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JESUS THE NAZAREN

The final days of Jesus' life on earth were indeed a severe test of His faithfulness and commitment to His Heavenly Father. They included physical, mental and emotional anguish, yet He overcame them all. He endured to the end and died a cruel death on the cross. He accomplished His Father's purpose; He fulfilled His ministry. What a Saviour!

Jesus maintained a close relationship with His disciples and in His final hours His love for the human creation was also manifest. In His most trying moment on the cross He asked one of His disciples to care for His mother: *"When Jesus therefore saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home"* (John 19:26-27). In spite of the agony He was suffering, He had consideration and sympathy for His mother.

Times and Scenes

The four Gospels give detailed accounts of the final week of His life on earth. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each portray a slightly different aspect of the events and when taken together they provide a comprehensive account of the suffering He endured and the sacrifice He made.

Fundamental to understanding the trials of His last days is the realisation that it was the Jewish Passover time. The Passover was a traditional memorial to the great saving power of Jehovah, specifically for the release of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Many Jews travelled from far away countries to congregate in Jerusalem, to offer praise to God and to purify themselves. The Chief Priests and Pharisees were looking for an opportunity to kill Jesus because they were concerned that He, and his followers, might convert many people to believe in Him and thereby destroy their authority.

Nevertheless a few days before His crucifixion Jesus arrived triumphantly in Jerusalem: *"On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they*

heard that 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 12:12-13). "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Tell ye the daughter of Sion, fear not, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass'" (Matt. 21:4-5). Jesus riding on an ass is significant—Smith's Bible Dictionary comments: "The most noble and honourable amongst the Jews were wont to be mounted on asses. In the East this animal is especially remarkable for its patience, gentleness, intelligence, meek submission and great power of endurance. The ass was the animal of peace, as the horse was the animal of war". Consequently, from a human standpoint, this greeting by the people might have increased Jesus' strength and enabled Him to endure the suffering He knew awaited Him.

Another event which transpired during Jesus' last days before His crucifixion included casting the money changers out of the temple: *"And Jesus went into the temple and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold*

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doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, 'Is it not written, My house shall be called of all the nations the house of prayer? But ye have made it a den of thieves'" (Mark 11:15-17).

During His last days He also healed people in the temple: "*And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they became indignant" (Matt. 21:14-15).*

Jesus knew that the religious authorities had plotted to kill him. Each time He conversed with them He demonstrated a level of understanding superior to theirs: "*Tell us then, what do you think? Is it lawful to give a poll tax to Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, 'Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the poll tax'. And they brought him a denarius. And He said to them, 'Who's likeness and inscription is this?' They said to him 'Caesar's'. Then He said to them: 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's'. And hearing this they were amazed and leaving Him, they went away" (Matt. 22:17-22).*

Jesus was forthright in declaring their hypocrisy. He told them that they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God. However, in spite of the majority not accepting Him, some of them believed Him: "*Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42-43).*

There were many other incidents during Jesus' life on earth which portray His commitment to God and exemplify His love for mankind, with perhaps His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane being the climax. There He prayed that God would glorify Him with the glory He had with His Father before the world was created (John 17:5)—He prayed for nothing more; no reward for His ministry of sacrifice other than to be reunited with His Father in heaven: the hour had come for Him to depart from the earth (John 17:13). He prayed for His disciples and for all his followers—those who would "*believe on Him through their word" (John 17:20).* He had completed the mission for which His Father had sent Him.

Jesus and His Disciples

During His last week on earth, Jesus continued the activities He had practised during His life: He performed miracles, He taught by parables and set

the perfect example for His followers, how they should serve God. However His imminent betrayal was prominent in His mind and He alerted His disciples: "*You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over to crucifixion" (Matt. 26:2).* John 12:31-33 also records His words to His disciples: "*Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself. This He said signifying what death He should die*". Those words foretold His crucifixion—He knew He would be crucified. Thus is evident His love and passion for His disciples—His faithful followers—those who had left everything to follow Him. Verses 35 and 36 continue: "*For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of the Light*".

John 15:12-14 and 15:16-17 record more of His exhortations to His disciples: "*This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you... You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask in my name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another*".

However this love was not developing in Judas: "*Truly, truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me" (John 13:21). "Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them" (Luke 22:3-4).* His betrayal by Judas was tragic.

Jesus' disciples found it hard to accept his imminent departure, however He offset the despair He knew they would experience by giving them hope. John 14:1-6 records His words to them in the Upper Room: "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto*

him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”.

Jesus gave them comfort also by giving them the assurance that, after He departed, the Comforter would come: *“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”* (John 14:26-27).

Jesus and Pilate

When the moment for His arrest came, Jesus twice asked His accusers: *“Whom do you seek? To which they said ‘Jesus the Nazarene’”* (John 18:7).

The same hands that had just healed the servant of the high priest (Luke 22:50-51) were then bound, making him look like an evil doer, as they led him to Annas.

The subsequent trial comprised both religious and civil courts. The first was before Annas, who *“sent Him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest”* (John 18:13, 24). Early next morning He was led into the judgment hall and brought before Pilate (John 18:28 to 19:15).

Pilate reasoned with Jesus. He asked Him: *“Are you the King of the Jews?”* (John 18:33). Jesus did not answer directly: *“My Kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is My kingdom is not of this realm”* (John 18:36). Jesus’ answer challenged Pilate and led to him exclaim *“What is truth?”* (John 18:38). In spite of his best endeavours to establish Jesus’ credentials, Pilate was uncertain of Jesus’ status and attempted to release Him (John 19:12). The point to be realised is that Jesus was operating on a level far above that of the human authorities and yet He submitted Himself to their judgements because He knew that it was His Father’s will for Him to suffer at their hand and be crucified.

But He was to suffer more ignominy. When he was brought before Herod, Herod also questioned Him, *“in many words; but He answered nothing”* (Luke 23:9). Jesus, the Lamb of God, was then mocked by the Roman soldiers and vehemently accused by the Jews, precisely as prophesied by Isaiah: *“He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet He did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep*

that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open His mouth” (Isa. 53:7).

Jesus was then subjected to more humiliation when the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns and placed it on His head and mocked Him, proclaiming *“Hail King of the Jews!”* (John 19:3). They smote him and scourged Him (scourging was a flogging by a whip which often had lead embedded in the flails to cause greater pain). For those who have not experienced such brutality it is impossible to imagine the pain inflicted; indeed it might be difficult to even contemplate the terrible suffering.

The cross of Jesus

And then came the final hours on the cross. In contrast to the grand and glorious entry into Jerusalem only a few days previously, the time had come for Him to consummate His sacrifice. It was God’s due time.

Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion, the method used in Roman times for the worst criminals, which means that He was not only unjustly persecuted but He was subjected to the most despicable form of execution.

There is much significance in the inscription that Pilate put on Jesus’ cross: **“JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (John 19:19 NASB). The record is that *“many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and in Greek”* (John 19:20). Historians record that the names of those who were crucified were written on the placard above their cross for a witness (or record), similar to the headstones on many graves in the Western World today.

The inscription also recorded the crime for which the victim was crucified. In Jesus’ case there was no case against Him—no crime—except that He was **“THE KING OF THE JEWS”**.

Jesus said: *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must first deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (Luke 9:23). A review of the life, trial and crucifixion of Jesus should stir all who believe that He was the Son of God, to ponder what little sacrifice they have been called upon to make: *“...He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him...He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth...”* (Isaiah 53:5-7). The cross each believer is asked to bear does not equate with the physical cross of Jesus, nor the ignominy and shame which

the Son of God who came down from heaven suffered. While each Christian has a cross to bear it cannot be compared to His sacrifice.

At this season of the year, when Christians specially remember His sacrifice, it is profitable for them to recall the words the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: *“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will keep us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our*

Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39). Paul fulfilled those words; nothing separated him from the love of Christ; he was faithful to the end and finished his course with joy: *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

May everyone who looks upon Him as their personal saviour, and as the One who opened the way to eternal life, renew their determination that nothing will separate them from the love of Christ, and the hope of attaining their crown of righteousness. ■

BEREA AND THESSALONICA

Berea: “*A city in the south of Macedonia, now called Verria or Kara-Verria and situated on the east slope of the Olympian range*”. So reads both Young’s Concordance and Smith’s Bible Dictionary (the Dictionary adds that the population was about 15000 – 20000). So in world-wide terms Berea was an insignificant place, and in Scriptural prominence also, being mentioned in only three verses in the Bible (Acts 17:10, 13 and 20:4).

However a search of the internet for the usage of the word “Berea” currently yields more than 8,500,000 responses, and a search for “Berean” yields more than 7,000,000 responses. Many of the organisations which incorporate either of these two words into their literature are based in countries other than Macedonia (Greece). Thus it seems that many organisations attach some significance to the meaning of the names “Berea” and “Berean”.

Paul preached at Berea during his second missionary journey: *“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few”* (Acts 17:10-12). Some of those who believed were Jews and others were Greeks; some were women and some were men.

Thessalonica

Thessalonica was a city situated approximately 45 miles (75 kilometres) from Berea. Acts 17:1-4 records Paul preaching there before he went to Berea: *“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a*

synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few”. As in Berea, some who believed were Jews, some were Greek, and some were women.

Nobility

Acts 17:10-12 (quoted above) compares the believers in Thessalonica with those in Berea and states that those in Berea were *“more noble because they searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so”*.

The difference between the assessment of those at Berea and those at Thessalonica might be surprising: it was the same Apostle Paul who preached to both and there were women, Greeks and Jews in both locations—the only difference was that the Bereans searched the Scriptures to prove what Paul said.

The Thessalonians could be deemed respectful for not searching the Scriptures—it was the Apostle Paul who taught them, and to question what he said could be deemed disrespectful. However the Bereans did not accept Paul’s word and insisted on searching the Scriptures to verify what he had told them.

Maybe the reception to Paul’s message contains a lesson for Christians today: they too should not take what anyone tells them just because their teacher is a noted student, author or is highly esteemed in any circle—everyone must prove all things, *“hold fast that which is good”, and “be fully persuaded in their own mind”* (1 Thess. 5:21; Rom. 14:5). ■

THE NEW JERUSALEM

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Revelation 21:1-5).

John’s vision recorded in Revelation 21:1-5 presents a glorious scene: a city coming down from heaven, as beautiful as a bride when she is dressed for her wedding; God dwelling with men; no more tears; no more death; no more sorrow; no more crying; no more pain. Such a scene constitutes the realisation of the Christian’s hope for the world of mankind—paradise on earth. Such a paradise will be established after “*the first heaven and the first earth were passed away*”.

Cities

The primary focus of the vision is the holy city of new Jerusalem. Historically, building a city has been a benchmark of achievement and authority. The quest started with Babel: “*And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass... they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly... let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven...*” (Gen. 11:1-4).

Nehemiah also wanted to build a city. He was sad because his father’s city lay waste: “*Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?... And (I) said unto the king... why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste... If it please the king... send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchres, that I may build it*” (Neh. 2:2-5).

Babylon also was a significant city, although not for virtuous reasons: “*And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen... Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city!..., Alas, alas, that great city... What city is like unto this great city!*” (Rev. 18:2, 10, 16-18).

The importance ascribed to cities is further testified by God’s commandment to Cyrus: “*Thus saith the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus... I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city...*” (Isa. 45:1, 13). Cyrus was directed to build God’s city.

It is recorded that Abraham also “*...looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is*

God” (Heb. 11:10), and Hebrews 11:16 records that God has “*prepared a city*” for the faithful mentioned in chapter 11: “*But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city*”.

Jerusalem

The city of Jerusalem is one of the prominent cities in Israel’s history:

- The first reference to it is in Joshua 10:1-2: “*Now it came to pass when Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had taken Ai and had utterly destroyed it...*”. The reference simply establishes Jerusalem as a physical city on earth;
- Jerusalem was specifically mentioned as being part of Benjamin’s inheritance (Joshua 18:28);
- “*God dwelt*” in Jerusalem (Psa. 135:21);
- The ark represented God’s presence (Judges 20:27) and it was taken to Jerusalem on several occasions (2 Sam. 15:29; 1 Kings 8:1; 1 Chron. 15:3);
- Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 3:1; 2 Chron. 3:1), and after the Babylonian captivity God gave specific instructions to Cyrus to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2);
- Several kings of Israel reigned from Jerusalem: David (2 Sam. 5:4-5); Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1); the heads of the Levites (1 Chron. 9:34); Solomon (2 Chron. 9:30); Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:13); Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 19:1).
- Jerusalem was the principal place for the people of Israel to worship: “*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship*” (John 4:20).

Nevertheless Israel failed to recognize the Messiah which led Jesus to declare: “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killst the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*” (Matt. 23:37). In those verses “Jerusalem” stands for the whole nation of Israel.

New Jerusalem

The city mentioned in Revelation 21 is the new Jerusalem. The adjective “new” implies that the

previous (“old”) Jerusalem will be superseded. It is called “new Jerusalem” in only one other verse—Revelation 3:12: “*Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God...*”.

The holy city

Revelation 21:2 also calls the new Jerusalem “*the holy city*”. Israel was God’s holy nation (Exodus 19:3-6), and so God considered Jerusalem, Israel’s capital, to also be holy. The adjective “holy” is appropriate—it would be heretical to regard as unholy any city that came down from God.

There are four verses of Scripture in which Jerusalem is stated to be holy, three times as a city and once as a holy mountain:

- Nehemiah 11: 1, 18. Verse 1 reads: “*And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city...*”;
- Isaiah 52:1: “*Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city...*”;
- Daniel 9:16: “*O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain...*”.

City of my God

Revelation 3:12 (quoted above) includes the title “city of my God”. The title occurs in only two other verses: Psalm 46:4 (where it is an alternative name for “*the holy place of the tabernacles of the most high*”), and Psalm 87:3 (where it is an alternative name for “*Zion*”).

More titles

Revelation 21:9 does not include the title “holy city” but it includes the title “holy Jerusalem”: “*And there came unto me one of the seven angels... and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. 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*”. This verse ascribes new Jerusalem the additional titles of “the bride”, “the Lamb’s wife” and “Holy Jerusalem”.

The bride: the Lamb’s wife

The concept of a bride is used in several other verses either to describe something, or as a symbol. Five verses in which the attributes of a bride are used to **describe something** are: Isaiah 49:18, 61:10, 62:5, Jeremiah 2:32 and John 3:29. John 3:29 does not

identify the bride but merely uses the difference between the relationship a bride has with her bridegroom, and the relationship a friend has with the bridegroom, to describe John’s role in relation to Jesus. Nevertheless, the use of bride and bridegroom for this illustration is most appropriate, especially in view of the new Jerusalem being compared to a bride.

There are eight verses in which the symbol of a bride is used to stand for something other than a literal human bride. The verses are: Jeremiah 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11; Joel 2:16; Revelation 18:23; 21:9; 22:17. However none of the verses state directly who or what is meant by the bride; some of them might be symbolic language for the new Jerusalem.

There are many characteristics of a bride: 2 Corinthians 11:2 refers to chastity; Revelation 14:4 states “clothed in white” and adds that they “*were not defiled with women, for they are virgins*”; Revelation 14:5 refers to her being guileless.

All of these characteristics apply to the New Jerusalem—all confirm that the new Jerusalem will be holy, that is, “*physically pure; morally blameless*” (definition from Strong’s Concordance #40)—the symbolism of a bride to stand for new Jerusalem is apt.

Structure of the new Jerusalem

Revelation 21:10-27 gives some details of the features of the new Jerusalem. Some of them are:

- “*The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*”. This quality reflects Jesus’ words to His disciples: “*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*” (John 8:12); and more specifically: “*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matt. 5:14-16);
- “*The wall had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*”. The apostles are the foundation stones of the church: “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone*” (Eph. 2:19-20);
- “*The wall had twelve gates, attended by twelve angels, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel*”. Entry to cities in Old Testament times was through gates in their walls (Gen. 23:10,

18). Entry to the new Jerusalem is through the gate of one of the tribes of Israel: “*And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel*” (Rev 7:4). Each member of the new Jerusalem has been grafted into (spiritual) Israel: “*And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree...*” (Rom 11:17). It is by being grafted in that they become “*the Israel of God*” (Gal. 6:16);

• “*The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it*”. As mentioned above, Cyrus’ first assignment when Israel returned from captivity in Babylon was to build the temple (Ezra 1:2), which is consistent with the temple being regarded as God’s house: “*And Jesus went into the temple of God... and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer...*” (Matt. 21:12-13). The statement in Revelation represents a fulfilment of Zechariah 6:12-13: “*And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH... he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both*”. Construction of the temple began at Jesus’ first advent, as James explained: “*Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written (Amos 9:11), After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things*” (Act 15:14-17).

• “*And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it*”. This statement will be a fulfilment of Micah 4:2: “*And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*”. Also Zechariah 8:22: “*Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD*”.

Jerusalem above

Galatians 4:22-26 reads: “*For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the*

freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all”.

The verses contrast the literal city of Jerusalem (which stood for the Law Covenant) and “*Jerusalem which is above*”. The new Jerusalem is the focus of God’s calling of the church: “*That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ...In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ*” (Eph. 1:10-12). If it were not for God’s plan to have a bride for His Son, there would not be a new Jerusalem.

Zion

Hebrews 12:22 reads: “*But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...*” (Heb. 12:22).

The word “and” is critical in the interpretation of this verse: Strong’s Concordance defines it (#2532) as “having a copulative and sometimes also a cumulative force”. The copulative sense means that the two phrases are saying the same thing (that is, one is a repetition of the other—in this case, coming to Sion is the same as coming to the new Jerusalem), and the cumulative sense means that coming to Mount Sion is additional to coming to the new Jerusalem.

Historically King David ruled from Zion: “*And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem... David took the castle of Zion, which is the city of David. And David dwelt in the castle; therefore they called it the city of David*” (1 Chron. 11: 4-9). Christ is to sit on David’s throne (“*the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David*”—Luke 1:32-33), and so Zion (Sion) is the place from which Christ will rule.

Summary

And so the picture is complete: in the previous (earthly) government David sat on his earthly throne in literal Mount Zion in physical Jerusalem. In the new heaven and new earth Christ will sit on His spiritual throne in spiritual Mount Zion with the bride, His wife. They will come down from heaven and be the new government—the new Jerusalem—“*they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years*” (Rev. 20:4).■

A MORNING AT THE SEASIDE

It was the end of a hard and sad night. The sun was starting to illuminate the scene as they sailed into shore. It had been a fruitless attempt to resume their former secular lives.

It was Peter who had said: “*I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee*”. So six others went with him to fish on the Sea of Galilee. “*They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing*” (John 21:3).

There was a man on the shore and he hailed the crew: “*Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No*” (John 21:5).

The time was now ripe for Jesus to perform a miracle and identify himself. They were still a hundred metres or so (200 cubits) from shore, and it would have been difficult for them to identify Him visually in the faint dawn light: “*And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes*” (John 21:6).

John was the first to realise the man was Jesus (verse 7). John announced it to Peter, and true to his impetuous character, Peter leapt into the sea. He could not wait for the ship to reach the shore.

They dragged the net onto the shore. All of them now recognised that it was the Lord. He already had fish cooking on a fire, and bread. Jesus asked them to bring some of the fish they had caught. There were 153 fish in the net, yet the net was not broken (verse 11)—another manifestation to them of Divine involvement in the early morning scene.

He said to them: “*come and dine*” (verse 12). In a practical and kindly sense He was inviting them to break their fast after a long and hard night. It is difficult to be assured of their thoughts as they realised it was their Lord; the One who had been crucified a few days previously. It is possible they were hesitant: it was a strange new world. This was the third time He had revealed Himself to them since His resurrection (John 21:14). He had also appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb (when she recognised “the gardener” by His voice—John 20:15-16) and as a stranger on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31). That same day He appeared to His disciples in the room even though the doors were shut (John 20:19), and eight days later He appeared as a fleshly being to convince Thomas that He had risen from the dead (verse 29). “*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book*” (John 20:30).

Jesus then took bread and fish and served them. This occasion might be one of the occasions to which Peter referred later: “*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth...Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead*” (Acts 10:38-41).

I go fishing

There is no Scriptural record regarding when this incident occurred, except that it was less than 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). Suffice it to say that there had been a sufficiently long time after His previous appearance that the disciples, and Peter in particular, decided that they should return to their previous occupations.

And so it is with His disciples at this end of the age—there might be an inexplicable delay between significant events and any delay can cause despondency. Just as all the virgins slept (not just the foolish ones) while they waited for the bridegroom to return (Matt. 25:5), so it is a challenge for all Christians to remain awake and alert and not to abandon the wonderful hope which God has extended to all those whom He has called: “*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil. 1:6).

Do you truly love me

After the meal Jesus asked Peter: “*Simon, Son of Jonah, do you truly love me more than these?*” (John 21:15). There are at least three lessons that might be learnt from the timing of Jesus’ question.

Firstly, Jesus’ consideration and kindness in waiting until after the meal before He challenged Peter to declare yet again that he loved Him. He did not challenge Peter immediately they arrived on the shore. Even though it was the third time He had manifested Himself to His disciples, He realised Peter still needed time to fully comprehend that it was “Him”. The importance of time is exemplified: much “harm” can be done by being too hasty to “get to the point” during any conversation, or to expect others to comprehend the majesty of God’s plan. Christians do well to remember that “*the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy...*” (James 3:17).

Secondly Jesus called him “Simon”. There are only two recorded instances when Jesus called him “Peter”: “*... That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church...*”—Matt. 16:18; and “*... I tell*

thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me" (Luke 22:34). The second occasion led to Peter becoming distressed: "*And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly*" (Matt. 26:75). Calling him "Peter" when he had just returned from a fruitless night fishing might have caused him to recall the occasion of his denial. Jesus' purpose now was not to remind him of his previous weakness but to strengthen him for the work that lay ahead of him: feeding the flock of God (John 21:15-17); and to be one of the foundation stones of the church (Eph. 2:20).

Thirdly, Peter's denial was particularly painful for him because he had declared that he would never deny Jesus, even if others did so: "*But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I*" (Mark 14:29). Consequently when Jesus asked Simon (Peter) if he loved Him "*more than these*" (John 21:15), He might not have been asking him if he loved Him more than the boats (and particularly as Peter had just returned from a fruitless

night fishing), but rather if he loved Jesus more than the other disciples loved Him.

One challenge for the Christian today is to ensure that their love for their Master is so strong that even if others forsake Him they will not follow them. They are to develop a faith as strong as those who have been martyred for their faith: "*... be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life*" (Rev. 2:10). Jesus is the forerunner (Heb. 6:20) and is the supreme example: "*... and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name*" (Phil. 2:8-9).

May all believers help each other remember that they "*... are of God...*" and "*... greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*" (1 John 4:4). As Paul reminded the Corinthians: "*He will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*" (1 Cor. 10:13). ■

LIFE'S EMPTY VICTORIES

The article below was written by a regular contributor to a secular newspaper in USA in 1932. Over the years it has been reprinted in several religious publications.

As a man grows older, yet has not reached extreme old age, when, presumably, all his past is mellowed and softened in the pleasant, tranquil light of sunset, and both mistakes and right acts are equally overspread by the thoughts that nothing has mattered much, since the whole thing will be soon over; when he arrives at the stage of life's journey where he reviews the past, not alone for the gentle pleasure of reminiscence, but also to seek guidance for his remaining future; and while he still imagines that it is possible for him to mould his character into the secret ideal which he has all along vainly struggled to perfect, there comes, at least to the man of average temperament, in this pause to review—this moment of rest before he completes his destiny—the thought of how much happier, and better and altogether pleasanter, his life might have been had he avoided, as he might easily have done, certain complications and conflicts which, at the time, seemed to him mightily important.

When they occurred, he was absolutely certain that the triumph of his opinion was a matter of tremendous consequence; it was essential that he should override the opposition and impress upon his opponent that pre-eminent truth and right of his position; and he went at him, hard and strong, and in the heat of the controversy, which ripened into a feud

and perhaps ended in the permanent estrangement of one who might once have been counted a friend, he said or did things which were hard and bitter, and better left unsaid or undone.

Perhaps he gained his point; beat down his antagonist, and sent him, humbled and mortified from the contest, to nurse his grievance ever after, and nourish to the end of his days a smouldering hate of the man who got the better of him; or worse, to cherish the feeling that he had been hardly used.

Strange it would be that, in his later years, the outcome does not seem to have been of very great consequence. What remains permanently is the memory of the incident, and a regret that it should have occurred. Looking back, he realises the exact moment when he might have refrained from pressing his man to the limit, have perhaps sufficiently satisfied his self-respect without sacrificing a friend.

The assets he counts up with the most satisfaction are the friends he finds about him. What may they—what will they—expect will be his animating spirit in the future? He will endeavour to be true to them and to his own convictions, but he will avoid the useless multiplication of enemies. This is his hope, as he takes stock of what lies before him. ■

THE ACCURSED SINNER

“There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed” (Isaiah 65:20)

The hope for mankind is that they will be resurrected from the grave. The prophet Hosea wrote: *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction...”* (Hosea 13:14).

In accord with that promise the Apostle Paul declared before the governor: *“But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust”* (Acts 24:14-15).

Paul declared that mankind will be resurrected (Greek: *anastasis*—stand up again) to life on earth as Isaiah had prophesied: *“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”* (Isa. 2:2-3).

The earth to which they will return will be “new”: *“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind”* (Isa. 65:17), and the Apostle Peter wrote: *“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”* (2 Peter 3:13). The new earth will be vastly different from the present earth and mankind will need to adjust to the new order.

Isaiah 65:20

Isaiah 65:20 is one of the verses of Scripture which addresses the time frame for mankind to adjust to the new earth. The verse may be considered to imply that the time frame for any individual to amend their ways from the present order to align with the new is 100 years: *“...the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed”* (Isa. 65:20).

However close investigation of the verse might indicate that it does not specify a period of 100 years for people to amend their ways.

The sinner

The Hebrew word from which “sinner” is translated (Strong’s #2398) is *châṭâ*; defined as “a primitive root; properly to miss; hence (figuratively and generally) to sin; by inference to forfeit, lack, expiate, repent, (causatively) lead astray, condemn”. It is translated by more than 14 different English words and phrases of widely varying meaning. However all words and phrases mean a transgressor, and so the verse is dealing with mankind as sinners.

Accursed

The word “accursed” in Isaiah 65:20 is translated from “*qâlal*” (Strong’s #7043), which Dr Strong defines as: “a primitive root; to be (causatively make) light... figuratively (easy, trifling, vile, etc.)”. It is translated as: abate, make bright, bring into contempt, accurse, curse, despise, be easy, easy, easier, light (in several senses), slight, swift, vile, whet.

Young’s Concordance defines “*qâlal*” as “to be lightly esteemed”, which is consistent with the definition in Strong’s Concordance.

In an endeavour to ascertain its meaning some verses in which “*qâlal*” occurs are listed below (the words translated from “*qâlal*” are those in **bold** type).

- Genesis 16:4: *“And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was **despised** in her eyes”*. The meaning of “*qâlal*” in this verse is not condemnation to death but that Sarai looked upon Hagar with contempt.
- Exodus 18:22: *“And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be **easier** for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee”*. Again “*qâlal*” does not imply condemnation to death but that the referral of the simpler cases to the “*able men*” whom Moses was to appoint would lighten Moses’ workload and thus enable him “*to endure*”.
- Exodus 21:17: *“And he that **curseth** his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death”*. To curse another does not mean to condemn them to death, but to make light of them; to treat them with disdain. The instruction to put to death those who dishonoured their parents was consistent with the Law because the Law required them to “*honour thy father and thy*

mother" (Exodus 20:12). However cursing one's parents did not put the parents to death, so "qâlal" does not mean condemnation to death. Additionally, the offender was to be put to death, but not by means of his cursing.

- Leviticus 20:9: "For every one that **curseth** his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath **cursed** his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him". Comment as above for Exodus 21:17.

- Leviticus 19:14: "Thou shalt not **curse** the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the **LORD**". Again "qâlal" does not mean condemnation to death: the instruction was that a deaf person was not to be despised.

- Leviticus 24:14: "Bring forth him that hath **cursed** without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him". His death was by stoning, not by cursing ("qâlal").

- Leviticus 24:23: "And Moses spake to the children of Israel, that they should bring forth him that had **cursed** out of the camp, and stone him with stones". See comment for Leviticus 24:14 above.

- 1 Samuel 2:30: "Wherefore the **LORD** God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the **LORD** saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be **lightly esteemed**". The verse does not condemn to death those who despise God, but that they will be not given any regard or esteem.

- 1 Samuel 18:23: "And Saul's servants spake those words in the ears of David. And David said, 'Seemeth it to you a **light** thing to be a king's son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and **lightly esteemed**?'" There is no mention nor suggestion in this verse that "qâlal" means condemnation to death.

- 1 Kings 16:31: "And it came to pass, as if it had been a **light** thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat...". There is no mention of condemnation to death in this verse.

- 2 Kings 3:18: "And this is but a **light** thing in the sight of the **LORD**: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand". God deemed the matter "trifling".

- 2 Kings 20:10: "And Hezekiah answered, It is a **light** thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees". Hezekiah was taunting Isaiah, challenging him to ask God to make the shadow go backward ten

degrees. Intrinsic in Hezekiah's taunt was the implication that it was "easy" for God to make the shadow advance ten degrees, and therefore doing so did not prove anything about God's power.

In the light of these Scriptures it is apparent that "qâlal" does not mean condemnation to death.

The question remains: what is the meaning of "qâlal" in Isaiah 65:20?

The child shall die an hundred years

Isaiah 65:20 contains the clause "the child shall die an hundred years". That clause might give the impression that the time frame for mankind to amend their ways will be 100 years. However the clause gives rise to two questions: why will children have to die; and why at 100 years?

One aspect of the new earth will be that children will not inherit the sins of their parents—"all will die for their own iniquity" (Jer. 31:30). Thus children will not have to die as they do in the present age.

The word "child" is translated from the Hebrew "na'ar" which means "a boy (as active) or girl from the age of infancy to adolescence" (Strong #5288).

The definition of "na'ar" implies that in the new earth a 100 year old person will be regarded as a child (or at least no older than a present day adolescent).

An alternative interpretation

The context of Isaiah 65:20 suggests another interpretation. Verses 17-25 describe the contrast between the present situation and the conditions in the new earth. At the present time infants die, and numerous men die before they fill their days ("three score years and ten"—Psa. 90:10). Hence verse 20 contrasts the present situation in which a 100 year old person is regarded as a very old man whereas in that day they will be still in their "childhood". The contrast will be so stark that "the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17), and it is in that context that, in that day, sinners at the age of 100 years will be lightly esteemed.

Regardless of whether the above alternative interpretation of Isaiah 65:20 is correct or in error, the clause "the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" does not suggest that there will be only 100 years for individuals to "make progress" towards perfection. On the contrary, other passages such as Isaiah 11:9 indicate that mankind will have the full 1000 years to amend their ways and reach perfection: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the **LORD**, as the waters cover the sea". ■

LOVE: THE GREATEST

The Apostle Paul concludes his exposition of the characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13 with the words: “*And now abideth faith, hope, charity* (Greek: *agape*; love), *these three; but the greatest of these is charity (love)*” (1 Cor. 13:13).

There are several senses in which love can be considered to be greater than faith and hope. The Greek word translated “greater” is “*meizōn*” which Dr. Strong defines as (#3187): “larger (literally or figuratively, specifically in age)”. In the King James Version it is variously translated as “elder, greater, greatest, more”. Its use elsewhere in the New Testament bears out Dr Strong’s definition, and illustrates that the word may be used in a very wide variety of senses. However the context of 1 Corinthians 13 does not provide any firm guidance regarding the particular sense Paul had in mind so a liberal application of “*meizōn*” is warranted—in other words, there are many ways in which love is greater than faith and hope.

Larger

The simplest meaning of “*meizōn*” is “larger”, and it has that meaning in Luke 12:16-18: “*And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods*”. The barn the rich man planned to build would be bigger (larger; greater), and have greater capacity to store his harvest.

In the same sense, love is larger (bigger; greater) than faith and hope in that faith and hope are centred in the individual—one cannot possess (or accommodate) another’s faith or hope. One can have faith that another will act in a certain way, and have hope for another’s future, but faith and hope in themselves are the sole province of the individual. In that sense, love is larger, broader, greater than faith and hope because love may be exercised for another by practising the qualities Paul mentions previously in the chapter (such as “*bearing all things, enduring all things, not being provoked, never failing*”).

Age and endurance

Another sense in which love is greater is age. There are several aspects of love which make it the elder of faith and hope. It was God’s love for His creation and His ultimate objective for them that led Him to send His only Son to earth: “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...*” (John 3:16).

Since Jesus’ sacrifice is the only means of salvation for mankind, without it there would not be any hope beyond the grave. Love existed before Man could exercise hope. At the other end of the spectrum, love will continue to exist into eternity whereas when all things have been restored to perfection mankind will not require hope—their every desire will be fully satisfied: “*How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men... shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures*” (Psa 36:7-8). There will not be any cause for mankind to hope for anything better. Logic dictates that if there will not be any need for hope, there will not be any need for faith because “*faith is (simply) the substance of things hoped for*” (Heb. 11:1). And so love, being eternal, is greater than faith and hope which will be rendered redundant.

Power and authority

Love is greater than faith and hope in that it has power to initiate action whereas faith and hope are inert—they cannot initiate action. The inability of faith and hope to initiate action is shown by the fact that, at the present time, the whole creation—and indeed Christians also—can do nothing more than hope for their deliverance; they cannot do anything about alleviating their suffering: “*... the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together... And not only they, but ourselves also... groan within ourselves, waiting for... the redemption of our body*” (Rom. 8:22-23). In other words, the whole world, wittingly or unwittingly, is hoping for better times—their hope is their reaction to the situation in which they find themselves.

On the other hand love can take action to offset pain and suffering: “*For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister*” (Heb. 6:10). In that way love is greater (more powerful) than faith and hope which can be only “watchers”. ■

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