bible commentators suggest that the countries of Israel and Moab were living peaceably during the years of around 1250 BC, the time when Gideon was the Judge of Israel. Now the two sons of Naomi were to marry young Moabite women. This must have been a real blessing to Naomi, to have Ruth as a daughter-in-law.

Ruth was obviously learning and observing the Israelites’ faith and customs. How much she must

have wished to seek the Lord Almighty in those early years we do not know. However, after her loss and sadness and vulnerability as a widow and perhaps many other hardships in a time of famine, this affected her. Just to provide food and water, and to dwell in safe and content living arrangements, would mean there would have to be many personal sacrifices. In her trials, she turned to the God of Israel.

This brings us back to the well-known words of Ruth to Naomi: ‘For wherever you go I will go, and wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God.’ Indeed, Ruth must have loved Naomi. Despite her mother-in-law’s advice to return to her mother’s family, Ruth clung to her and did not return. We find in chapter 1, verse 14, that Ruth and the other widow, Orpah, wept and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law but Ruth clung to her. The meaning of the word translated ‘cling’ (Heb **dapaq** Strong’s No.1692) is given by Vine as – ‘to join fast together, to glue, cement’. The idea here is of devotion and affection, just as is meant when a man shall cleave unto his wife. We have a promise of the restoration to Israel in Deut.30:20 – ‘That thou must love the Lord thy God and that thou mayest obey His voice that thou mayest cleave unto Him, for He is thy life and the length of thy days.’ Yes, we indeed need this loyalty and loving devotion to our Heavenly Father.

The Barley Field of Boaz

If we continue with the account of Ruth we see that Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem. Naomi was

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feeling afflicted by the Lord due to the losses in her family. However, she still had the young woman, Ruth, to support her. As a widow also, they could understand each other and have some compassion one with the other. The time of the barley harvest came, an all-important time to gather the grain into the barn. It is interesting to note that various writings refer to corn instead of barley, yet it is explained in Smith's Bible Dictionary that 'corn' included wheat, barley, spelt or rye, and millet. The Indian corn was unknown in biblical times. The barley was an important cereal grain for baking into bread, especially among the poor, and it was also used as fodder for animals. Ruth was a hard worker and sought to glean in the fields.

It was known that Naomi had a wealthy kinsman, Boaz, who was a close relative of Eliminech. Boaz was addressing his servants working in his field reaping when Ruth had been observed gleaning. Boaz sought her name and welfare, then he showed immense favour towards Ruth, allowing her to be with the maids and to have protection from the men. When we understand that the gleanings were only for the poor or foreigners of Israel, it shows us the kindness of Boaz and his obedience to the Lord's instruction given in Deut.24:18,19, which reads: 'Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this. When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it; leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.' There we see Ruth, the widow, and how Boaz was fulfilling this commandment of the Lord.

Boaz instructed Ruth to stay on in his fields and to drink from the servants' water jars. Perhaps one of the most submissive actions performed by Ruth is in chapter 2, verse 10 - 'Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found favour in your sight?' And Boaz acknowledged Ruth's great care and devotion and sacrifice to Naomi, and for this he prayed a blessing from the Lord to be upon Ruth: verse 12 - 'May the Lord reward your work and your wages be full from the Lord, God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.' Ruth had taken great comfort from Boaz and returned to Naomi with a bountiful amount of barley she had gleaned that day. Ruth was to stay in Boaz's field for the whole harvest period. Thus Ruth and Naomi were receiving favours from the kinsman, Boaz. Naomi saw that it was good and asked for a blessing of the Lord on Boaz.

Boaz Redeems Ruth

The account of the event that follows brings about more social interactions with Boaz and Ruth. Naomi encourages Ruth to have security or to confide in someone. So with some detail to physical appearance

and apparel, she went and secretly approached Boaz down at the threshing floor and did all that Naomi had instructed her by uncovering his feet and lying down. Boaz acknowledged that he was a redeemer. He was impressed that Ruth did not seek young men, either rich or poor. Ruth's character is praiseworthy in this regard as with her love shown to Naomi and for her submissiveness and gracefulness. In Ruth 3:11 Boaz says, 'Now my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in this city know that you are a woman of excellence.' The other translations say 'virtuous, noble or worthy woman'. What a beautiful expression this is to honour the woman Ruth. How would it make you feel if you were known for such traits? Abounding in the graces should rightly develop and purify them even more by humility and patience.

Ruth was granted six ephats of barley to take to Naomi, while Boaz sought to settle his redeeming rights to the young woman. The interest Boaz had in Ruth was very honest and sincere. We may see a romantic element between them, and this is perhaps in the zeal and promise he gives her that he would seek to redeem her in that day. Boaz sought out the closest relative with wisdom and friendliness. They then took ten elders of the city and announced before the witnesses that Boaz would buy the field from Naomi and redeem Ruth by means of marriage to her. This agreement was blessed, and the Israelite custom of removing one sandal was practised. The redeemer was giving much to Naomi and Ruth. This was the way of raising up the name of the deceased. Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife.

The union was blessed by God. The Lord God enabled Ruth to conceive and it was that she gave birth to a son. In Ruth 4:14 the women say to Naomi: 'Blessed is the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in all of Israel. May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you and is better to you than seven sons has given birth to him.' The child was named Obed. Naomi would become a nurse for him. Oh, what love Ruth had for Naomi and for Boaz. She was indeed a holy woman of Israel.

Ancestor of Christ our Redeemer

Obed was born into the royal line and his son was Jesse, and Jesse had the son named David. We see in the description by Ruth that she was used by the Lord to bring forth the promised seed. Obed was a blessing to her and Naomi, yet the verses speak prophetically of the genealogy of Christ, the Redeemer of all time and Redeemer for all, Jesus Christ, some 1200 years later. He will become great and famous in all Israel.

We know our Deliverer has bought us with His life

and will restore and sustain us. It is interesting that Ruth is mentioned with Boaz in the listing of the generations in Matt.1 where we have the genealogy of our Saviour, Christ. We see the wisdom from above evident in the lives of Boaz and Ruth – Boaz in his dealing with his servants in the field and his maid was fair and reverential. He also took the steps in redeeming Ruth, showing mercy and submission to the elders. Reading from Proverbs 2:1-10: ‘My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding, for if you cry for discernment lift your voice for understanding. If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth comes knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice, and he preserves the way of his godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course for wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.’

May we take this path to find wisdom from our God and daily live the words of Proverbs 3:1-6: ‘My son, do not forget my teaching but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness

and truth leave you. Bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart so you will find favour and good repute in the sight of God and man.’ And ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.’ May we learn to dwell safely under His wings, as Ruth did, in our Heavenly Father’s care. Do we have this love and affection and holy devotion to Him and cleave unto Him, unto our brethren and to the truth? Yes, we must obey His voice, for He is life and length of our days. Today we still see His work in the hearts of the faithful in this end of this Age. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God is drawing His people to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and we still have the gathering into the barn of the ripe grain as each one finishes their course. May we all be faithful unto the end. May we have a faith like Ruth.

Psalm 128 fits very nicely into the life of Ruth: ‘How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands you will be happy and it will be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive plants around your table. Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord blesses you from Zion, and may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life, indeed may you see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel (DG/05)

THE TWO PART SEED OF ABRAHAM

In Romans 4:16 the Apostle Paul presents to us an interesting topic: ‘Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.’ In this verse Paul makes it clear that there are two parts to the seed to whom the promise is made sure or guaranteed. These are (1) that which is of the faith of Abraham, and (2) that which is of the Law. Three main questions arise in relation to this verse. At this time, the first two questions will be addressed, particularly as they have relevance to that part of the seed of Abraham designated ‘that which is of the Law’. The third question will be the subject of a future presentation. The questions are:

1. What is the promise referred to here?
2. Who constitutes the two parts of the seed?
3. How will this promise be fulfilled?

Firstly, we need some background information before addressing these questions specifically. We are all familiar with the phrases ‘the Abrahamic covenant’ and ‘the Abrahamic promise’. These are usually taken to mean the same thing, namely, the unilateral promise

by God to Abraham that his seed would bless all the nations of the earth. We also understand that a covenant is an arrangement between two parties, in this case between God and Abraham. Biblical covenants are usually ratified by a sacrifice. This particular covenant, specifically this arrangement, involves the promise that something will occur without conditions or requirements made of the other party, namely Abraham. Given that the promise was made by God, and God is of course all powerful and cannot lie, the thing promised must therefore come to pass. God made this promise to Abraham ‘because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws’ as Genesis 26:5 shows when God was speaking to Isaac, Abraham’s son.

We talk about the Abrahamic covenant or promise in terms of one promise, but in fact God promised a number of things to Abraham at various stages. God promised to Abraham:

1. That he and Sarah would have offspring, a seed, despite his advanced years and Sarah’s barrenness.
2. His seed would be multiplied as the stars of

heaven and as the sand of the seashore.

3. That the seed of Abraham would possess the gate of his enemies.
4. That he would be the father of many nations.
5. The land of Canaan would be his and his seed's possession forever.
6. In Abraham all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.
7. Finally, that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

We note that Genesis 28:14 makes clear that there would be two sources of blessings for the nations of the earth, namely, Abraham himself as well as his seed. The possible significance of this will be addressed shortly. These last two promises have the most far-reaching consequences. It is inclusive that, unlike the previous promises which refer to promises for Abraham and his seed, this promise pertains to all nations or all peoples of the earth. In essence, God declares unilaterally and in fact swore by Himself since there was none greater that He would bless all peoples of the earth and that Abraham's seed would be the avenue for this blessing. It is worth emphasizing that it is this promise that is usually synonymous with the Abrahamic unconditional covenant or promise. An explicit example of this is given to us in Acts 3:25, and we note the three elements contained in this covenant: (1) Abraham's seed, (2) shall bless, and (3) all the kindreds and families of the earth. At the same time, one is impressed by the number of references in the New Testament to some of the other promises made to Abraham, and it is also reasonable to include them as being part of this overall Abrahamic covenant. The other promises appear to have less inclusive aspects and indicate sometimes purely earthly fulfillments, but because they carry the same weight of certainty they should not be overlooked or undervalued. Therefore the Abrahamic promise or covenant can be regarded as including these other promises under the main far-reaching umbrella promise of 'in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed'. Some of these references will be mentioned now.

We will note shortly in Galatians 3 that Paul applies 'in thee', that is 'in Abraham shall all the families of the earth be blessed', to the Gospel Age blessings for Christians. In Romans 4 we have reference to God's promise to Abraham that he would have a fleshly seed and that he would become the father of many nations. Acts 7 mentions God's promise that his literal seed would be multiplied, using the narrow definition of the Abrahamic promise, namely as referring to 'in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed, unless otherwise stated. Many Christians understand that the Abrahamic promise is fulfilled in the Gospel Age blessings of Christians who demonstrate the faith of Abraham in Christ Jesus. Certainly Galatians 3

gives that impression, that it is only Gospel Age Christians who are justified by faith, and Paul equates this with the promise that 'in thee shall all nations be blessed'. We notice, however, that Paul does not say 'in **thy seed** shall all nations of the earth be blessed'. He, in fact, says '**in thee** shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' No reference is made to the seed blessing the families of the earth. This omission appears to be significant. In the enumeration of Abrahamic promises earlier, a distinction was noted in Genesis 28:14 where all the families of the earth are blessed **in thee**, ie Abraham, **and in his seed**. In other words, all the families of the earth will be blessed in Abraham **and** in his seed.

Paul's lesson in Galatians 3 appears to be a direct reference to the blessing of Gospel Age Christians as expressed in their connection with Abraham, namely, they have the same important faith. In this regard, the common union of faith justifies and fulfills the prophecy that in Abraham all the families of the earth shall be blessed. The corollary of this is that the blessing of all the families of earth by Abraham's seed is something different and something awaiting fulfillment. It is different because the blessing is done in the seed and not in Abraham, and it awaits fulfillment because if we are right and the **faith-seed** has not been completed then the **seed** cannot be blessing all the families of the earth as yet. We understand and feel the blessedness of our position of not having our sins imputed to us because of faith in Jesus. This provision by the grace of God qualifies as 'good news' or 'the gospel' as Paul puts it, particularly for heathen or Gentile nations because formerly God only knew the Jewish nation.

In some ways it would seem reasonable that this blessedness of a small number of truly faithful followers of Jesus be mentioned in the Abrahamic covenant, which we understand is a general statement of God's plan for all of mankind. If we are of that true faith-seed of Abraham, we, like Abraham, are truly blessed. Not only have we been given a much more detailed view of God's plan than Abraham had but we, like Abraham, have been justified before God, and not just under friendship but under sonship. He was called the friend of God, we the sons of God. To be called the sons of God implies blessings too numerous and stupendous to mention. We have been made to sit in heavenly places and given the guarantee of our heavenly inheritance. This is a truly blessed position and, as Paul suggests, is referred to in the Abrahamic promise by that part expressed by 'in **thee** shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' Therefore, this distinction between Abraham and his seed blessing all the families of the earth appears important. It is important because the grandest and most far-reaching promise made to Abraham does not refer just to the relatively

small number of Christians during the Gospel Age but to the entire human family.

The Faith-Seed of Abraham

We see then that the faith-seed of Abraham is firstly the object of God's blessings but, once complete, becomes the subject of God's blessings for the whole world. In other words, the seed is blessed and yet will also be the avenue or the conduit by which the blessings of the whole world will flow. This flow-through nature of God's blessings in relation to a perfect creature is to be expected since God cannot use an imperfect creature to bless others unless the Adamic creature is firstly brought into relationship with God. This can only occur if that creature is made righteous, whether this be actual or imputed. This flow-through nature of God's blessings is also shown in God's dealings with Abraham. Abraham became the friend of God because righteousness was imputed to him for his faith, and it was only after this blessed state was achieved that he could become the focus of God's blessing for others, Gospel Age Christians for instance. It goes without saying that all of these blessings originate with God so that when we speak of the seed blessing all the families of the earth, the real origin of them is with God and they merely flow through the seed to the world. This flow-through nature of God's blessings is mentioned because the same thing in such as the seed may be both the subject and object of God's blessings. This also reflects the abundance of God's blessings inherent and implicit in the Abrahamic promise.

In our key verse, Romans 4:16, we need to be clear about which of these promises the Apostle Paul is alluding to, and this is the first question that will be addressed. Which promise our key verse refers to is given in Romans 4:13, a few verses prior to our key verse: 'For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.' Here we have a direct reference to the promise that Paul is talking about in our key verse. The problem is that the phrase 'heir of the world' or something similar is not found elsewhere in the Scriptures. It also, at first glance, does not appear to correspond to any of the promises made by God to Abraham as enumerated before. So what does Paul mean by 'heir of the world'? When we look through the list of promises, one would assume that possessing the gate of his enemies and the seed blessing all the families of the earth would have to be closest to what Paul means by 'heir of the world.' The Greek word translated 'heir' also carries the thought of 'possessor, or one who possesses something'. The Diaglott translates the word 'possessor'. Most other translations also carry that thought of inheriting or possessing.

We understand that to bless all peoples, the spiritual seed needs to subjugate or rule over the nations. This can, of course, only occur through the much-promised worldwide Kingdom of God. Paul may have had Psalm 2 in mind when he used the phrase 'heir of the world' showing that the world would have to be subject to the seed before the blessings could flow. Paul knew that the Kingdom that Jesus preached meant possessing the world before blessing it. The whole seed would be included here, which is made clear in the promise made to the church in Revelation Chapter 2. We note the similarity of the promises here and in Psalm 2. The key feature is that nations are subjugated and become subject to the seed. Psalm 82 also refers to inheriting the nations, this time however by God.

The Kingdom is, of course, ultimately God's. This is why we call it the Kingdom of God. The spiritual seed will reign a thousand years and then the direct rulership will be handed back to God. Another clue linking inheriting all nations in Psalm 82 to the Kingdom and thereby its blessings is the reference to judging the earth, which we also understand occurs only in its ultimate sense in the Kingdom. It seems fairly clear then that Paul's phrase 'heir of the world' probably reflects the main Abrahamic promise that the seed shall bless all the families of the earth.

Now we will examine the second question in relation to the key verse in Romans 4, the two parts of the seed. Who does 'that which is of the law and that which is of the faith of Abraham' refer to? Let us address the second group first since this seems most straightforward. The answer is given to us in Galatians 3:7 and 29: 'Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham....And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' In other words, those that are in Christ have the same faith as Abraham and are Abraham's seed. Does this group of 'those of the faith of Abraham' refer to Gentile converts only or Jewish converts as well? The verses above are not exclusive and do not speak of just Gentiles, and therefore all that show Abraham's faith in Jesus are counted as being part of the seed. This would then suggest that Jewish and Gentile converts would be referred to collectively. This thought that Jewish and Gentile converts are included together is supported by Galatians 3:23,24. Those under the Law and taught correctly by it were brought to the faith in Jesus. These are styled 'the Jewish remnant' for as a nation the Jews were rejected and stumbled at Jesus, but those few, like Paul, came to have Abraham as their spiritual father and not just a father according to nature. So this category 'which is of the faith of Abraham' appears to refer to all Gentile and Jew who have come to develop Abraham's faith in Jesus.

That Seed Which Is of the Law

Having clarified who constitutes this part of the seed, we need to answer who constitutes that part of the seed styled 'which is of the Law'. It has been suggested that it refers to Jewish converts through faith in Jesus, but we have already seen that these would have to be included amongst those of the faith of Abraham, and therefore it appears that Paul had something else in mind. The fact that this group is 'of the Law' suggests those of natural Israel who have not died to the arrangement of the Law Covenant. Jesus, of course, made an end of the Law Covenant by nailing it to the cross. This provided an opportunity for imputed righteousness by faith in Him and became established once His perfect sacrifice was completed.

We note, however, that faith in Him is required before this imputed righteousness can be provided and death to the Law Covenant could occur. Those still under the Law Covenant who do not have that faith remain under the Law until now. Romans 4:13,14 makes it plain that faith is required in order to inherit the promise 'heir of the world' which we have seen is, in Paul's mind, equivalent to blessing all the families of the earth. This suggests that in order to inherit the promise those making up this category, ie those still under the Jewish Law or Covenant at present must come to a position of faith in Jesus; but not during the Gospel Age, for then they would qualify as Jewish Christians and be counted under that which is accounted the faith of Abraham and become part of the spiritual seed. Therefore this conversion would have to occur after the spiritual seed has been completed.

But what evidence is there that religious Jews convert and see Jesus for what He was and is, namely their Saviour? Romans 11:25, 26 speak of this event in the right timeframe. We note that at this time that the full number of the Gentiles has come in, this event referring to the full number of spiritual seed being gathered during the Gospel Age. So what is being talked about occurs at the end of the Gospel Age not during it. That this is the correct timeframe is confirmed by the reference to the Deliverer coming out of Zion. This suggests that true anti-typical Zion at this point exists as a total rather than as a partial entity. In type literal Zion is a reference to the typical seed of Levitical power of Jerusalem on Mt. Zion, and the anti-type refers to the establishment of the spiritual rulership of the Kingdom. Acts 3 tells us that Jesus is first and foremost the anti-typical David. We also note that the whole seed, that is Jesus and His 144,000 body members, are included in this picture. They stand together on Mt. Zion, as we read in Revelation 14; the whole seed being the anti-typical David and thereby fulfilling the sure mercies of David. This again points to a time at the end of the Gospel Age when the spiritual seed is complete and it is only after this that Israel will be

saved by the Deliverer banishing ungodliness from Jacob.

Romans 11 refers to the lack of faith in Jesus as a hardening (or blindness, as the King James puts it). This hardening occurred because of unbelief. Jesus was and is still a stumbling block and a rock of offence for the majority of Jews, but we note that this will end when the full number of Gentiles comes in producing faithful, natural seed. Zechariah gives us much more information concerning these events. We are familiar with Zechariah 12:10. This verse describes the stupendous conversion of the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and is associated with the events which we understand will occur at the very end of the Gospel Age, specifically the destruction of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem – sometimes referred to as Jacob's trouble. This again confirms the right timeframe. There are many details in these chapters concerning these points and soon to come to pass events which time does not permit us to examine. However, some of the more salient features are as follows.

In Zechariah 13 we are told about the cleansing of the house of Jacob and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This corresponds to Paul's 'banishing ungodliness from Jacob'. This cleansing process is likened to a refining process in verse 9. We note Zechariah 13:7-9 and the first two verses in Chapter 14 are given in poetic form. It is to be noted that only one-third are left and refined like gold. Previously some have taken these poetic verses as referring to spiritual Israel, however the context is that of Jacob's trouble at the end of the Gospel Age, indicating that it refers to natural Israel. So then, it appears that those of the natural seed that have been cleansed and have had ungodliness banished from them and pass through the refiner's fire will come to have the necessary faith to qualify for the promise as outlined by Paul, namely, to become heirs of the world or, in other words, to become part of the seed that shall bless all the nations of the earth. Given that the spiritual seed has been completed by this time, this natural part of the seed would have earthly bodies and consequently constitute the earthly seed of Abraham. Since this earthly part of the seed is gathered after the spiritual seed has been selected at the end of the Gospel Age, it is appropriately styled 'that which is of the Law' because it is future by Paul in our key verse because during the Gospel Age they properly remain shackled by the Law Covenant.

In much the same way as the spiritual seed, this natural seed will be blessed first in order to become useful and qualified to bless the nations of the earth. This order of blessing, like the order of tribulation and anguish which has been fulfilled historically, is alluded to by Paul in Romans 2:9-11. Again we see this flow-

through nature of God's blessings, this time the conduit being the faith-seed according to the Law. It is worth emphasizing that this faith-seed according to the Law is a highly selected group. They will have come through much cleansing and refining to be part of this faith-seed. Like Nathaniel, they will be Israelites indeed. It has been suggested that it would be unfair for a faith-seed according to the Law to be favoured with such a prominent position and role in the Kingdom. However, we note that as touching this selection they are beloved, for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. The promises made by God to Abraham and reiterated to Isaac and Jacob are sure. Not only this, but also God is no respecter of persons, i.e. there is no favouritism with God. The nations of the earth will receive their blessings of true life, but all in good time, according to God's own counsel expressed in His plan of the Ages.

This thought of faithful Jews blessing the nations of the earth is supported by various Scriptures. We note in Zechariah 8:13 that the time will come when the house of Judah and Israel will no longer be a curse among the heathen nations but, in fact, a blessing. In Zechariah 8:23 we have a clearer picture of how this will occur. The nations will actively seek the guidance and help of the true Jew in order to access divine blessings because God will first dwell with that nation. Isaiah and Micah speak similarly. The nations will actively seek the blessings of the Kingdom of God which will be set up and have its earthly seat in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be the conduit for the word of the Lord. Every nation that will not worship God by not recognising the seat of God's Kingdom in Jerusalem will have its blessings withheld, shown by the rain

being withheld. These verses therefore support the notion of the natural faith-seed role of blessing the nations of the earth.

In conclusion, it seems the Abrahamic covenant and the promise in relation to the Abrahamic seed blessing all the families of the earth is complex and far-reaching in its scope. The Abrahamic covenant is a general statement of God's Plan of Salvation for all of humanity. It seems it cannot only be regarded as including earthly blessings for natural Israel but specifically includes a faith-seed made up of earthly natural descendants styled by Paul as 'that which is of the Law' which will bless all the families of the earth like the spiritual faith-seed. Both parts of the seed of Abraham are selected according to their faith, the spiritual part being selected during the Gospel Age proper, whereas 'that according to the Law' once the spiritual seed has been finished. We have also noted the flow-through character of God's blessings in relation to both parts of the seed and even of Abraham himself. It also seems that the promise to inherit or possess the world is assured to both parts of the seed. Both will be conduits for God's blessings for all nations.

We stand with the Kingdom in sight. The spiritual seed appears to be all but complete and the selection, cleansing and refining of the natural faith-seed will soon take place and be completed, allowing the Kingdom to be set up and for the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Let us lift up our heads as we see these things taking place for our deliverance draweth nigh. Let us see that the time is truly short and make every effort to make our calling and election sure. (ES:12/03)

We Have This Treasure

The Apostle Peter had a very clear objective in mind when he wrote his second epistle. In 2 Peter 1:12,13 we read: 'Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things though ye know them and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance.' And then in the last chapter, that is, 2 Peter 3:1 he says 'This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you in which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.' And those words are equally applicable to us today. The very large majority of our spiritual activity today is stirring up our minds by calling into remembrance the things that we already know. So it is, over the last few months, I have been reflecting upon the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor.4:5-7 which read: 'For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined

in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.' As I reflect upon those verses I realise that there are many deep and precious truths in them. So it might be profitable if we stir up our minds just by reflecting on three points that Paul raises in those three verses.

(1) What is the Treasure?

First of all, just what is the treasure that the Apostle Paul referred to, why does he call it a treasure and not give it some other name, and then close with just a few thoughts about earthen vessels – 'we have this treasure in earthen vessels.' What, then, is this treasure that the Apostle Paul refers to? I can still remember the first time I read these verses for myself. At that time I had just become convinced about the calling of the church and the idea of joint heirship and living and reigning

with Christ for a thousand years. Those thoughts were pre-eminent in my mind. What else could surpass those concepts? So, when I read these verses for myself, straight away I assumed that the treasure was the hope of joint heirship. It wasn't until many years later that I realised I was wrong. What I was doing was imposing my preconceived idea on what the Apostle's words were rather than sitting back and reading what the Apostle was saying and understanding what he said. Let us again read what he said in verse 6: 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels.' So it now comes through to me that the treasure to which the Apostle is referring has already been defined in verse 6 – the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That's the treasure.

When we ponder those words, we realise that Paul does not say God has given the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, and stop there. He adds the qualification that God has given the light of the knowledge of the glory of God **in the face of Jesus Christ**. That qualification is necessary and very important because there are other things that tell us about the glory of God. In Psalm 19:1 we are told that the heavens declare the glory of God, and don't they? It has been said that if the heavens were available for humans to view on only one night in a year, not one person would miss the spectacle, but because they are so freely and continuously available, then we tend to take them for granted and don't always appreciate the majesty and glory which are manifest and apparent from the heavens. Not just from the celestial heavens, either. We also see in our terrestrial environment the glory of God is apparent all around us. Let us read Romans 1:20 – '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.' They are available to mankind to see, and they reflect the glory of God, the invisible things of Him, His eternal power and godhead. Nature, using that general expression, is there for anyone who observes and thinks about it; that creation reflects the glory of God. The nation of Israel also reflects the glory of God. In Isaiah 43:1 & 7 'But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, fear not for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine....For everyone that is called by my name, for I have created him for my glory.' When we understand even something of the role of Israel is God's plan. I believe we can now see something of God's glory manifested in them and eventually the whole world will see God's glory manifested in them.

So we see there are several things that reflect the glory of God, therefore the qualification that Paul adds in 2 Cor.4 is important. He has given us 'the light of the

knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Why did he say the face of Jesus Christ? The face is a very indicative member of the human anatomy. We can tell lots of things by looking at a person's face. Observe the colour: white and pasty –unhealthy; rosy - well, healthy; red – angry, pulsed up. I believe a sensible and logical interpretation or understanding of this expression 'in the face of Jesus Christ' is consistent with the use of the face in biblical symbolism. After all, these verses are written for us to understand, and in Ezekiel 38:18,19 we read: 'And it shall come to pass that at the same time that Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord God, that my fury will come up in my face.' That's a very meaningful expression, isn't it, when we relate it to our everyday observation? Nothing mystical about it! 'My fury will come up in my face!' We can always tell when someone is angry, furious, hot and bothered.

Another attribute of the face is that it indicates favour or disfavour. I recall seeing Idi Amin on television when he attended a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. He was shaking hands with all the dignitaries and came to Prince Charles who was there representing the Queen at that time, and Charles turned his back on Idi Amin, refusing to shake his hand. That symbolism is also used in the Scriptures. In Ezekiel 39:22,23 we read: 'So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword.' Then in verses 28 and 29 the contrast: 'Then shall they know that I am the Lord their God which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them.' Showing the face is an act of favour, wanting to be greeted, acknowledgement, but turning the back is an act of disfavour. So we see the face is a very important part of our make-up and we can tell lots of things by seeing a person's face - does he show us his face or does he not, is he furious, angry, healthy, and so on? In 2 Cor.4 we learn that God has shined in our hearts, the light of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. Not in the back, no, He has turned His face to us as an act of favour. We see His face, and we can learn so much from the face of Jesus Christ about the glory of God.

What do we see in the face of Jesus Christ that really reflects the glory of God? First of all, let us turn to Hebrews 1:1,2 – 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.' We can debate the meaning of 'worlds' there but it comes through quite

clearly that to understand that God created the ages, fleshed out the heavens, made the earth, modified the earth for man's existence, all through His Son, elevates His Son to a very high and important position. And understanding the status He had helps us to see the glory of God. On the other hand, those who don't understand the significance of Jesus' initial position are unable to understand the glory of God. When we look at some Aboriginal monuments and places of tourist attraction with their technologically brilliant displays, we can feel sympathy with the people because entwined amongst their decorations, illustrations and exhibitions we never see credit given to the fact that the world was created by God's Son. These people at the present time have absolutely no chance of seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ because they do not recognise Him. But, of course, people today looking out on the world don't see any glory in creation, particularly in man's plight, as we read in Romans 8: 'The whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.'

What do **we** see? We see that the whole creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into His marvellous light eventually, the same as Christians. They do not have the same reward, but they will be delivered from corruption. And how will that be brought about? By Jesus Christ, who gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time. If we don't see Jesus Christ in God's working, then we can't see the glory of God. But if we understand that God has subjected man to this present situation but that He has given His only Son, the One who was with Him and through whom He made the worlds, to be man's Redeemer who gave Himself a ransom for **all**, then we can start to see something of the glory of God. Of course, if it was just limited to those who see and understand now, it would still be a very shallow and perhaps cruel organisation. So doesn't Acts 24:15 become important, that 'there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust.' We can't see that unless we understand that Jesus Christ gave Himself a ransom for all. After man has been condemned to death as he is now, and goes through the death condition, bondage and corruption, when he is resurrected (both the just and the unjust) then the world of mankind will start to rejoice in the glory of God. But we can see that now in the face of Jesus Christ, and aren't we privileged to see that?

In Isaiah 35:10 we are told that 'the ransomed of the Lord shall return.' Who are they? Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all, and there will be a resurrection of all the dead, both the just and the unjust. The ransomed of the Lord will return and come to Zion, not in the bondage of corruption but with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall come in joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. So, we start to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. How privileged we are to see that at this time! But let us give credit where credit is due, and that of course is giving

credit to God, because in 1 Cor.1:22-24 we read: 'For the Jews require a sign, and the Greek seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock and unto the Greeks foolishness. But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Yes, God's great plan of salvation is totally dependent upon Jesus Christ, as we all know by stirring up our minds, and putting ourselves in remembrance of these things that we already know.'

(2) Why is it Called a Treasure?

Paul says we have this treasure in earthen vessels. Why does he call it a treasure? A treasure is something to which we esteem **value**, and something might be a treasure to one person and it is a treasure to that person because they attribute value to those particular items. Paul says we have 'this treasure'. I would like to suggest that there are three characteristics of any particular item which might cause us to attribute value to it and therefore regard it as a treasure. The first one is that the object might be rare, and this is evident when looking over the gem fields in Coober Pedy. An enormous quantity of overburden and mullock had to be processed and they might find one little gemstone. That was regarded a treasure, and rightly so. That's in the material world. In the material world it also refers to the field of knowledge. Once during my working life I had to attend the Victorian Government State Library. I hadn't been there before. I walked into the front room and was shown to the reception desk, and I just could not believe my eyes. Altogether there were six storeys of books. Books, and books, and books, and books! I just couldn't believe that! I wanted to find a piece of information, which I eventually found with the help of the assistant, but not once during our searching did I see anything spiritual in the six storeys of books. That to me was just like the minefields or the gemfields at Coober Pedy. Oodles and oodles and oodles of stuff, but was there a gem there? Not really. So Acts 4:12 to me always is important. There is salvation in none other. There is no other name by which man can be saved other than by Jesus Christ. So really, in the field of knowledge in the world today, knowledge about our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is indeed very, very rare. Therefore, that is one reason why I think it is a treasure.

Another reason why it might be regarded as a treasure is that we **recognise** it. Now at the gemfields, we went and saw them being polished and put into settings or mountings, some people there were really impressed with the actual mounting of the gemstone. To them it meant a lot. To me, it meant nothing really. I didn't have the ability to recognise the value of that piece of jewellery. So the ability to be able to recognise that it is something very precious and we can attribute value to it is a privilege. I was observing the overburden and not being able to recognise the privilege. That's the way it

is with Jesus Christ, isn't it? In all these displays and scientific learning, so called, how much value is attributed to Jesus Christ? In simple terms I would be inclined to say He was a loser. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Indeed, 'foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head'. So, in temporal terms, mankind does not attribute any value to Him. They don't appreciate His value. It is very important, of course, because we are able to appreciate that value, that we recognise where the valuation comes from. It says in 1 Cor.1:30 'Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' So it is God who has given appreciation of the value of Christ Jesus. Yes, and that is in the face of Jesus Christ.

A third attribute which would cause somebody to regard something as being a treasure is **heritage**. Something that has been handed down to us from our forebears. We had nothing to do with it. It probably was not available to us while the previous person was alive. We only became aware of it after their death. And that's the same with Jesus Christ, isn't it? If we go to Galatians 3:22-24 we read: 'But the scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. For before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.' So before faith came, we were shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. It wasn't available. As we read in 1 Peter 1:7, 9-12: 'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.....Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you. Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.' Yes, the prophets enquired and searched diligently, but they were shut up at that time. It wasn't until after the death of Christ that faith came. So here we have a characteristic of the face of Jesus Christ which we can now see, just because we are living in the Christian era.

(3) In Earthen Vessels

Just a few comments about the next part of our text

where Paul says 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels'. For many years I accepted that the significance of that expression was that earthen vessels are leaky, we need continual replenishment, continuously stirred up. Let's read what the Apostle says: 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.' Then I asked myself some questions: Are earthen vessels necessarily leaky? We have some china vessels at home which are merely baked clay, and they don't leak. So again, I feel I was superimposing on these words my pre-conceived idea rather than listening to what the Apostle said. What is the scriptural significance of 'earthen vessels'? Are they meant just to be leaky? In Jeremiah, chapter 18, we have the account of the potter's house. Reading just a few verses from Jeremiah 18: '1The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, 2Arise, and go down to the potter's house and there I will cause thee to hear my words. 3Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. 4And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. 5Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying 6O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? Saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.' No mention of leaky vessels there. The vessel was marred in the hand of the potter. So what did the potter do? He made it again. In Romans 9, as we know, He is able to make one vessel unto honour and another vessel unto dishonour. Does it mean that it leaks? No. It simply means that we are as clay in the potter's hand and He does the work.

And isn't that what Paul has been saying to us? In the face of Jesus Christ, it is not of ourselves but of Christ crucified, that the excellency of the power may be of God, not of us. So we see this treasure, the treasure of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Jesus Christ, not because of our own doing, we are simply the clay. But we see it in the face of Jesus Christ because God has so designed it. **He** has shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ 'who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' Indeed, this knowledge that we have is a great treasure, something we are all aware of. I have discussed nothing new, I am sure, but maybe it has been a time of refreshing to recognise just what a great treasure we have in the knowledge that we have, however partial it may be. (GS/05)

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Rom 11:33

IN BRIEF

“DAVID ENCOURAGED HIMSELF IN THE LORD”

1 Samuel 30:6

This was at a time when David was sorely pressed; Saul was trying to destroy him. It seems strange that Saul, the once anointed of God, should do this. The background of events leading to the words of the text is found in the earlier chapters of this book. The question that arises is – How did David “encourage himself” in this chain of events, and so be able to successfully perform his difficult task? One may help to encourage another person, but how encourage oneself? Surely it was by waiting upon his God and by the exercise of faith.

Trust is the Old Testament term for faith. David trusted in his God; he recognized that God was everything; he exalted His name, and declared a knowledge of his own insufficiency. “He knoweth our frame” He remembereth that we are dust.” David’s knowledge of God and God’s knowledge of him combined to make great events possible. If God should be for him, all would be well, and how did David assure himself that this would be so?

He prayed to God and then obeyed His direction in answer. Thus God showed Himself the help and strength of David, In the circumstances of the time, we would think it would have taken tremendous courage, for instance, in earlier times for David to go out against Goliath. But David had faith – “I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts; He will give you into our hands.” We may ask – Does faith make courage unnecessary? Rather, it would seem that each is supplementary to the other; each supports the other. “Wait upon the Lord and He will strengthen thine heart.”

When David went out against Goliath, he went with courage in faith. David could have exercised faith on the sidelines and God could have done it all of His own will. But David knew someone had to go out for the Lord and co-operate with Him in what He wanted done. So it is for us to profit – How do we encourage ourselves in occasions of need? Let us remind ourselves of what God is and what He can do. We have more revealed to us than David had. We can rejoice in the promise of blessings to all the families of the earth. We can face things as they are now because we know what they are going to be. Jesus tasted death for all mankind and God’s blessings will flow to all as a result.

But there are still things for us to do; God requires our

co-operation. How can we strengthen ourselves in the Lord/ By studying God’s Word to learn His will. By becoming doers of it not hearers only, and through communication in prayer. By acknowledging Him in all our ways so that He shall direct our paths, Let us work out our salvation with great carefulness, believing that God is all-powerful to accomplish His will. With courage let us face realities; look through the difficulties; realize our weaknesses; in full confidence in His power to work through us.

SOJOURNING WITH GOD

Psalm 15:1

The opening verse of Psalm 15 poses two questions - "Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" (Verse 1 margin) Christians are pilgrims or "sojourners" in this present world, the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness pictured this. As they drew their succour from the tabernacle which travelled with them, so do we; it kept them, and it keeps us in touch with the Infinite

Our sympathetic High Priest keeps us cleansed from sin, and provides food from the "holies", if we continue faithful in the way. Some of the requirements of those who would sojourn with God are summed up in verse 2 of the psalm - firstly "he that walketh uprightly" ;The real meaning of the word is "consistency, careful at all times in what we say, what we do and where we go. Then follow "he that worketh righteousness" and "he that speaketh the truth in his heart."

Barnes comments that the psalm "contains a statement of what real religion is; one of the most explicit and formal which we have in the Old Testament." Micah 6:8 lists the requirements as "to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." If we seek earnestly to do so, we will enjoy the blessing that issues from the tabernacle of God, those holy things provided for our sojourn through "wilderness" conditions.

After the Israelites reached the promised land, Solomon built them a temple - "a settled place for them to abide in forever." (1 Kings 8:13) The temple on the holy hill of Zion pictured the eternal kingdom of God. If we complete satisfactorily our sojourn with God's tabernacle through the wilderness of the narrow way: during this Gospel Age, we shall dwell everlastingly in God's holy Zion above.

"In thy presence is fullness of joy. At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:11)

LOVE IS ...GREATER THAN PROPHECY

In secular circles the desire to know what the future holds is so strong that considerable resources are expended trying to predict it. Areas in which these efforts are made include the weather, financial markets, consumer preferences for various goods, traffic density and outbreaks of disease. Additionally, many who might not directly expend resources to obtain predictions of the future nevertheless base many of their decisions on such information, for example weather forecasts. Also, at a personal level, if one of our kin is sick we are anxious to know the "prognosis", that is, what their future is expected to be. So anxious are some to know what the future holds that they employ "fortune tellers" - card readers, palm readers, astrologists and the like.

Likewise in the religious world. Many aspects of religious faith are concerned with the future, and motivate its adherents to strive to better prepare for it.

The desire to know what the future holds has been with mankind since early days and prophets have always played an important part in God's dealings with mankind. There are several instances recorded in the Old Testament where people were curious to know what the future held. In Genesis 15:2 Abram asked the Lord "... what will thou give me .", a seemingly innocent request but nevertheless one that shows that Abram wanted to know what God had planned for him.

Another example is Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar had "*magicians and astrologers . in his realm*" to interpret his dreams and predict what lay ahead. (Daniel 1:20; 2:2) However they could not interpret one of his dreams and eventually he called on Daniel (a prophet - Matt. 24:15) to interpret the dream. God revealed to Daniel "*what shall be in the latter days*" and "*what should come to pass hereafter*". (Daniel. 2:28,29) Nevertheless Daniel was not given to know everything about the future, and on another occasion he was commanded to "*shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end.*" (Daniel 12:4, 9)

Daniel was not God's only prophet, but Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos and others "*...in old time ... spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*". (2 Peter 1:21). These prophets also yearned to know what the future held, as we read in 1 Peter 1:10 - 11: "*...of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently; ... searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow*".

Later, the apostles also wanted to know what lay ahead - "*wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*". (Acts 1:6) Such a desire was natural and in accord with God's will; the Revelation being given

later to "*show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass*" (Revelation 1:1)

In 1 Corinthians 12:28 the Apostle Paul establishes a clear hierarchy of the servants of God in the church, with prophets being second only in rank to the apostles: "*God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles...*". Consequently the office of a prophet in the early church carried with it considerable esteem and so it is easy to imagine why many in the early church would have desired the gift of prophecy.

The reason why the Apostle Paul gave prophets such a high rank is evident from their role. Dr Strong defines the term (#4396) as "*a foreteller, by analogy an inspired speaker*", and Young's Concordance defines the term as "*a prophet, public expounder*". The two aspects of prophecy - an inspired speaker and expounder on the one hand, and a foreteller on the other - are closely related. Prior to Jesus' first advent the Jews were a people in darkness (Isaiah 9:2, Matthew 4:14 - 16) and the Gentiles had "*no hope, and without God in the world*". (Ephesians 2:12) It was the gospel that "*brought life and immortality to light*". (2 Timothy 1:10) The work to be accomplished during the Gospel Age is the preaching of the "*gospel of the kingdom in all the world for a witness unto all nations*". (Matthew 24:14) This "gospel of the kingdom" relates to a time that was future from the Apostle's day (and is indeed yet future) and required inspired speakers to correctly expound it.

Prophecy - a basis for our faith

The gift of prophecy was one of the powers that God gave to selected ones to promote the development of the early church. (Romans 12:6) This gift was no less spectacular and awe inspiring in those days than it was in Old Testament times. In view of the importance of the prophets and prophecy in Old Testament times, and their relevance to the establishment of the Christian church, it is not surprising that the gift of prophecy might have been keenly coveted by those in the early church. Consequently the Apostle's declaration that "*though I have (the gift of) prophecy ... and have not charity (love), I am NOTHING*" (1 Corinthians 13:2) is a statement of great moment and ranks the development of love as the all important Christian characteristic.

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