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The Samaritans

*“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was:
and when he saw him, he had compassion on him” (Luke 10:33).*

Jesus instructions to his disciples, “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans” (Matthew 10:5 NKJV), are interesting, considering that he preached to the Samaritans and used the story of the Good Samaritan to show the Jewish people how they had strayed interpreting the Law.

Great animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans caused the religious leaders to attack Jesus’ credibility. “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (John 8:48).

To understand the reasons behind these events requires knowledge of the history of the Samaritan people and their interactions with the Jewish nation.

Rebellion of the Northern Tribes

This rebellion has its beginnings with an aging King Solomon who had entered into political marriages with non Israelites. 1 Kings 11:4-8, “When Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. (5) For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. (6) Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. (7) Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. (8) And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods” (NKJV).

Before Solomon’s death, he managed to antagonize almost all his subjects. When he was succeeded by his son Rehoboam, Jeroboam, the leader of the ten northern tribes, sought relief from the burdens of work and taxation. Rehoboam followed bad advice and

refused. The northern tribes declared independence and formed a separate kingdom with Jeroboam as head. They named their kingdom “Israel.”

The City of Samaria

The name Samaria meant “lookout” and was the first capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, built about 880 BC by Omri, the sixth king of Israel (1 Kings 16:23-24). “In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king over Israel ... And he bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; then he built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, Samaria, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill” (NKJV).

Samaria occupied a 91 meter high hill about 68 kilometers north of Jerusalem, and 40 kilometers east of the Mediterranean Sea. It was situated on the major north-south road through Palestine, controlling the east-west route to the Plain of Sharon and the Mediterranean Sea. Because of its hilltop location, Samaria could be defended easily. Its only weakness was that the nearest spring was a mile distant, but this difficulty was overcome by the use of cisterns cut into the soft sandstone to collect rainwater.

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The Region of Samaria

This was a territory in the uplands of central Palestine roughly within the lands allotted to the tribe of Ephraim and the western portion of Manasseh. It consisted of about 3626 square kilometers of attractive, fertile land, bounded by the Valley of Jezreel in the south and Mount Carmel on the north. Its rich alluvial soil produced valuable grain crops, olives, and grapes. Samaria was able to engage in commerce with neighboring Phoenicia as well as the more distant nations of Syria and Egypt.

Because Samaritan soil was considerably more fertile than the soil in Judah, the Northern Kingdom was always more prosperous. But the very attractiveness of the territory brought invaders, while trade with such pagan nations exposed the people to corrupt foreign religions. The prophets strongly condemned the wickedness of Samaria — its idolatry, immorality, idle luxury, and oppression of the poor (Hosea 7:1, 8:5-7).

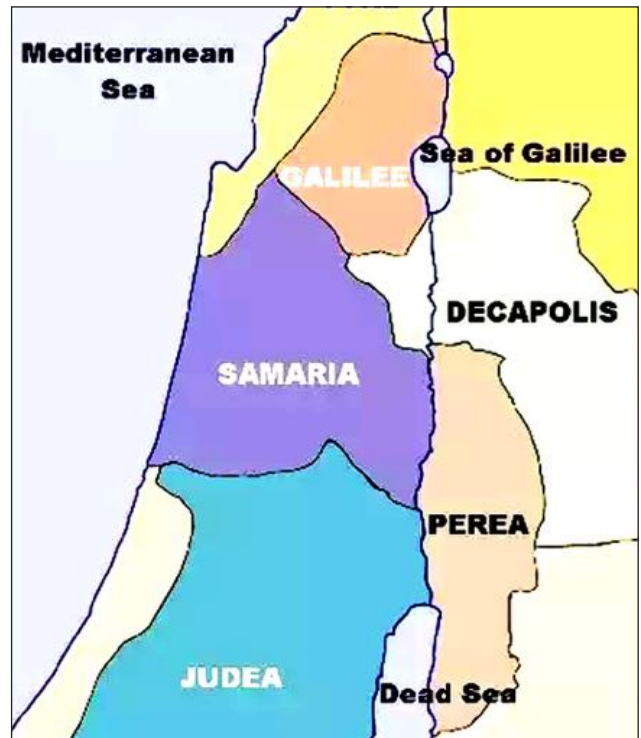
Samaria's History

Samaria became the new capital of Israel, and successive kings added to it and rebuilt sections to make it a well-fortified capital. But the city fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Most of the leading citizens of the Northern Kingdom were deported to places in Syria, Assyria, and Babylonia (2 Kings 18:9-12).

Sargon (king of Assyria) replaced the deported Israelites with foreign colonists (2 Kings 17:24). These newcomers intermarried among the Israelites who remained in Samaria. These people took the name Samaritans from the territory and attempted to settle the land. However, “they did not fear the Lord, and the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them” (2 Kings 17:25). In despair, they sent to Assyria for “one of the priests” who would “teach them the rituals of the God of the land” (2 Kings 17:27). Thereafter the Samaritans worshiped the God of Israel. But they also continued their idolatry, worshipping the pagan gods imported from foreign lands (2 Kings 17:29).

When a group of Jews, led by Zerubbabel, returned from the Babylonian Captivity, the Samaritans offered to help rebuild the Temple. When their offer was rejected, they tried to prevent the Jews from finishing their project (Ezra 4:1-10). When Nehemiah attempted to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, he was opposed by Arabic and Samaritan groups (Nehemiah 2:10-6:14). The breach between the Samaritans and the Jews widened when Ezra, in his zeal for racial purity, pressured all Israelite men who married during the Captivity to divorce their pagan wives (Ezra 10:18-44).

The final break between the two groups occurred when the Samaritans built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, claiming Shechem rather than Zion (Jerusalem) as the true Beth-el (house of God), the site traditionally chosen and blessed by the Lord.



In the Roman period the Samaritans appeared to prosper. Their religion was made legal in the Empire, being practiced in synagogues in Italy and Africa.

In the time of Jesus, Palestine west of the Jordan River was divided into the three provinces Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Because of their intermarriage with foreigners, the people of Samaria were shunned by orthodox Jews. Situated between Galilee and Judea, Samaria was the natural route for traveling between those two provinces. The pure-blooded Jews would travel east, cross the Jordan River, and detour around Samaria, rather than have dealings with the Samaritans.

Armed with a greater knowledge of the history of the area of Samaria and its inhabitants, the Bible student has a greater insight into the encounter that Jesus had with the woman at the well (John 4 1-42), and why he used a Samaritan in the story of the good Samaritan to explain how God's laws were meant to be interpreted (Luke 10 25-37).

The Woman at the Well

The meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well was planned by Jesus. He could have, like many of the pious Jews, taken a long route and gone around Samaria, but when taking a closer look at the passage it becomes apparent that there were lessons for the disciples, the Samaritans, and for the student of today.

In John 4:5-9 they “came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar ... Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.” The time would have been around midday, the heat of the sun, the journey, and the fact that it would have been meal time, would have been the reason for the weariness. “(7) A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give Me a drink.’ ... (9) Then

the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (NKJV).

This set the scene in which Jesus was able to speak of the changes that were to come as the Jewish Age came to an end. The Jewish Nation had been chosen by God. “You are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 7:6 NKJV). It was to the Jews, “the lost sheep of Israel,” that Jesus had come, and yet he knew that they would reject him and that “their house would be left unto them desolate.”

At the time of Jesus’ first advent, the only recognised place of worship was the temple at Jerusalem. Jesus in John 4:21-24 indicated that this arrangement was soon to end. “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. (22) You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. (23) But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. (24) God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (NKJV). The time for the change was close at hand, the sacrifices and the Temple worship would cease as they were but a shadow of the things to come. Jesus’ great sacrifice on the cross open the way for the worship of God “in spirit and truth.”

John records the effect that Jesus’ visit on the people. “We believe ... for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (NKJV). The Scribes and the Pharisees were not satisfied with Jesus’ words, stating “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You” (Matthew 12:38-39 NKJV). The words that Jesus had spoken did not satisfy the religious leaders, even though “No man ever spoke like this Man!” Nor did the miracles that were preformed move them to accept Jesus as the Christ, and yet the Samaritans, looked down at by the Jews, not only listened, but accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah.

The Good Samaritan

Although one of the best known stories in the Bible, it takes on greater significance when the history of Samaria is taken into account.

Luke’s gospel gives the setting of the story. “And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Luke 10:25 NKJV). It appears that the lawyer came forward feigning a desire to be instructed, but actually coming to test Jesus, to lead him to contradict some of the fundamentals of the law. The question ‘what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ was a one often asked by the Jewish people. The lawyer knew that only total obedience to the law of God could bring everlasting life.

Jesus turned the question back to the lawyer. “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” The lawyer answered ... ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself’” (NKJV). It is interesting that this is the same answer that Jesus gave the Pharisees when they asked him “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Matthew 22:36 NKJV). The lawyer continued, “And who is my neighbor?” The Pharisees held that the “Jews” only were to be regarded as such, and that this obligation did not extend to the Gentiles. The lawyer appears ready to affirm that he had discharged faithfully his duty to his countrymen, and had thus kept the law, and so could justify himself.

Jesus does not answer the question directly. Instead he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan and then asks the Lawyer, “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?” His answer gives more insight into not only his character, but also the attitude prevalent at that time. He could not bring himself to answer “The Samaritan,” instead answering “The one who showed mercy toward him.”

Jesus spoke of the attitude prevalent at the time of his first advent in Matthew 5:43. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’” (NKJV). The original command from God was “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18). The thought that you must hate our enemy was an inference drawn from it by the Jewish religious leaders. They supposed that if they loved the one, they must of course hate the other. Jesus shows that this was not the intention that his Father, stating “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (45) that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:44-45 NKJV).



Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well

The Ten Lepers

“Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. (13) And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” (14) So when He saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. (15) And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, (16) and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan” (Luke 17:12-16 NKJV).

The attitude of the Samaritan leper is interesting. As soon as he realized the wonderful miracle that had happened, he returned and expressed his thanks to God and to his Jesus. He then would have had to go to the priest as he was directed; as he could not have been restored to society without doing it; but he first poured out his thanks to God, and gave him praise for his wonderful recovery. His response was noted by Jesus and the words Jesus spoke were probably more intended for the witness to this event than to the Samaritan, when he stated “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? (18) Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” (19) And He said to him, ‘Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well’” (Luke 17:17-19 NKJV). The Jews lived by the letter of the law, not by their faith.

The Spread of the Gospel

Just before Christ’s ascension, he issued new instructions to his disciples. They were to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the holy Spirit. They were then to “be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NKJV). The instructions not to go into Samaria were rescinded, and now armed with the holy Spirit they were to preach to the Samaritans.

God’s overruling seems to have brought about a quicker spread of the gospel to the Samaritans, as shown in Acts 8:1. “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (NKJV). From the reaction of the people, they hungered after the gospel. “Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. (6) And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did ... (8) And there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:5-8 NKJV).

It appears that the Samaritans, unhampered by the traditions that held back the Jews, were able to quickly grasp the idea of a faith-based religion, rather than one that adhered to the letter of the law rather than to the spirit of the law.

Historical notes from Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary
Thomas Nelson

The Test of Discipleship

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NASB).

We may not be able to tell the exact time or place or trace all the circumstances in the process of conversion, but this does not mean that we are not converted. Christ said to Nicodemus, “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8 NASB). Like the invisible wind, the effects of which are plainly seen and felt, is the spirit of God upon the human heart. The power which no human eye can see begets a new life in us and we become new creatures.

While the work of the spirit is silent and unseen, its effects are manifest. If the heart has been renewed by the spirit of God, the life will bear witness to that fact. While we must not trust at all to ourselves or our good works, our lives will show whether the grace of God is dwelling within us; a change will be seen in our character, habits, and pursuits. The contrast will

be clear and decided between what they have been and what they are.

Character

The character is shown not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of habitual words and acts. The love of influence and the desire for the praise of others may produce a well-ordered life. Self-respect may lead us to avoid the appearance of evil.

A selfish heart, too, may perform generous actions. By what means, then, shall it be decided whose side we are on? We may ask the questions, who has our heart? With whom are our thoughts? Of whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are Christ’s, our thoughts are with Him and our best thoughts are of Him. We love to follow in His footsteps, do His will and please Him in all things.

Bringing forth Fruits

Those who become new creatures in Christ Jesus will bring forth the fruit of the spirit, which we find recorded in Galatians. Paul says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23 NASB). He continues in the following verses, “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5:24-26 NASB). We are to follow in the Lord’s steps by faith, reflect His character, and purify ourselves even as He is pure. The proud and haughty become meek and lowly in heart; the vain customs and fashions of the world are laid aside. Christians will seek not the “outward adorning,” but that which comes of a meek and quiet spirit.

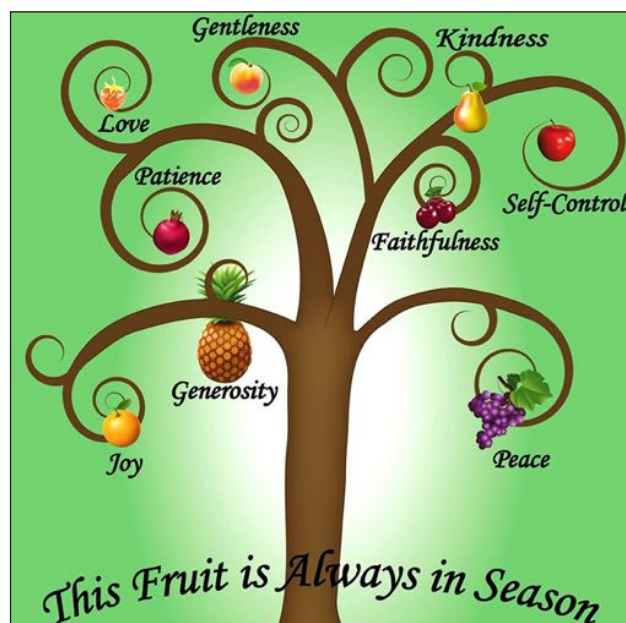
When we come to Christ and become partakers of His grace, love springs up in the heart. Every burden is light, for the yoke that Christ imposes is easy. Duty becomes a delight and sacrifice a pleasure. The path that before seemed covered in darkness becomes bright with beams from the Lord of heaven.

Love

Love is of God, and love to God was the controlling power in our Saviour’s life; it was His delight to do the will of God, and the beauty of the character of Christ will be seen in His followers. The un-consecrated heart has not this love and therefore cannot pass it on. It is only to be found in the heart where Jesus reigns (1 John 4:7-21). Love controls our character and this in turn helps us to govern our passions, subdue enmity, and enriches our affections. This love kept within us sweetens our lives, and those about us can see that we are indeed followers of Christ.

Be on Guard

There are two things against which Christians especially need to guard. The first, already mentioned, is that of looking to our own works to bring ourselves into harmony with God. If we are trying to become holy by our own works in keeping God’s law, we are attempting the impossible. All that we can do without Christ is tainted with selfishness. It is the grace of Christ alone, through faith, that can make us holy. The second thing to guard against is that belief in Christ releases men from keeping God’s commandments; that is, that since by faith alone we become partakers of the grace of Christ, our works have nothing to do with our redemption. But we need to realise that obedience is not just an outward act; it is the service of love. God’s laws are an expression of His very nature; they are full of the great principle of love. If our hearts are renewed in the likeness of God, if the divine love is implanted in our hearts, the law of God will be carried out in the life. Obedience, then, through service and



love is the true sign of discipleship. We read, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3 NASB). Again the Apostle says, “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4 NASB).

Instead of releasing man from obedience, faith only makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience. We do not earn salvation by our obedience, for salvation is the free gift of God to be received by faith, but obedience is the fruit of faith. That so-called faith in Christ which professes to release men from the obligation of obedience to God is not faith, but presumption. “By grace are ye saved through faith,” said Paul to the Ephesian church. And in James’ Epistle we read, “But faith if it hath not works is dead.”

Gaining Eternal Life

The conditions for gaining eternal life are now just what they always have been; just what was required in Paradise before the fall of our first parents — perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness. If eternal life were granted on any conditions short of this, then the happiness of the whole of humanity would be in danger; the way would be open for sin with all its consequences. It was possible for Adam before the fall to form a righteous character by obedience to God’s law, but he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen, and we cannot make ourselves righteous — we cannot perfectly obey a holy law.

Having no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God, Christ made a way out for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life; He died for us, and now He offers to cover our sins and give us His righteousness. Christ’s character stands

in place of our character, and we are accepted before God just as if we had not sinned. Christ also changes the heart; He abides in our hearts by faith, and the complete surrender of our will to Him enables us to say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20 NASB).

Nothing to Boast

So, we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ which is given to us. When we speak of faith we do not mean the kind that merely believes the existence of God’s power without acting on that belief. The Scripture says, “the devils also believe and tremble,” but this is not faith. Where there is not only a belief in God’s Word, but a submission of the will to Him; where the heart is yielded to Him, the affections fixed upon Him, there is faith — faith that works by love, and purifies the whole being.

The closer we come to Jesus, the more faults will appear in our own eyes, for our vision will be clearer, and our imperfect nature will be seen in contrast to Christ’s perfect life. If our life is changed by the grace of Christ, we will admire His beautiful character, but if we do not see our own shortcomings, we have failed to see the excellence of Christ. The more our need drives us to Him and His Word, the more we shall see of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image.

Sacrifice

The richest quality of love is sacrifice, and the noblest credential of any work is the spirit which has laid every selfish interest down at Jesus’ feet, and counts all things loss for Christ; which holds its money, its friendships, its life, all subservient to the Master’s claim, and, living a dying life, at last gives life itself as a willing offering to Him who gave His life for US. In this selfish and luxurious age, it is the rarest quality found but it is the most needed as the end approaches.

In Search of a City

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:8, 10 NASB).

The Call

“**N**ow the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing’” (Genesis 12:1-2 NASB).

In the twelfth chapter of Genesis the Bible shifts from a commentary on the history of the human race to a man called Abram. He lived in the city of Ur of the Chaldees and was the first person to be called

a Hebrew in scripture. The meaning of the word Hebrew is interesting, “one from beyond,” no doubt referring to the fact that he had come from beyond the river Euphrates.

Mentioned in the Bible as the hometown of Abraham, Ur around 2000 BC was the center of a wealthy empire that drew traders from as far away as the Mediterranean Sea, 750 miles to the west, and the Indus civilization — called Meluhha by ancient Iraqis — some 1,500 miles to the east.

Why Call Abram? What Made Him Special?

It seems that Abram’s family worshipped pagan gods like everyone else in the land of Ur who were known for worshipping Nanna, the moon god. This is supported by Joshua saying to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac’” (Joshua 24:2-3 NASB). However it appears that Abram, like Noah before him was a faithful follower of the Almighty God.



Abraham and his entourage departing from Haran

There appeared no special reason for God to call him. As we follow his journey, he shows his human short comings, he lies about his wife twice, does not wait for God to provide the promised seed, has a child with Hagar, Sarah's handmaiden and later drives Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness (Genesis 21:8-21).

What makes Abraham so special is God's election, God choosing who to bestow a special grace. One that would not just bless Abraham but would at the right time bless the whole world through his seed. It is very difficult to understand the foreknowledge of our Heavenly Father and how He uses this to fulfil his purposes. The Apostle Paul gives the following example "And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED [loved less]" (Romans 9:10-13 NASB).

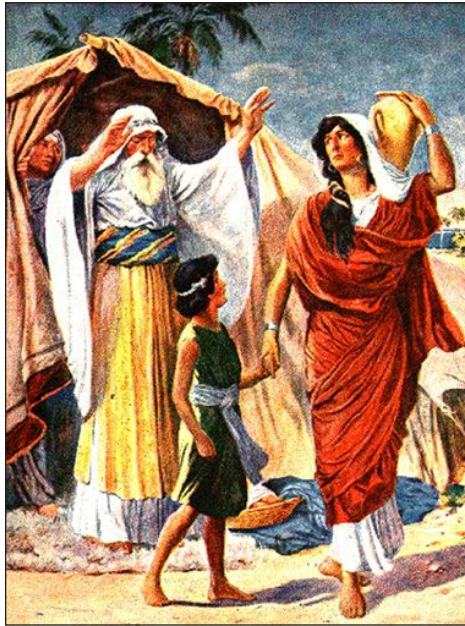
God knew that Isaac would be far more interested in his father's inheritance, the spiritual blessing, than Esau. Esau should not be considered as evil, but he was far more interested in worldly possessions shown by his first two marriages to Hittite women, giving him access to trade with their families.

Abraham Did Not Know His Destination

Another aspect of Abraham's call was that it required faith and his reliance on God to provide what He had promised. God told him to "Go forth from your country" from a city that was secure, with good prospects to make a living for Abram's family and in to following God's instructions into the unknown. He was just told "Go to the land I will show you." We can imagine those who knew Abram in Ur questioning his mind to uproot his family, father, servants, and his livestock to head out into the unknown. He was leaving for a land that God would show him, and this required his faith in God, a life of depending upon God.

A Parallel Lesson for Christians

Our life of faith begins when we accept Christ, to solely trust in Christ's finished work. Through the acceptance of Christ, we are saved. The Jews saw their salvation as coming from obedience to the law, that is through works of the flesh. The problem was they could not keep the law as James states. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become



Hagar and Ishmael departing

guilty of all" (James 2:10 NASB). We still do good works, as a result of our salvation — not for salvation. Also, as Christians following God's call, the Lord continually teaches us of our insufficiency and his sufficiency. Essentially, he teaches us how to depend on him and live the life of faith. James brings out the point "that faith without works is useless." Earlier in the chapter James gives us an example of faith without works. "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" (James 2:15-16 NASB).

Abraham's Journey

What was the need for Abraham to start this journey from his birthplace to a land chosen by God? There are clues in the history of the human race.

- In the days of Noah evil was prevalent amongst the people. This was 1656 years after Adam was driven from the Garden "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them" (Genesis 6:5-7 NASB). Only Noah found favour with God.

- In the days of Nimrod, the lessons of the flood had been lost and men's hearts were once again turning against God. They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4 NASB). It appears that it was only 339 years before once again God had to intervene. The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city (Genesis 11:6-8 NASB).

- God's decision to have Abraham leave Ur was no doubt to protect him from the influences of the people around who were idol worshippers. Abraham's journey was not straight forward to the promised land, he would be a sojourner and an alien in a foreign land.

Ur of the Chaldees

This was the birth place of Abraham and it was from here that his father Terah took the family north to Haran. “Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. Terah and his family followed the River Euphrates upstream for about 600 miles to the city of Haran. The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran” (Genesis 11:31-32 NASB).

Haran in Mesopotamia

This was a large city and possibly Terah had moved here for business reasons. Some claim that he renamed the city Haran after his son. It appears that they may have been in the city for about 5 years before Terah died. Possibly God waited till this time as Abraham would have to leave his father behind and this was no longer the case. “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.’ So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran” (Genesis 12:1-4 NASB).

Haran to Shechem

The journey was approximately 500 miles, traveling through Damascus, the city from which Eliezer had come from (Genesis 15:2) to reach Shechem. “Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus, they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land” (Genesis 12:5-6 NASB). The last part of the verse is interesting when considering the promise from God. “The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” So, he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him” (Genesis 12:7 NASB). God did not tell Abram how he would possess the land, and yet Abram built an altar to the Lord. By this solemn act of devotion, Abram openly professed his religion, established the worship of the true God, and declared his faith in the promise.

Shechem to Bethel

Abram’s journeys continued about 30 miles to the south, to Bethel. “Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the

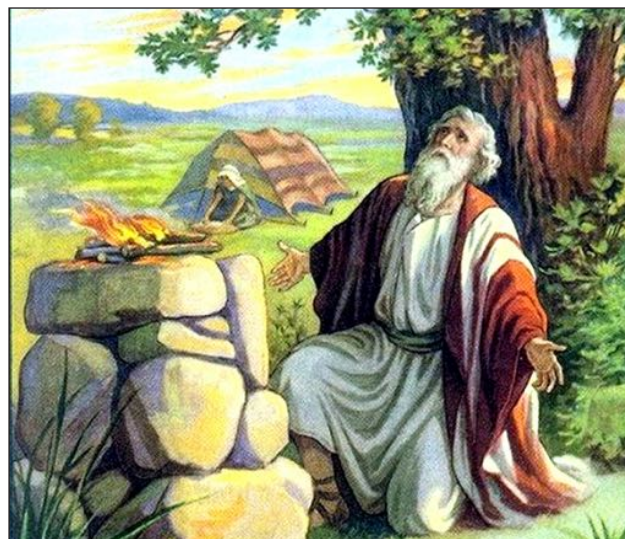
name of the LORD” (Genesis 12:8 NASB). Bethel was the first place that we are told that Abram pitched his tent indicating his intent to settle there. This is the second record of him building an altar to the LORD. The name Bethel means “house of God,” and it is quite possible that it was Abram that named the place.

Bethel to Egypt

Abram continued south from Bethel towards Negeb, that is the southern part of Judah to the area known today in part as Gaza. No doubt in search for pasture and water for his stock. He had to continue south, as we are told, “Now there was a famine in the land; so, Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land” (Genesis 12:10 NASB). It was here that Abram’s faith was tested. Sarai was very beautiful and thus desirable, and Pharaoh’s officials mentioned this to Pharaoh. Sarai was taken to Pharaoh’s house. Abram was concerned that if they knew she was his wife they may have killed him, so he tried to pass her off as his sister. God struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues for taking Sarai. “Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, ‘What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?’” (Genesis 12:18 NASB). Pharaoh provided safe passage for Abraham and his family.

Return to Bethel

“So, Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD” (Genesis 13:1-4 NASB). It was at Bethel that a dispute arose between Abram’s and Lot’s herdsmen over pasture rights. This resulted in Abram settling in the land of Canaan and Lot settling in the cities of



Altar at Bethel

the valley as far as Sodom. Lot's choice would have consequences. "Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD" (Genesis 13:13 NASB).

Bethel to Hebron

This was about 7 miles to the northeast of Bethel. Before departing Bethel for the oaks of Mamre in Hebron, Abram was given more details of God's plan. "The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. 'Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you'" (Genesis 13:14-17 NASB).

Dan

The events that took place at these locations are recorded in Genesis 14. This chapter presents Abram in the unexpected character of a warrior. The occasion was this: "The king of Sodom and the kings of the adjoining cities, after having been tributaries for twelve years to the king of Elam, combined to throw off his yoke. To chastise their rebellion, as he deemed it, Chedorlaomer, with the aid of three allies, invaded the territories of the refractory princes, and defeated them in a pitched battle where the nature of the ground favoured his army. 'Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country' (Genesis 14:10 NASB). He hastened in triumph on his homeward march, with a large number of captives and booty" (JFB). "They also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom" (Genesis 14:12 NASB).

It is at this time that Abram became aware of the situation "Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan" (Genesis 14:13-14 NASB).

Shaveh — The King's Valley

This appears to be close to Salem. It was there that Abram met Melchizedek. "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' He gave him a tenth of all" (Genesis 14:18-20 NASB). Abram had



Abraham with Melchizedek

won the war and was thus able to take the spoils of war from the King of Sodom who offered Abram the spoils of war. Abram's answer shows his character. "Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, I have made Abram rich'" (Genesis 14:22-23 NASB).

Hebron

Upon Abram's return to Hebron the Lord God makes many promises, reaffirming his promise of an heir. God speaks of the fact that his descendants will be strangers and would be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years (Genesis 15:1-21). Sarai, still being childless, offers Hagar to bear a child. Hagar bears a son which causes troubles between the women. Hagar is driven from the camp, but the angel of the Lord tells her to return. She would bear a son and call him Ishmael (Genesis 16:1-16). This was 11 years after Abram had departed Haran.

The next event was when Abram was ninety-nine years old. His name was changed from Abram (Exalted father) to Abraham (father of a multitude) "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:5-7 NASB). It was now that the circumcision of the flesh of the foreskin was commanded (Genesis 17:10-14).

During Abraham's sojourn in Hebron, "Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her'" (Genesis 17:15-16 NASB). Abraham's and Sarah's age meant that this promise seemed impossible. God stated, "Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed

time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son'” (Genesis 18:14 NASB).

Gerar

This was in the land of the Philistines and Abimelech was the king. The king took Sarah as again Abraham had declared that she was his sister. (Actually, a half-sister Genesis 20:12.) God intervened in a dream to the king, stating that Sarah was married, and he would die. Abimelech answered “Lord, I am innocent! Would you destroy me and my people? Abraham himself said that she was his sister, and she said the same thing. I did this with a clear conscience, and I have done no wrong.” Sarah was returned to Abraham with Abimelech giving Sarah gifts either as an atoning gift or a testimony of her innocence in the sight of all.

Beersheba

Abraham settled here and Sarah conceived and gave birth to Isaac, who was circumcised on the eighth day. The child grew and was weaned and was mocked by Ishmael who was then driven out. Sarah stated, “Send this slave and her son away. The son of this woman must not get any part of your wealth, which my son Isaac should inherit” (Genesis 21:10). God made promises to Hagar. “I will make a great nation out of his descendants.” It was here that Abraham and Abimelech made an agreement over the well and Abraham remained here for many days.

Mount Moriah

“Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you’” (Genesis 22:1-2 NASB).

This was the most extraordinary test of Abraham’s faith and obedience in offering his long awaited son to the Heavenly Father. He arose early in the morning and took the three day journey to the mountain chosen by God. Isaac asked, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” and Abraham replied, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”

The willingness of Isaac to follow the instructions cannot be overlooked. A lad of sixteen could have easily overpower his aging father. Just as Abraham was about to kill Isaac, the angel of the Lord intervened. “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now, I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

Abraham’s faithfulness was rewarded. “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Genesis 22:16-18 NASB).

Hebron — The End of the Journey

It was here that Abraham bought land so that he could bury Sarah who died at one hundred and twenty-seven years. Although all the land he had travelled through was promised to him by God, he had to buy the cave of Machpelah to provide a sepulchre for his family. Abraham died at one hundred and seventy-five after one hundred years sojourning in the promised land, and yet never received the promised inheritance. He was buried with Sarah.

“Lord, Increase Our Faith”

(Luke 17:5 NASB).

When we read and meditate on such portions of God’s Word as the 11th chapter of Hebrews, we begin to realise something of the value and importance of faith. It is very precious in the sight of God. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:1,6 NASB).

Dr. Strong’s definition of faith is — “persuasion, i.e., credence, conviction of the truthfulness of God (which implies acceptance of His Word of truth),

reliance upon Christ for salvation; then constancy in such profession; then assurance, belief, fidelity.”

Dealings With Israel

In His dealings with the children of Israel, God revealed, in a measure, His glorious attributes. God’s perfect standard of righteousness — holiness — was held up before the people in the Law Covenant. The children of Israel were told that if they would keep God’s Law perfectly, they would gain life. But because of inherent sin and imperfection, not one of Adam’s children could measure up to the standard of perfection required by the Law. This is clearly shown

by Paul in Romans 3:9-28.

This provision of God's grace to justify repentant believers in Jesus Christ is indeed glad tidings. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH" (Romans 1:16-17 NASB). In our Lord's Day some of the people said to Him "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:28-29 NASB).

So that we may have an enlightened and intelligent belief in Christ as our Saviour from sin and death, and that we may have an ever increasing faith in God, we need first of all some knowledge. "Christ is made unto us [first] wisdom [which implies knowledge, enlightenment]; then righteousness [justification], then sanctification, and redemption [deliverance]" (1 Corinthians 1:30. ASV).

Elements of Faith

Faith may be said to have in it the two elements of intellectual assurances and heart reliance. Both the head and the heart — the intellect and the affections — are necessary to the faith without which it is impossible to please God. With some, faith is all emotion; with others, it is all knowledge. But neither of these elements alone can withstand the fiery tests to which faith is subjected. Both must be present and remain, if our faith will endure to the end, and be found unto praise, honour, and glory at the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The trial of our faith to which our Lord and the apostles refer, is a trial not only of our intellectual knowledge of divine truth, but also of our heart reliance upon God. In both respects, the true child of God will find himself severely tried. Let him see to it that he has a "Thus saith the Lord" for every item of his belief. Let him study the doctrine and get a clear understanding of every element of the truth. Let him become rooted, grounded, settled, and established in the doctrines of God, and give earnest heed lest at any time he let them slip. "For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it" (Hebrews 2:1 NASB).

With faith well grounded in the fundamental principles of divine truth, let every consecrated child of God see to it that he also continues to cultivate heart reliance in the "great and precious promises." The Apostle Peter tells us "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation" (1 Peter 4:12-13 NASB). Whenever we



The Apostle Peter

pass through a fiery trial and still retain not only our faith in the doctrines, but also our confidence in God, our reliance in His promises, our integrity of heart and purpose, and our zeal for truth and righteousness, then our characters have grown more Christ-like, and hence more pleasing to God, who subjects us to discipline for this very purpose.

Severe Testings

The Apostle Peter tells us that the faith of those called throughout the Gospel Age will receive a severe testing. He says, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7 KJV). In the present time, when gold is comparatively a rare metal, it has a special value. Therefore, the apostle compares it to the faith of the little flock, to whom alone, of all humanity, will be given the glory, honour and immortality promised to those who overcome.

Hence the trial of the faith of this class is very important. None will be admitted to membership in the Body of Christ who has not been tested and proved by the Lord. But let us remember that our testing is not to see whether we are perfect according to the flesh. On the contrary, God "knows our frame; He remembers that we are but dust" (Psalms 103:14 NASB).

What God is seeking in us is the development and perfection of faith. We are tested to see whether we believe in Him as a faithful, wise, loving, and true God, and in His Son as our Redeemer, who purchased us with His own precious blood, and as our Advocate who now covers our blemishes, past, present, and future, with the robe of His imputed righteousness. These are the elements of faith which He will test thoroughly, and which must grow stronger as time goes by. Without strong, well tested faith in God and His promises, we cannot please Him and become members of the elect class which He is now selecting.

Not by Chance

The trial of our faith is not left to chance. It is supervised by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who is



Jesus will refine us as silver.

represented by the prophet. “He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness” (Malachi 3:3 NASB). In one sense of the word, He came as that refiner at the first advent. During the entire Gospel Age, He has continued that refining work in His people, that the offering to the Father might be an acceptable one.

First of all, our Lord laid down His life in fulfilment of the types of the Law, thus demonstrating His absolute trust, loyalty, and faith in God. The church of Christ must be similarly tested and proved in respect of their obedience, trust, and loyalty to the Father. They must be willing, not only to trust God when things are favourable, but trust in His providences when they cannot see the outcome. To attain this degree of faith, they must pass through manifold trials and testings, that they may demonstrate their faith and loyalty.

Works Versus Faith

The question arises, why should God bless faith rather than works? The answer is that works are dependent upon the ability of the worker, and that the whole race of Adam has become unable to do perfect works, on account of the fall of their first parents. None can be perfectly just, perfectly wise, perfectly loving; in our present imperfect condition this is impossible.

Therefore, in His wisdom and love, God avoids making His test along those lines in which we are absolutely incompetent and makes it along the line of faith in His wisdom, His love, and His promises. To doubt any of these would be to weaken the basis of our hope. We realise that we are in a fallen condition; that we are dying like the remainder of the race. We have heard through the Word of God that He has provided a Saviour, but we see that things continue much as they were, despite all that God and Christ have done. Our faith, however, assures us that God, who knows the end from the beginning, is working all things according to the counsel of His own will, and that in due time He will establish righteousness in the earth (Ephesians 1:11, Psalms 72:1-7).

What a splendid example of faith we find in Abraham. Our respect for his faith rises higher and higher as we

behold the various manifestations of his confidence in God, and his obedience to the divine command. We say to ourselves, Oh that we might have in fullest measure this abounding faith, this willing obedience, this trust, resting securely in God — this assurance that He is able to accomplish all that He has promised, even though the accomplishment of it should make necessary a resurrection from the dead! For the apostle assures us that Abraham meditated upon this matter — respecting the fact that Isaac was his legitimate heir and had been so acknowledged of the Lord, saying, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.” He could see no other way that God’s Word could be true; yet so strong was his faith that he trusted that the Lord was able to raise his son from the dead in order to fulfil the promise. “He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type” (Hebrews 11:19 NASB).

The Faith of the Gospel Church

This is exactly the kind of faith that the Lord desires in the spiritual seed of Abraham — the Gospel Church — a faith that will trust Him even where it cannot trace Him; a faith which recognizes His perfect wisdom, perfect love, and perfect power. It is not a faith, however; that is a spontaneous growth, under present fallen conditions. It requires years for its development. Abraham had not this degree of faith when first he entered the land of Canaan as a pilgrim. It was a faith that had grown through His continued intimacy with his Almighty “Friend.” His previous trials had already contributed to the development of this, his finished faith; the long waiting and frequent disappointments in respect of Isaac had been beneficial; the attempt to assist the Lord in the fulfilment of the promise, in the begetting of Ishmael, and the subsequent rejection of Ishmael as not being of the Lord’s arrangement, had no doubt helped to establish the patriarch in his confidence that God’s purposes are immutable, and His power unlimited.

So it is with the spiritual seed of Abraham, the Christ, the Church. Our faith is a work of time and patient endurance of trials and testings, which, rightly received, work out for us an increase of knowledge, an increase of faith, and an increase of fellowship with God, until, by the Lord’s grace, we later on reach such a development of faith in Him as sometimes surprises ourselves, and assures us that we have made some progress, because at the beginning of our way we could not have endured the same trials successfully. We see that in many respects even our faith is a gift of God — that while we exercised some faith in the beginning of our experiences, yet the development of it to such a condition and degree as will be acceptable to God is of God’s grace, through His providential leading, dealings, and instructions. To Him, therefore, we must render the praise, not only for the glorious results, but also for the faith and the works of this present time, which fit and prepare us for the coming glory and blessings.

Spirit of the World Contrary to Christ

Our Lord's teachings were contrary to the spirit of the world and so adverse to its policy that His disciples felt that to adopt His methods and principles and discard their own former ideas, in yielding themselves as true disciples, they needed a stronger, firmer faith than they had yet been called upon to exercise. They were quite persuaded from the purity and nobility of His character, and from His miracles and His teachings, that He was indeed a teacher sent from God; yet remembering the requirement of discipleship — "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Luke 14:33 NASB). They felt that to continue in this attitude of discipleship would require a growing faith that would rise to every emergency of His requirements. Hence their request — "Lord, increase our faith."

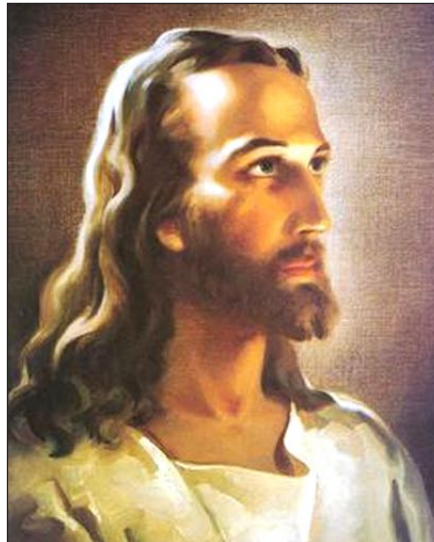
They were quite right in their reasoning, for the Lord shows that the true disciples must make progress in the school of Christ toward the full overcoming of the spirit of the world. This progress can be achieved only by faith — by full, implicit confidence in His teaching and training as will keep them continually as earnest, diligent pupils under His guidance and instruction. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4. ASV).

This is very suggestive of what is signified to be an "overcome," to whom pertains all the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel of Christ. It is simply this — that day by day we attentively heed and patiently carry out the instructions of our infallible Teacher and Guide in full, unquestioning faith in His wisdom and love, no matter how heavy the daily cross will be or how severe the discipline. It is indeed a tedious, life-long process, but the end will be glorious; and even the daily discipline, patiently and meekly borne, will bring the present rewards of conscious progress in the great work of overcoming and of a nearer approach to the goal of a ripened Christian character. All of this is implied in the beautiful words, so expressive of the faith and fervent devotion of true discipleship.

*"Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee,
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me."*

Increase of Faith

While Jesus made no direct answer to this request for an increase of faith, His whole subsequent course with the disciples was a fulfilment of it. And so it will be with us if, in a similarly true spirit of discipleship, we pray, "Lord, increase our faith." The increase of faith will come, not by a miraculous infusion, but in the



Jesus, our example

natural process of Jesus' leading and training. In the school of experience, in following His leading and in the blessed results of each step of the way, faith develops and grows.

As servants of God, we owe Him the full measure of our ability; hence, we may not feel that we have merited or earned the great blessings of heavenly inheritance and joint heirship with Christ. We have merely done our duty; but God, with exceeding riches of grace, has prepared for those who lovingly serve Him, rewards far beyond that for which they have asked or hoped. We can do no works beyond what duty requires; even at our best our

service is marred by imperfections and could never find acceptance with God except as supplemented by the perfect and finished work of Christ.

In order that the Christian may be strong in faith, God has provided a protection and urges us to "take unto you the whole amour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (See Ephesians 6:10-18.) We are exhorted to have our "loins girded about with truth," implying that we are servants of the truth; and we are to "have on the breastplate of righteousness," implying faith in the righteousness of Christ as the ground of our acceptance with God.

It is also implied that we love righteousness and seek to conform our lives to the principles of righteousness and truth as revealed in Christ and in the Word of God.

The Necessary Components

In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul speaks of the "breastplate of faith and love." Our feet are to be "shod with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace." We are to be ready always to speak the Word of the Gospel in the spirit of our Lord, with meekness and reverence. Then we are to have "the shield of faith" — confidence in God — faith in His power and wisdom and love. It is faith in God, the use of the shield, that will quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. Then we must have the "helmet of salvation," for the knowledge of the truth respecting God's plan and purpose is important. Paul calls "the helmet," "the hope of salvation."

Then he mentions the "sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God." We must depend in the struggle of this "evil day" upon the Word of God, "It is written." We must use no darts like Satan's — anger, malice, hatred, strife. And "the sword of the spirit" can be possessed only by careful study and leading of the spirit after consecration — after enlisting in the Lord's army. In verse 18 the apostle urges upon us the importance of prayer, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Four Distinctly Separate Parts

The Bible Teachings (Part Nineteen) — Covenants, Mediator, Ransom, Sin Offering, Atonement

The careful student will note in the words quoted four parts distinctly separate: God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church, and the world. God and the world are in opposition. Divine sentence of condemnation passed upon all the human family, determining that they were out of covenant relationship with God — imperfect, unable to keep the Divine requirements, and therefore under death condemnation. In due time God sent forth His Son, with the avowed object of reconciling the world. Jesus did not even attempt to do so. He confined His efforts entirely to the Jewish nation and amongst them to the seeking for the “lost sheep,” as many as the Father would draw to Him.

Him that Hath Ears to Hear

Having finished His ransom-sacrifice, He ascended on high and applied it, not for the world, but for those who should believe on Him and become His followers by consecration. The Apostle was one of these, as He explained to others, and incidentally to us of the same class today. The results of our Lord’s appropriation of His merit on our behalf, was our consequent harmony with God and share in the reconciliation, not done by our Lord, but in a measure committed to us, His “members.” He says, as above quoted, “God hath reconciled us to Himself through Jesus and hath given to us the ministry (service) of reconciliation”; not the service of our own reconciliation, which is already passed, but the service of making known to the world the great fact that through the merit of Christ’s death, whosoever wills may return to harmony with God, be reconciled to Him. Our message is that this reconciliation is eventually to reach the whole world, but that, at the present time, it is intended only for “him that hath an ear to hear.”

Church’s Ministry as Ambassadors

As ambassadors for God, as “members” of The Christ, it is our ministry or service in the world to carry the message to all who can hear it — to persuade men, to encourage them by word and example, to be reconciled to God — to accept His terms and conditions and to submit themselves fully to His will. This ministry or service in the present time affects merely the gathering of “the household of faith,” including the “elect,” but this is not the end of the service. Those faithful in the present work of the ministry of reconciliation will be counted worthy by the Lord of a share in the glorious work of the future. The reconciliation of that time will differ from the message of the present time. For we persuade, we urge, we entreat, we lay down our lives for the

brethren. We seek by word and example to encourage, to entice them to the Lord — to have fellowship in His sufferings and in our ministry.

The Church’s Ministry of the Future

The ministry of the future will be entirely different — it will be glorious. Instead of suffering and sacrificing and being rejected of men, the future reconciliation work will be accomplished on a plane of glory. Our Lord and Head, glorified, will be the King of kings and Lord of lords. We, His humble followers, will be “changed” by the power of the First Resurrection and, as “members” of His “glorious Body,” we will sit upon His throne. We will exercise under Him the office of Prophet, Priest, King, Mediator between God and men, the world. No longer will men be entreated, but, on the contrary the Law shall go forth from Mt. Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:5.) And “the soul that will not obey that Prophet shall be destroyed from among His people,” after full, fair warning and helpful advice (Acts 3:25).

Present and Future Ministry of Reconciliation

This ministry of reconciliation committed to the Church, now and hereafter, is sometimes referred to as the ministry of the New Covenant — the service of bringing Israel in covenant relationship with God anew. These royal priests serve the New Covenant by way of making; ready, under the guidance of their Head, the sacrificing of their restitution rights as under priests. The duties and privileges of this “royal priesthood” are now a sacrificing service; by and by a reigning, restoring and teaching service. “As He was, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17).

The Righteousness of God in Him

2 Corinthians 5:21 above quoted tells how our Lord became the sin offering for us, the household of faith, and that this is in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. In other words, we His “members” may be the channels through whom His merit would be applied for the propitiation of the world’s sins, under the terms of the New Testament, or bequest, in His blood. This is in harmony with Paul’s statement that God’s mercy through Christ will be extended to Israel through the Church. As it is written, “They shall obtain mercy through your mercy.” It is God’s mercy through Christ which will pass through the Church to natural Israel to whomsoever wills of all the families of the earth. Thank God for the privilege of this ministry of reconciliation committed unto us (Romans 11:27) (Z1910-6).

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While it is our intention that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord's Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the discourses reported.

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For the Diary

Australian Bible Students Online Convention

Friday 24 to Sunday 26, January, 2025

Details in October, December People's Paper

The Bible Teachings

On the Covenants, Mediator, Ransom,
Sin Offering, and Atonement.

This book was published by the Berean Bible Institute in the 1970's and sets out the teachings from the Bible on topics which so eluded many in the Christian world. The insert in this edition of the Peoples Paper covers the next part of this 274-page book. For Brethren who would like to read more of the content, it is available at:

www.australianbiblestudents.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/The-Bible-Teachings-on-the-Covenants2.pdf

At the End of the Tunnel

In the not-too-distant past, our railroad trains were equipped with kerosene lamps, lighted only after the darkness had set in. Unlike the electric lights on our modern trains, the kerosene lamps each had to be individually lighted by the porter.

Sometimes, during the day, a train had to pass through dark tunnels. Because these periods were comparatively short, the lamps were not lighted at such times. The people would sit in the darkness, awaiting the light as the train emerged from the tunnel.

On one of these train trips, a little girl was running up and down the length of the train, very much to the dismay of her mother, who had time and time again asked her to sit down beside her, so that she would not fall and hurt herself if the train should suddenly lurch around a curve. However, the little girl was too busy enjoying herself and did not heed her mother's request. Suddenly, the train entered one of these dark tunnels, plunging from the brightness of noonday into the darkness of midnight. Everything went quiet; the little girl's laughter and the patter of her feet could no longer be heard. Everyone wondered what had happened to her, until the train emerged into the light again, when, lo and behold, there sat the girl on her mother's lap, her little arms tightly clasped about her mother's neck!

How often we, too, are so childish in our pursuits — wanting to have our own way — until some trial, some tragedy, some bereavement, sends us scurrying back to the Father's bosom.

A. C. Frey

"Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10 NASB).



The Day Thou Gavest

The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended,
The darkness falls at Thy behest;
To Thee our morning hymns ascended,
Thy praise shall sanctify our rest.

We thank Thee that Thy Church unsleeping,
While earth rolls onward into light,
Through all the world her watch is keeping,
And rests not now by day or night.

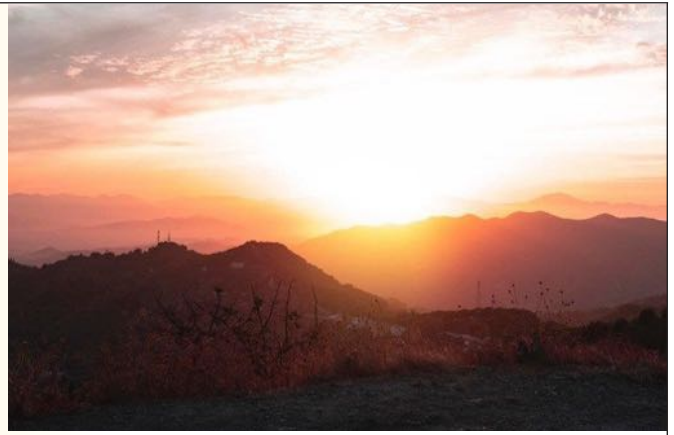
As o'er each continent and island
The dawn leads on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent,
Nor dies the strain of praise away.

The sun that bids us rest is waking
Our brethren 'neath the western sky,
And hour by hour fresh lips are making
Thy wondrous doings heard on high.

So be it, Lord; Thy throne shall never,
Like earth's proud empires, pass away;
Thy Kingdom stands, and grows for ever,
Till all Thy creatures own Thy sway.

Author: John Ellerton (1870)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZJs0-0Qa2g



*His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning.
Great is Thy faithfulness.*

Lamentations 3:22-23

Gett Lang