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WHAT IS TRUTH?

Pilate was in a dilemma: he “*knew that for envy they had delivered him*” (Matt. 27:17-18; Mark 15:10), there was no evidence of sedition—Jesus had told him that His “*kingdom was not of this world*”—and his interrogation had not given him any other reason to convict Him. Nevertheless, in spite of him declaring: “*I find in him no fault*” (John 18:38), Jesus’ countrymen demanded he release Barabbas and send Jesus to be crucified.

When Pilate asked Jesus: “*Art thou a king then?*” Jesus replied: “*Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth... Pilate saith unto Him what is truth?*” (John 18:37-38).

Absolute origin of “being”

Pilate is not the only one who has asked that question. In Old Testament times, Solomon gave his “*heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven...*” (Eccl. 1:13-14). Solomon desired to know “the truth”, that is, the truth regarding the origin and purpose of life.

However despite Man’s best endeavours, the question remains unanswered. The theistic religions (those that teach there is a supreme being—a “god”) are based on the assumption that there is a god, even though they do not know his origin. Christianity—a theistic religion—defers to the Biblical declaration that God is “*from everlasting to everlasting*” (Psa. 90:2)—He is believed to be the Ultimate Cause, even though the Bible does not explain His origin.

Atheists (those who do not believe there is a supreme being) cannot answer the question either. The theory of evolution starts with “something” (“matter” or “anti-matter”); where did the “something” come from? The question remains unanswered.

Hence no-one knows the absolute truth about the origin of “being”, and consequently mankind is left to formulate hypotheses based on their observations. It is in that context that the authority of the Bible as the source of truth has to be established.

The Bible

For four centuries the King James Bible has been the foundation of the Christian world. Its teachings have been the basis of the legal and ethical frameworks of Western Societies. Referring to the King James Version, England’s Queen Elizabeth II, in her 2010 Christmas address to the nation said: “*Over four hundred years ago, King James the Sixth of Scotland inherited the throne of England at a time when the Christian Church was deeply divided. Here at Hampton court in 1604, he convened a conference of churchmen of all shades of opinion to discuss the future of Christianity in this country. The King agreed to commission a new translation of the Bible that was acceptable to all parties. This was to become the King James or Authorized Bible, which next year will be exactly four centuries old... The King James Bible was a major cooperative endeavour that required the efforts of dozens of the day’s leading scholars. The whole enterprise was guided by an interest in reaching agreement for the wider benefit of the Christian Church, and to bring harmony to the Kingdoms of England and Scotland*”.

The result of their studentship comprises 66 books, written by 40 authors over a period of many centuries. Several other books were considered, in

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particular 13 which refer to matters similar to those in the current Old Testament, and an undefined number relating to the New Testament; together they are commonly referred to as the Apocrypha (or “secret”), and are included in some of the “more liberal” Bibles.

The title “Authorized Version” is significant as indicated by the preface to a version published by Collins Clear-type in 1839: *“Translated out of the Original Tongues and with the former translations diligently compared and revised by His Majesty’s special command, appointed to be read in churches”*. It was *“Printed by Authority”* with the licence which authorized the printing restricting the print run to 50,000. The licence remained effective until 1948, but without the 50,000 limit.

Its influence

The Bible’s influence was greater in times past than presently, particularly when the British Empire dominated a significant portion of the globe. Since the demise of that Empire, some of its edicts have been abandoned by some administrations in the belief they have “greater light” (for example, marriage as an exclusively heterosexual arrangement is now being challenged by the concept of same-sex marriage). Nevertheless, the philosophy pronounced in the Bible continues to be the most plausible regarding Man’s origin, history, current plight and destiny. Indeed it is the only Book which contains a plausible explanation of all those aspects of Man’s existence—triumphs and tragedies alike.

The Biblical record

The Bible contains much prophecy and records much history. The Apostle Paul encouraged his readers to accept the Old Testament as the truth. He wrote: *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”* (Rom. 15:4). The premise of the Apostle’s argument was that the fulfilment of the prophecies recorded in the Old Testament testified to its authority, and therefore constituted a sound basis for hope that the promises that had not yet been fulfilled will yet come to pass.

The situation has not changed. Observation of world events, and their correlation with Bible prophecy, testifies that the Scriptures are the word of God, in contrast with false predictions (Deut. 18:21-22).

One prophecy recorded in the Bible which has been fulfilled is the sequence of the kingdoms that dominated Europe. The prophecy is recorded in the book of Daniel. In summary the prophecy was that the kingdom of Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:36-38), would be

superseded by the kingdom of the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5:5-28), then by Greece (Dan. 8:1-21) and finally by a fourth kingdom (Dan. 7:1-28), after which the kingdom will be given to *“the saints of the most high”* (Dan. 7:18). Several details of the transitions from kingdom to kingdom are given but suffice it to say here that the rise, fall and sequence of the kingdoms as prophesied in the book of Daniel are testified by secular records. In 2011 the world is in transition between the fourth kingdom and the kingdom of *“the saints of the most high”*.

Two prophecies being fulfilled at this time are recorded in Daniel 12:4—*“many running to and fro and knowledge being increased”*.

One evidence of the fulfilment of this prophecy is the increase in the number and use of motor vehicles. Numerous roads and “freeways” have been built to accommodate them, but the increase in traffic is such that they are frequently congested and even more freeways are required.

Air travel has also expanded dramatically in both the size and number of aeroplanes flying. Approximately 60 years ago the average aeroplane carried less than 100 passengers and travelled at approximately 300-350 kilometres per hour. Today many airline aircraft carry 300-400 passengers at speeds of almost 1000 kilometres per hour, travelling non-stop from Australia to USA.

The increase is stark when it is remembered that for centuries mankind was limited to walking, or using horses, donkeys or camels to move from one location to another. The increases in the number of people travelling, the speed at which they travel and the distances covered are phenomenal and are a fulfilment of the prophecy recorded in Daniel 12.

From beginning to end

The first and the last books of the Bible contrast Man’s origin and destiny. In Genesis, the earth is created; in Revelation, it passes away. In Genesis, the sun and moon appear; in Revelation there is no longer a need for the Sun or the Moon. In Genesis there is a garden, a home for man; in Revelation there is a city, a home for all the nations on earth. In Genesis, the marriage of the first Adam; in Revelation the marriage of the Second Adam. In Genesis, Satan the enemy appears; in Revelation Satan and all his cohorts are destroyed. In Genesis, tears, pain and death afflict mankind; in Revelation, sorrow, pain, tears and death are destroyed. In Genesis the ground is cursed; in Revelation there is no more curse. In Genesis, Man is driven from the tree of life; in Revelation Man returns and eats from the trees of life. The story is complete!■

THE BOOK OF LIFE

“... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

The purpose of Jesus' coming to earth was to enable mankind to have life. The right to live forever was lost when Adam transgressed in the Garden of Eden: *“And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life... In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return... And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden...”* (Gen. 3:17-23).

Since that time, many have sought to regain life, not just a temporary existence, but eternal life—to live forever. The Apostle Paul was one whose hope was to obtain eternal life, as he wrote to Titus: *“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began”* (Titus 1:2). Likewise Paul exhorted Timothy to *“fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called...”* (1 Tim. 6:12). And so it is that the purpose of every Christian's calling is to obtain eternal life, because *“there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling”* (Eph. 4:4). The hope of eternal life is not limited to Christians, but has been the hope of many throughout history, to all *“... who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life”* (Rom. 2:7).

The book of life

However Revelation 20:12-15 implies that not everyone will gain eternal life: *“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is (the book) of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works”* *“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire”* (Rev. 20:12-15). Those whose name is not in the **book of life** will be destroyed in the lake of fire, that is, second death. Consequently the qualifications

required to gain entry into the book of life are crucial to the attainment of eternal life.

Qualifications

Revelation 3:5 specifies two qualities that are necessary to gain entry into the book of life: *“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels”*. The two qualifications of those in Sardis whose names were in the book of life and would not be blotted out were to have *“not defiled their garments”* and to have *“overcome”*.

Another qualification is given in Revelation 13:1-8: *“And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns... and all the world wondered after the beast... and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast?... And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”*. Those whose names **are not** in the book of life wondered at the beast (wondered; admired; worshipped—Strong's Concordance #2296; 4352). Those whose names **are** in the book of life did not wonder—admire, worship—the beast.

Time frame

The visions in the book of Revelation relate to events that *“must shortly come to pass”* (Rev. 1:1), that is, that would occur after Jesus' ascension. Since all the texts quoted above relating to the book of life are in the book of Revelation, it may be assumed that entry into the book of life was not possible before Jesus' first advent. However Revelation 17:7-8 states: *“...whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world...”*. The expression *“foundation of the world”* refers to the creation of the world as Hebrews 4:3 states: *“... the works were finished from the foundation of the world”* (Heb. 4:3). Hence all who have ever lived have been eligible to have their name written in the book of life, from Adam onwards.

Thus, although not named, the Book mentioned in Exodus 32:31-32 might be the “*book of life*”, and Moses’ name is in it: “*And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written*”. Moses must have known that his name was in the book of life in order to ask that it be “*blotted out*”.

Moses’ request also implies that his name was entered into the book of life while he was alive. Entry during one’s earthly life is confirmed by the Apostle Paul: “*And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life*” (Phil. 4:3). The names of Paul’s fellowlabourers were in the book of life during their lifetime.

In the same vein Psalm 69:27-28 reads: “*Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous*”. The implication is that only the righteous have their name written in the book of the living—the book of life (“living”: Strong’s Concordance #2416—alive).

Entry into the holy Jerusalem

Only those whose names are in the book of life will be granted entry into the holy Jerusalem: “*And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God... And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or*

maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life” (Rev. 21:10-27).

However the nations of earth will be granted entry to the holy Jerusalem: “*And the nations shall walk in the light of it (the holy Jerusalem—Rev. 21:10) and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life*” (Rev. 21:24-27; interpolations deleted).

Those verses show that entry of names into the book of life will continue until the nations are righteous—the two conditions which must be met before one may enter the holy Jerusalem are that they must not be defiled or work abomination, and they must be written in the book of life. Consequently, for the nations to enter the holy Jerusalem their entry will not occur until they are made righteous.

The nations will not be righteous until the Lord’s “*judgements are in the earth*”, at which time “*the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness*” (Isa. 26:9). At that time God will “*turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent*” (Zeph. 3:8-9).

Consequently entry to the book of life has been available from the foundation of the world and will continue to be available until the nations are restored to harmony with God.■

PROVERBS

“*To know wisdom and instruction*” (Prov. 1:2). The book of Proverbs enshrines a great deal of what is called the “Wisdom” literature of Israel. In Old Testament days, an equivalent term to the “Word of God” was the expression “the Wisdom of God”. Nine chapters are devoted to the words of the “Wisdom of God”, transmitting His counsel to men upon earth. Within these verses there is what amounts almost to an autobiography of the Word of God, a personal explanation or definition of His relationship both to the Father and to the world in which men live. “*So Wisdom, the Word, speaks, saying 'the Lord possessed (acquired) Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up (anointed) before the earth was.....'*”, and “*When there were no depths, I was brought forth... before the mountains, before the hills, was I brought forth, while He as yet had not made the earth... When*

He prepared the heavens I was there, when He set a compass upon the face of the depth... then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him” (Prov. 8:22, 24-30). The investment of His Wisdom, His Word, with attributes of personality, as implied in this chapter, was evidently prior to any work of creation. Jesus always claimed continually that Divine Oneness subsisted between Himself and his Father, a unity which was in Jesus’ mind when He said “*I and my Father are one*” (John 10:30). Furthermore, this association of personality with the Word marks the dividing point between the eternity in which God dwelt without creation and the time span during which His creative power brings into existence the creation, comprehended in time and space as we understand those terms.

—From “*The Almighty*” by Albert Hudson■

AT MOUNT SINAI

Romans 8:24 implies that hope is essential for a Christian to gain salvation. The verse reads: “*For we are saved by hope...*”. Thus all influences which increase a Christian’s hope aid their salvation.

One such influence is learning about the things that are recorded in the Old Testament—the Apostle Paul wrote: “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*” (Rom. 15:4).

The events which transpired at Mount Sinai and which are recorded in the Old Testament are part of those things which “*were written aforetime*” and therefore meditation on them is profitable for the Christian’s hope.

The record reads: “*And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice*” (Exodus 19:16-19).

Earthquakes

The earthquake was only one of the seven phenomena that occurred at Mount Sinai when Moses brought the Israelites to meet God, and as such it should not be given undue emphasis. However earthquakes can be dramatic events; are amongst the signs that Jesus listed as indications that the end of the age was near (Matt. 24:7; Luke 21:11); feature in the prophecies included in the book of Revelation (Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18) and occur today (which means they are in the public eye).

For example, the earthquake which struck Indonesia on December 26, 2004 killed more than 200,000 people, either by collapsing buildings or being drowned in the ensuing tsunami. The power of the earthquake has been estimated as 23,000 times that of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima during World War 2. It caused Planet Earth to wobble on its axis, some small islands southwest of Sumatra were displaced 40 metres (66 feet) and the northern tip of Sumatra moved 75 metres (118 feet).

God’s purpose in earthquakes

A fundamental question which may be asked is why does God use earthquakes to accomplish His purposes—what characteristics of an earthquake make them such a powerful tool?

Part of the answer to that question is that earthquakes make people realise that a force exists which is greater than anything mankind has engineered. Nevertheless earthquakes do not bring everyone to realise there is a Superior Being, frequently being glibly termed the “force of nature”, or a “natural disaster”. Nevertheless, for those who acknowledge the existence of God, earthquakes remind them of the truth expressed in Hebrews 10:31: “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*”.

Spiritual significance

The events which occurred at Mount Sinai are of particular significance to the Christian because the writer to the Hebrews explains the lessons which should accrue from a consideration of them. The lesson is one of contrast—He wrote: : “*For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded... so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels...*” (Heb. 12:18-22).

While the earthquake at Mount Sinai caused Moses and the people to fear, Christian’s should not be fearful of the Mount they approach. On the contrary, approaching Mount Sion should engender confidence and peace because it is the city of the living God, and will be the fountain of blessing for all the world: “*And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem... 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. 2:3-4).

The Christian should not forget the privilege of coming to Mount Sion, “*for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*” (2 Tim. 1:7). ■

MINISTERING SPIRITS

“But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”

Hebrews 1:13-14 states that the role of angels is to minister to those who will inherit salvation.

Three questions arise: who or what are angels, what is the role of a ministering spirit, and who will inherit salvation?

Angels

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for “angel” is “malak”, which Dr. Strong defines (#4397) as “to despatch as a deputy; a messenger; specifically of God”. It is variously translated into four English words: ambassador, angel, king, messenger.

In the New Testament, “angel” is translated from the Greek word “angelos” (Strong #32) which is defined as “a messenger”; especially an “angel”; by implication a *pastor*. It is translated as “angel” or “messenger”.

Those definitions of “angel” mean that any being or influence which brings a message to one or more of God’s people is an angel. One such angel was Gabriel: “And the angel answering said unto him (Zacharias), *I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings*”. “And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph...” (Luke 1:19, 26). Gabriel was God’s messenger who brought messages to Zacharias and Mary.

Angelic forms

In the majority of cases angels are spirit beings, that is, of the spirit nature, not having a material body: “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke 24:39). As such they are invisible to the human eye.

Changing nature

On some occasions angels have “materialized”, that is, they have transformed themselves into visible form, sometimes as a human being. Such was the case with Jesus after His resurrection as mentioned above (Luke 24:39).

An instance in the Old Testament of an angel materializing is when the angel came to Gideon: “And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah... And Gideon

said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us?... Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face” (Judges 6:11-22). The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon as a human being and vanished when he had delivered his message.

The Spirit that released Peter from prison also transformed himself into a human being: “And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; **and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision**” (Acts 12:6-9). Initially Peter thought he had had a vision—a vision is an imagination in the mind; a mental impression that is not real. However Peter did not have a vision—it was an angel which shed the chains that had bound him. The angel changed into human form, became visible and Peter followed him.

Human beings as “angelos”

On occasions God uses human beings who are not spirit beings to be His messengers. One such was John the Baptist: “But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send **my messenger** before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:9-11). John the Baptist was one of God’s messengers—an “angelos”.

Ranking

However the purpose of Hebrews 1:13-14 is to establish Jesus’ superiority above the other angels.

In God’s realm angels rank between Jesus and human beings. Originally Jesus was above the angels, being the “beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 3:14),

the One by whom God created the worlds (Heb. 1:2). He is the archangel: “*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first*” (1 Thess. 4:16).

Angels rank above mankind, as implied by Hebrews 2:9: “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man*” (Heb. 2:9). Jesus was made lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that is, He became a man—flesh and blood—and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Thus flesh and blood (mankind) is lower than the angels.

As an aside, consistent with that ranking is the fact that some angels have “materialized” (as was the case with Gideon’s messenger) whereas mankind does not have that power.

Ministers

Hebrews 1:13-14 states the angels are sent forth to minister for those who will be heirs of salvation. A minister’s role is to “attend as a servant” (Strong #1248) and thus all of God’s messengers came to minister to those who are “*heirs of salvation*”.

Heirs

Although the angels are spirit beings and above mankind in God’s ranking, nevertheless they are servants and not heirs—they merely serve God’s greater purpose—they do not inherit.

On the other hand an heir receives something for which they have not laboured—something which is given to them purely on the basis of the position they hold and not because they have laboured.

However, the Apostle Paul wrote: “*Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all*” (Gal. 4:1). There are no grounds for the heir to claim self-aggrandizement—their inheritance is purely a gift—before they receive their inheritance they are of the same nature and rank as servants.

It is likewise with the Christian: “*For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs*

according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3-7). Initially the Christian “*differed nothing from the servant*”—they were foolish, disobedient, deceived, but God has showered upon them His grace and they have become heirs, and as such are ministered to by the angels as Hebrews 1:1-14 states—the role of angels is to serve those who are heirs of salvation..

Salvation

The meaning of “salvation” is “rescue or safety” (Strong’s #4991).

The Apostle Paul wrote that, in the ultimate sense, salvation is an inheritance and not a reward: “*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. 2:1-10). He declares that the Christian is God’s workmanship and the grace they enjoy now is not the work of any individual.

The world of mankind

In one sense the whole world of mankind are heirs of salvation because all of them will be saved from the present death sentence: “*...there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust*” (Acts 24:15). Additionally they will be resurrected to a place of safety: “*No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there*” (Isa. 35:9).

Nevertheless the salvation of the whole world of mankind is not the point of Hebrews 1:13-14: the point of Hebrews 1 is that the angels are the servants of the heirs—the servants of those who are the heirs of salvation and who, if obedient at that time, will live forever: “*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Rom. 6:23).

The angels

The angels are not heirs of salvation—there is no promise of their salvation, but rather those who have transgressed face destruction: “*For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment*” (2 Pet. 2:4). That judgement involves being cast into the lake of fire: “*And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matt. 25:40-41).■

ISAIAH 35

Isaiah chapter 35 presents a wonderful scenario. Verse 1 reads: “*The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose*”. In view of approximately one third of the earth currently being desert (the proportion varies with the definition of desert—the proportion is greater if the frozen areas of the Arctic and Antarctic are included) the concept of the desert being fertile and bearing vegetation conjures mental images of prosperity and fruitfulness.

That image is endorsed in the succeeding verses. Verse 2 reads: “*It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God*”. Verse 2 states that the desert will “*blossom abundantly*”—not merely “*blossom*” as in verse 1—which expression is complemented by the symbolic clause “*and rejoice even with joy and singing*”.

Adding to the grandeur of the scene is the expression: “*the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it*”. The term “*the glory of Lebanon*” occurs in only one other place in the Scriptures: “*the glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious*” (Isa. 60:13).

The glory of Lebanon

Isaiah 60:13 implies it was the trees which grew in Lebanon that gave rise to the expression “*glory of Lebanon*”. Although it is not mentioned in Isaiah 60, its cedar trees were the most greatly renowned, as exemplified by Solomon specifying the cedars of Lebanon as the source of the timber required for the temple he was going to build in Jerusalem: “*And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name. Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon...*” (1 Kings 5:2-6).

Lebanon is remote from Jerusalem and transporting the cedar trees from Lebanon to Jerusalem was not an easy task. The procedure adopted is described in 2

Chronicles 2:16: “*And we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need: and we will bring it to thee in floats by sea to Joppa; and thou shalt carry it up to Jerusalem*”. After floating the cedars on the sea to Joppa, they had to be transported overland to Jerusalem, a distance of approximately 60 km (40 miles). In view of the lack of roads and the means of transport available in those days that was a challenging task. Nevertheless Solomon considered the cedars of Lebanon to be the only trees acceptable for the Lord’s temple, regardless of the difficulty in transporting them to Jerusalem.

More changes

Isaiah 35 also prophesies vastly better health for mankind. Verses 5 to 7 read: “*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert*”. Anyone who has had an association with blindness, deafness or lameness will appreciate the blessing of the affliction being removed—the restitution of sight to a blind person, hearing to a person who has been deaf, and a lame person being able to walk again are wonderful blessings.

The eyes of the blind

In the Scriptures, blindness is used in a symbolic sense also. Isaiah 44:18 reads: “*They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand*”.

The Apostle John quoted Isaiah’s statement and applied it to Israel in Jesus’ time: “*That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him*” (John 12:38-41).

The Apostle Paul continues the symbolism. He wrote: “*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" (Rom. 11:25-27). Paul uses the same metaphor as Isaiah and John—Israel's "blindness" will be removed. The language is symbolic because there is not necessarily any connection between physical blindness and an inability to understand.

The same symbolic language is used today—the expression "do you see the point" refers to mental perception and not physical sight.

Ears to be opened

In the same sense Isaiah 35:5-7 prophesied "*the ears of the deaf will be unstopped*"—not just their physical ears so that they can literally hear again, but their symbolic ears so they may "hear" (perceive) God speaking to them. The situation will be the opposite of the message Isaiah was given to convey to Israel in the days after king Uzziah died: "*And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed*" (Isa. 6:9-10). God used both hearing and seeing in a symbolic sense to convey that, in spite of their physical senses operating normally, they were not able to understand.

Isaiah 35:8

Coming now to verse 8, several additional concepts are introduced. Isaiah 35:8 reads: "*And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called 'The way of holiness'; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein*".

A highway and a way

Firstly Isaiah 35:8 states there will be a "highway and a way", called "The way of holiness".

Human reasoning suggests that "*the highway*" and the "*way of holiness*" are symbolic. In spite of the fact that "*ten men shall take hold... of the skirt of him that is a Jew saying we will go with you*" (Zech. 8:23) it is inconceivable that there will be one literal highway and one literal way for the unclean and wayfaring men—there are billions of wayfaring and unclean men who have died and it is implausible that there will be only one or two roads for them to travel along and not err whilst doing so.

Isaiah 35:8 is the only instance where the Hebrew word translated "highway" occurs, and so its meaning cannot be ascertained directly from Scripture.

Addressing the definition of the Hebrew word, Young's Concordance states that "highway" is translated from the Hebrew word "maslul" which it

defines as "highway" with no expanded explanation. Strong's Concordance defines "maslul" (#4547) as "a *thoroughfare* (as turnpiked)". A turnpike is a tollhouse, which implies a way along which there will be "check points" with a toll to be paid at each point. That definition is strengthened a little by the word from which it is derived (Strong's #5549—to mound up, especially a turnpike). However, whether that definition, and the detailed interpretation flowing from it, are sustainable is a matter of opinion—the significance of turnpike being mentioned is unclear.

Another possibility of the significance of the term "highway" is that it contrasts the ease of passage at that time with the sojourn of the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt: "*Then came the children of Israel... into the desert of Zin... And there was no water for the congregation... and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink... And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us: How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers: And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border: Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders. And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword. And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing any thing else, go through on my feet. And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him. And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh, and came unto mount Hor*" (Num. 20:1-22).

During their exodus from Egypt, Israel was prevented from travelling along their preferred route—the

“king’s high way”. The picture to be gleaned from the “highway” in Isaiah 35:8 is the opposite—in the new earth the people will have free passage along the “king’s highway”.

A way

The word “way” in Isaiah 35:8 is translated from the Hebrew “derek”. Young’s Concordance defines “derek” as “a trodden path or way” while Strong’s Concordance defines it (#1870) as “a road (as trodden); **figuratively** a course of life or mode of action”. Several different English words are used to translate “derek”, some of which are: along, away, because of, conversation, custom, journey, manner, passenger, through, toward, pathway, way.

Although several different words are used to translate “derek”, in the King James Version it is most often translated “way”. One instance where it is used in a **literal sense** is Genesis 16:7: *“And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur”*.

“Derek” is used in a **figurative sense** in Genesis 6:12: *“And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth”*. Mankind had not corrupted God’s physical pathway, nor their own physical way—the meaning of “derek” in this verse is figurative.

While the significance of there being both a “highway” and “a way” is unclear, one clear implication is that they are figurative terms which provide for mankind’s progress.

Wayfaring man

On the other hand, the expression “wayfaring men” in Isaiah 35:8 clearly means anyone who is travelling along a road, either literally or figuratively. Strong’s Concordance states that the term is a combination of two Hebrew words (“halak”, #1980—to walk; and “derek”, #1870—a road), both of which may be used in either a literal or a figurative sense.

“Halak” (“to walk”) is used in a literal sense in Genesis 13:17: *“Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee”*. The verse records God’s instruction to Abram to physically walk through the land.

Some instances where “halak” is used in a figurative sense are Genesis 5:22 and 24: *“And Enoch walked with God”*, and Genesis 6:9: *“...Noah walked with God”*. The meaning in those verses is figurative—neither Enoch nor Noah physically walked with God. The conclusion drawn from the expression “wayfaring man” is that it embraces mankind of all ranks—everyone will be travelling along “the road”.

Though fools

Isaiah 35:8 states that wayfaring men, “*though fools*” will “*not err*”. Young’s Concordance defines the Hebrew word translated “fools” (“eviyl”) as “evil”. Strong’s Concordance defines “eviyl” (#191) as: “From an unused root (meaning to be *perverse*); (*figuratively*) *silly*”. It is translated by the English words “fool”, “foolish” and “foolish man”.

Looking more closely at Dr. Strong’s definition of “eviyl”, the English word “perverse” is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as “persistent in error, different from what is reasonable or required”. The use of “eviyl” in Psalm 107:17-21 gives some support for that definition: *“Fools (eviyl) because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted... Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses... Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”* The implication of that verse is that fools are persistent in error, and when they consequently become distressed they cry to the Lord to save them. In today’s language it would be said “fools do not learn from their mistakes”.

Dr. Strong gives the **figurative** meaning of “eviyl” (“fools”) as “silly”, which the Oxford Dictionary defines as “innocent” or “simple”. It is difficult to imagine that perverse and silly men “will not err”, at least in the beginning of their travel along the “highway of holiness”.

Shall not err

Consequently the meaning of “not err” becomes significant. Strong’s Concordance gives the meaning of “err” as (#8582: tā’âh): “A primitive root; to vacillate, that is, reel or stray (literally or figuratively); also causatively of both”. It is translated variously into many English words, all of which imply making mistakes. Consequently a situation in which mankind will not err will be a stark contrast to the present situation as described in Isaiah 53:6: *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way...”*.

When

The next question regarding Isaiah’s prophecy is when will it be fulfilled, when will this glorious situation eventuate?

One indication may be derived from an overview of the book of Isaiah. There is no obvious demarcation between chapters 34 and 35. Isaiah 34:1-4 reads: *“Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his*

fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter... And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree”.

At that time God will call the nations to hear—that is, their “ears will be unstopped”—the Lord’s indignation will be upon all nations and the host of heaven shall be dissolved.

That time is also prophesied by Zephaniah: “*Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent*” (Zeph. 3:8-9). The prophecy also defines the time as when God pours His “fierce anger” upon the nations and turns to the people a “pure language”.

Isaiah’s and Zephaniah’s prophecies use different words to describe the same time period: Isaiah states that their blindness will be removed and the heavens will be dissolved; Zephaniah states they will be given a pure language so that they may call upon the Lord to serve Him with one consent and “*the earth shall be devoured*”.

The literal earth will not be devoured—it will abide forever: “*And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever*” (Psa. 78:69). The Apostle Peter explains the sequence thus: “*For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men... But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up... Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*” (2 Pet. 3:5-13).

Peter explains that the first heaven and earth have already passed away and the second heaven and earth (the present heaven and earth) will also pass away. The physical earth and physical heavens were not

replaced at the time of the flood of Noah’s day and the present literal heavens and earth will not pass away in the day of judgment; the language is symbolic. The term “world” in 2 Peter 3:6 is translated from the Greek “*kosmos*” which means arrangement or order of things, and it was the order of things that passed away in Noah’s flood and which will do so again in the day described in Isaiah 34, Zephaniah 3 and 2 Peter 3.

Time will be required

Isaiah 2:2-5 describes a time when peace and harmony will pervade the earth. The verses read: “*And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD*”.

Several expressions in those verses imply that mankind’s restoration to perfection will occur over a period of time. The implication arises from the expressions that the nations will “*flow unto it*”, they will say “*let us go to the mountain of the Lord*”, where they will be taught. All of those processes currently require a period of time and there is no indication that a period of time will not be required at that time. Indeed it will be as Isaiah 26:9 states: “...*for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness*”. The learning process requires time.

Not pass over it

The expression “not pass over it” has a wide variety of meanings. Dr Strong (#5674) defines it as “*to cross over; used very widely of any transition*”. One contrasting situation was when the angel of death passed over the land at the time of Israel’s exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:12). The unclean will not pass over the highway, that is remain unclean, but will be changed.

A glorious scenario

Notwithstanding it is not possible to form firm conclusions regarding some aspects of Isaiah 35:1-8, the scenario described therein is so glorious that, as the prophet went on to write: “*the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind*” (Isa. 65:17).■

THE PALM TREE

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat” (Gen. 1:29). God has provided mankind with many varieties of trees that produce edible fruit: fig, palm, almond, chestnut, mulberry, olive, pomegranate.

As well as being a source of edible fruit, the date palm tree has several uses: its leaves can be woven into mats, baskets or rigging, and its trunk provides timber suitable for buildings and furniture.

Characteristics

The palm trees which grew in Palestine had a smooth, straight trunk which was also tall and slender. It had deep roots which reached into a hidden supply of water and therefore it was able to survive a severe drought and withstand strong winds. Its sap channel was in the centre of the trunk, not just under the bark as in other trees, and thus damage to the exterior bark did not result in the tree dying. The palm tree does not bear fruit until it is approximately six years old; it continues to bear for another 70 years with the fruit becoming sweeter as the tree ages.

Another characteristic of the palm tree is its longevity. A seed from a date palm was discovered about thirty years ago during archaeological excavations on Mount Masada on the shores of the Dead Sea. It is probable the seed had been there since the Roman siege approximately 1900 years ago. It was planted in a kibbutz in the Arava Desert, it germinated and grew into a normal, healthy tree. It is the oldest seed known ever to do so.

Similarities for the Christian

Several of the characteristics of the palm tree are similar to the characteristics which a Christian should develop. Firstly their source of life—their sap channel—is deep within, not just under the surface, and consequently it can withstand outward scarring. The Christian also must withstand “scarring”: “*For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake*” (Phil. 1:29). The “outer man” can be abused and scarred by circumstances without affecting the “inner man”.

Its deep roots enable the palm tree to withstand strong winds. It is his deep love of God and his fellowman that enables the Christian to withstand the winds they encounter during life: “*That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love...*” (Eph. 3:17-19). Deep roots are also required to withstand the battering of erroneous doctrines:

“*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine...*” (Eph. 4:14). The resilience of the palm tree provides a model for the Christian to emulate.

Maturity

In Psalm 92:12-14 the righteous are likened to a palm tree, bearing fruit in their old age: “*The righteous will flourish like the palm tree ... Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.*”. Just as the palm tree yields its most prolific crop when it is approximately thirty years old, and continues to bear fruit for seventy years, the fruits of the Spirit also mature (and become sweeter) with age.

Leaves and branches

The palm tree holds special significance because the people used its branches to welcome Jesus when he rode triumphantly into Jerusalem one week before His crucifixion: “*On the next day much people ... when they heard Jesus was coming to Jerusalem took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet him and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord*” (John 12:13). The palm tree was used to herald Jesus’ victorious arrival; the Christian should herald the coming of their King.

Beauty

In spite of its inner qualities, the palm tree is not renowned for beauty. Likewise the Christian should not strive for outward glamour but rather should concentrate on bringing forth “*fruits meet for repentance*” (Matt. 3:8):

A little seed lay in the ground, and soon began to sprout. “Now which of all the flowers around”, it mused “shall I come out?

The lily’s face is fair and proud but just a trifle cold; The rose, I think, is rather loud, and then its fashion’s old. The violet is very well, but not a flower I’d choose, Nor yet the Canterbury bell - I never cared for blues And so it criticized each flower, this supercilious seed, Until it woke one summer hour and found itself a weed■

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