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THE PAST YEAR

The beginning of a new year is an appropriate time to reflect on the events of the past year and to ponder what might be in the year ahead.

During 2009 there were several events whose effect was to cause alarm rather than peace: armed conflicts, acts of terrorism, earthquakes, tornadoes, cyclones, floods and drought. The human suffering, both in degree and magnitude, was enormous, and so when reflecting on the past year it is profitable to keep in mind John 14:27: "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".

Armed conflicts

During 2009 several parts of the globe were plagued with war—Iraq and the Middle East, Asia, the African continent, parts of South America, and the Adriatic region. There were several other places, not published in the media, where human beings inflicted pain and suffering on fellow human beings. One example is Iran; below is a report from Israel National News television published on 25 June 2009:

"Iranian Dissident: Dear Israeli Brothers and Sisters - Help Us! by Nissan Ratzlav-Katz

Iranian anti-regime activists are hoping for an Israeli technological hand to help them fight the Islamic Republic. As of now, **hundreds of protesters have been killed by the regime**, which is evidently using Arabic-speaking armed thugs from Hizbullah to help perpetrate the violence.

"Dear Israeli Brothers and Sisters," writes Iranian dissident Arash Irandoost, "Iran needs your help more than ever now. And we will be eternally grateful. Please help opposition television and radio stations which are blocked and being jammed by the Islamic Republic (Nokia and Siemens) resume broadcast to Iran. There is a total media blackout and Iranians inside Iran for the most part are not aware of their brave brothers and sisters fighting and losing their lives daily. And the unjust treatment and brutal

massacre of the brave Iranians in the hands of the mullah's paid terrorist Hamas and Hizbullah gangs are not seen by the majority of the Iranians. Please help in any way you can to allow these stations resume broadcasting to Iran.

"And, please remember that we will remember, as you have remembered Cyrus the Great's treatment of you in your time of need," Irandoost concludes, signing his blogged call for help "Your Iranian Brothers and Sisters!"

In an interview with Israel National News, Iranian expatriate pro-democracy activist Amil Imani said that Irandoost's message represents the sentiments of much of the youth in the streets in Iran. They have a strong belief in the technological know-how of the Israelis to overcome the Iranian regime's attempts to block communications.

"This is going to be the most massive, impressive revolution of the 21st century," Imani said, "and we're seeing it live." However, he added, it is now too dependent on Internet communications, so the protesters are very much in need of outside assistance to fight the technological and information war. More generally, Imani said, the Iranian people are lionizing any leader of any nation who comes out strongly against the Islamic Republic at this time.

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According to Imani, at least 500 people have been killed by Iranian government forces, with another 5,000 injured. But the hospitals are no longer safe, he added, as the gunmen from the basiji militia enter the emergency wards looking for wounded protesters. Therefore, Imani said, sympathetic doctors have taken to treating the wounded wherever they can, including in private homes.

Even outside Iran, tens of thousands of protesters are out in the streets every day, especially in the United States and Europe. Imani said he thinks the phenomenon represents unprecedented unity in the Iranian expatriate community.

As for the basijis themselves, Imani reported, many of them are Lebanese and Palestinian Authority Arabs hired by the regime to do its bidding. Iranians reportedly captured seven basijis who spoke no Persian, only Arabic. According to Imani, 10,000 more Arab hired guns arrived in Tehran to serve "the mullah-led regime.

But they are not the only ones thinking about guns at this point. Some Iranian protesters, Imani reported, have taken to threatening their oppressors, "God have mercy on you if we decide to [take up] arms!" "There is no turning back," Imani concluded.

(Source: www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/132073).

The United Nations

The above report, and the prevalence of other armed conflicts in the world in 2009, is a reminder that, in spite of their best efforts, Man is unable to establish peace on the earth. Engraved into the stone wall of the United Nations' Churches Center in New York (directly across First Avenue from UN headquarters) is the inscription: "...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more—Isaiah". The specific reference of the quotation (Isa. 2:4) is not engraved into the wall, maybe to avoid offending those nations of predominantly non-Biblical faiths. However, in spite of this noble objective of the UN, the total fire-power in the world today is greater than when the UN was established on 25 October 1945, and so the UN is failing to achieve the conversion of "swords into plowshares and spears into pruninghooks".

The armed conflicts in the world in 2009 made it a challenge to be truly at peace and, in view of the reporter's prediction quoted above for Iran, it will remain a challenge during 2010. Everyone who believes in the existence of a God may well ask the question: if you are a God of love, compassion and

mercy why don't you do something to end the suffering? How can you sit idly by and watch your human creation endure such heartbreak?

God's supremacy

The first point to be grasped in any search for the answers to those questions is that the creator of the universe is supreme and operates at a level far above the level of the human mind—indeed the challenge is to realise how much higher are His ways than Man's ways. The prophet Isaiah wrote: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9). A consideration of the height of the heavens above the earth gives some idea of the difference in the levels of intellect between God and Man.

The prophet Jeremiah also wrote of the power of God relative to that of His human creation: "But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath, the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens'. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. Every man is brutish in his knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish" (Jer. 1:10-15).

Jeremiah wrote that not only has God complete control over the affairs of men but also that He made the world "by His wisdom", which implies that whatever is happening in the world is happening because it will yield the best outcome for mankind in the long term. God is "the only wise God" (Rom. 16:27) in contrast to "the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth", as Jeremiah termed them. Consequently Christians can rest assured that the present distress is in accord with God's plan for mankind; He has the power to stop it, and will do so when it has accomplished His purpose.

Meanwhile Christians should be at peace within themselves because, although "men's hearts will fail them for fear for looking after those things that are coming on the earth", the faithful should: "...look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:26-28).■

THE WAY THAT SEEMED RIGHT

The writer of Proverbs exhibited a comprehensive understanding of mankind's plight when he wrote: "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*" (Proverbs 14:12 KJV). The verse expresses, in a few words, the results of Adam's transgression and Man's struggle to thwart its effects.

The verse does not say that the way that seemed right is the cause of death—the death sentence had already been imposed shortly after Adam disobeyed in the Garden of Eden—but rather that every effort mankind makes to offset or delay its effects ends in death and not eternal life.

Genesis 2:17 records the pronouncement of the death sentence upon Adam but it does not give any details as to how the sentence was to be carried out—the verse simply states: "*But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*". However Genesis chapter 3 does give some details of human experience as each one progresses down the way which finally ends in death.

Genesis 3:16-19 reads: "*Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*".

The ground cursed

The first element of the curse which God conveyed to Adam was that the ground would be cursed and bring forth thorns and thistles. Thorns and thistles were not part of God's initial provision for mankind: "*And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so*" (Gen. 1:29-30). The earth was to bring forth everything that Man required for his sustenance and no mention is made of him having to cultivate the soil.

However God changed the situation when He pronounced the curse on Adam. Confronted with the need to earn his living by the "*sweat of his face*", mankind has cultivated the ground in an endeavour to increase its yield. In many third world countries the development has been nothing more than the use of animals to pull primitive cultivating implements; in Western countries machines powered by combustion engines have been developed. Although cultivation has produced increased yields the consequences of the curse remain; cultivation has not provided a comprehensive antidote.

Western countries have developed more sophisticated systems. Experimentation has led to the development of chemical fertilizers to overcome soil deficiencies and various other chemicals have been developed to reduce the prevalence of thorns and thistles. The effect of these chemicals has been "*marvellous*", increasing yields to values previously not considered possible—initially the development of these chemicals "*seemed to be right*". However the continued use of them is now having an adverse effect and some of the land is becoming infertile. Additionally, some of the chemicals have been absorbed by the crops and have made the produce toxic to mankind and has required those chemicals to be banned. The long term outcome of the use of the chemicals has not been to mankind's benefit but rather has led to his death—the end of the way that seemed to be right has resulted in death and not life. The original death sentence remains.

Irrigation systems have been developed to bring water to land which was unproductive due to a lack of water. However, although the short term benefits are and were substantial, their long term effects include the soil becoming salty and unproductive. Again the way that seemed right is not yielding the results for which mankind yearns—eternal life.

The sweat of thy face

The curse also promised that man would eat his bread "*in the sweat of his face*", and until recently such has been the case. However the industrial revolution of a little more than 200 years ago sparked an endeavour by mankind to alleviate the burden of physical labour. Today machines perform many tasks which previously had to be accomplished by manual labour. Initially such inventions were deemed to be "*great steps forward*", and there is no doubt that they have relieved mankind of many tasks which caused them to perspire. However it is now becoming apparent that those developments are not enabling mankind to annul the death sentence. Indeed their long term effects are now adversely affecting the whole globe.

The main problems arising from industrialisation stem from the need for raw materials to provide the energy necessary to drive the machines (energy which previously was provided manually and which resulted in man experiencing sweat on his face), and the effluent produced by the machines.

The acquisition of raw materials such as coal and other minerals required to sustain the industrial processes requires the natural environment to be disturbed which, in turn, is upsetting the ecological balance of the planet. One of the effects of such disruption is now considered by some scientists to be a reduction in rainfall and currently there is some movement towards preserving forests in order to restore natural rainfall.

Pollution

The effluent from the industrial processes is causing even greater concern. Apart from effluent such as toxic gases and other chemicals which are foreign and injurious to mankind's physiology, concern is currently being expressed about the widespread effects of factories belching huge amounts of effluent in all forms; solid, liquid and gas.

Some scientists claim that the exhaust gases from factories and motorised means of transport are affecting the earth's atmosphere increasing the proportion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere which in turn is raising the average temperature. One term used to refer to the phenomenon is "global warming" and international co-operation is currently being sought to arrest the amount of carbon dioxide being exhausted into the atmosphere. One way currently being sponsored to reduce the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is to preserve forests because trees absorb carbon dioxide during the photosynthesis process.

The concern about global warming is not new. Some scientists have warned of the potential for several decades. Below is an extract from this publication almost 60 years ago, which quotes a report printed in the Melbourne press at that time:

*"Peoples Paper, Volume XXXIII No. 6,
MELBOURNE, JUNE, 1950 Price—Fourpence
Halfpenny.*

The World is Warming Up, Experts Say

New York.—The world's climate is becoming slowly warmer and there is a danger that the levels of the oceans may be raised, causing serious inundations as a result of the melting of glaciers and the polar ice-caps.

This is stated by the Reports and Forecasts section of the U.S. Weather Bureau. Its chief, Ivan Tennehill, says the evidence of this change of weather is

becoming too impressive to be ignored. He says that weather men may not be able to agree on the cause but the rise in temperature has been going on for 100 years. Average temperatures in many places have risen four degrees in that time, fish are moving farther north, and so are the Alaskan forests. Most of the world's glaciers are melting faster and in Iowa the length of the growing season has increased by 20 days in 40 years."

The editor of the "Peoples Paper" added: "The above news item... is of interest to all who have faith in the "times of restitution of all things" during the Millennial reign of Christ. Undoubtedly the extremes in climate, as in all other things, will be corrected to produce perfect conditions ultimately for all the world of mankind....".

The editor expressed the view that there will need to be a moderation in the world's climate for the times of restitution to be effected. Scriptures such as Isaiah 35:1-7 imply that there will be changes: "...the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly...in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes". The promise that streams will break out in the desert, that the desert will blossom as the rose, and the parched ground will become a pool all indicate that the amount of water available on the earth will be increased. However whether those changes will come about because of industrialisation is not stated in the Scriptures. At the present time the amount of water in some areas of the globe seems to be decreasing but increasing in others; some scientists attribute the increase to the melting of the polar ice caps.

Further endeavours

Mankind has endeavoured to negate the effects of the curse in other fields also. One of the more prominent fields is medicine. The short term benefits to mankind are amazing, however the prolongation of life of the aged is requiring increased expert care and accommodation for them which in turn is increasing the financial burden on the immediate relations and the wider community.

Finance is another area where sophisticated systems have been developed to enable people to more promptly acquire goods which, it is hoped, would improve their standard of living. However those systems also have failed. Thus it is evident that every endeavour which "seemed right to Man" to alleviate the effects of the Adamic curse has failed, and the death sentence remains.■

THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

The message to the church at Philadelphia is the sixth of the seven messages sent to the churches in Asia minor.

The city of Philadelphia (now named “Alasehir” in Turkey) was situated 45 kilometres S.E of Sardis on the Cogamus River. The city is situated on a fault line, and is subject to frequent and sometimes powerful earthquakes. The earthquakes are amply recorded in history, a severe one occurring in 17 AD which destroyed the city and eleven others. Sardis fared worse from the initial quake, but Philadelphia shook more frequently from severe aftershocks, traumatizing the population.

Historians record that the city may well have been founded for a social purpose, being regarded as “a missionary city” founded to promote “a certain unity of spirit, customs, and loyalty within the realm...”. Such a purpose is consistent with the ancient city having several temples; indeed the city became known as “little Athens” for its dedication to deities. The word Philadelphia means “brotherly love”.

The open door

The message to the church at Philadelphia (Rev. 3:8-13) contains expressions which relate to the physical characteristics of the city. The reference to “doors” (verses 7 and 8), and the keys necessary to open them, may well refer to the numerous doors of the various temples in the city. The message to the Christians that an open door was set before them which “no man was able to shut” might have been a sharp contrast to the closed doors of the temples which were under the strict control of the officiating clergy. The language of the message was particularly meaningful to the Christians in Philadelphia.

Likewise the reference to the “synagogue of Satan” in verse 9 would have been particularly meaningful to them because of the prevalence of physical synagogues of Satan in the city, and their adherents’ claim to be Jews but were “not”; the term “Jews” being used in a general sense to mean that they claimed to be the true people of God.

Little strength

The reference to them “having a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (verse 8) was a further reference to the need for the Christians to remain pure and separate from the several philosophies being taught in the temples. In comparison to the other institutions the church was of “little strength” and so again the language used in the

message of the angel was particularly meaningful to the Philadelphian Christians.

Another reason for the angel using the expression “*having a little strength*” might have been the burden, physical and financial, of repairing the damage caused by the earthquakes.

However, whatever the reason, it was inconsequential to the Philadelphians because their commendation was that they had kept the word of the Lord and had not denied His name.

The message continues with words of encouragement: “*Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown*” (Rev. 3:11). The word “*behold*” appears to have been added as it does not appear in the oldest manuscripts. Their cheerful endurance of the trials they endured was to be rewarded in that the Lord promised “*I come quickly*”. The promise of the Lord’s return, for which the believers had prayed in the words “*Thy Kingdom come*”, was now nearer. They were to hold fast; not to waiver in their faith. As they saw the troubles in the world around them they were not to be distracted, because to do so meant they ran the risk of losing the promised crown of life. They would lose that opportunity if they exchanged consistency and suffering for compromise and ease.

A pillar

The last portion of the promise to the Philadelphian Church is in 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: and I will write upon him my new name*”. The promise, “*him that overcometh I will make a pillar...*”, was particularly meaningful to the Philadelphians because of the number of earthquakes in the region. It is noteworthy that amongst the ruins of the Greek churches of Asia a column (or pillar) of the church of Philadelphia still stands today.

Christians today do well to remember that the symbolism of a pillar is equally appropriate now as it was in the Philadelphian’s time—not just for the local church’s benefit but indeed for the church at large: “*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15). Thus the language of the angel’s message has been relevant all down the age.■

JACOB THE PROPHET

When the Apostle Peter wrote “*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” (2 Peter 1:21 KJV), he was referring to the prophecies which relate to the “*coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (verse 16). He went on to explain that he was one of those who heard God speak to Jesus in the “*holy mount*”, and that God’s words at that time confirmed what had been written previously by the prophets. Consequently they were justified in being absolutely certain that what was prophesied regarding the future would come true.

The prophecies relating to Jesus’ first and second advents, and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, are prevalent in the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the later (“minor”) prophets. The significance of those prophetic writings is so great that it is easy to overlook that God used other “*holy men*” to foretell other events which were to transpire on the earth. One such “*holy man*” was Jacob.

Jacob’s life

Jacob’s life comprised many remarkable events. Before he was born his mother was told that the elder of the twins in her womb would serve the younger. Jacob was born second, making him the younger. However he purchased his older brother Esau’s birthright in exchange for a bowl of pottage and, in collusion with his mother, obtained by deception his father’s final blessing. In fear of his life he fled, stopping overnight at Bethel where he had a dream of a ladder reaching up to heaven. After arriving in Padan Aram he was deceived into marrying Leah, after which he served Laban for seven more years before being given Rachel to wife.

By his two wives Leah and Rachel, and their handmaidens Bilhah and Zilpah, he fathered twelve sons. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28; 35:10), and his twelve sons are the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 49:28). Jacob died in Egypt at the age of 147 years (Gen. 47:28-29; 49:33).

Shortly before his death, his favoured son Joseph visited him and took his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh with him. Genesis 48:17-20 records Jacob’s prophecy concerning his two grandsons: “*And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father’s hand, to remove it from Ephraim’s head unto Manasseh’s head. And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also*

shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh”.

Jacob’s prophecy comprised several elements, each of which illustrates the degree of detail that God has built into His plan for His people.

To become a people

Jacob declared that Manasseh would also “*become a people*”, which implies that both Ephraim and Manasseh would have numerous progeny. Numbers 1:32-35 and Deuteronomy 33:17 record the fulfillment of that prophecy. Numbers 1:32-35 records the number of the children of Ephraim who were 20 years old and upward was 40,500, and the number of the children of Manasseh was 32,200; Deuteronomy 33:17 reads: “*...they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh*”.

Ephraim to be greater

Jacob prophesied concerning Manasseh that “*his younger brother shall be greater than he*”. It might be a small indicator but the number of their tribes given above, and the difference between the expressions “*ten thousands*” and “*thousands*” confirm the fulfillment of that aspect of his prophecy.

Another aspect of “*his younger brother shall be greater than he*” was when the tribes pitched around the tabernacle prior to their entry into the promised land. The tribe of Manasseh assembled under Ephraim’s standard: “*On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim according to their armies...and those that were numbered of them, were forty thousand and five hundred. And by him shall be the tribe of Manasseh...and those that were numbered of them, were thirty and two thousand and two hundred. Then the tribe of Benjamin...and those that were numbered of them, were thirty and five thousand and four hundred. All that were numbered of the camp of Ephraim were an hundred thousand and eight thousand and an hundred, throughout their armies...*” (Num. 2:18-24). The tribes of Manasseh and Benjamin were both under the standard (or flag) of Ephraim, and their number was counted as part of the number of Ephraim, which is another instance of Ephraim being regarded as greater than Manasseh.

Manasseh to be a multitude of nations

Another element of Jacob’s prophecy was that Manasseh would become a “*multitude of nations*”.

There does not seem to be a specific reference to this prophecy being fulfilled, however it may be deduced that the prophecy will yet be fulfilled.

Joshua 14:1-4 records that the land of Canaan was distributed to the tribes “as commanded by Moses”. Verses 3 and 4 read: “*For Moses had given the inheritance of two tribes and an half tribe on the other side Jordan: but unto the Levites he gave none inheritance among them. For the children of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim: therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land, save cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for their cattle and for their substance*”. Likewise Joshua 16:4 records: “*So the children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance*”. Thus the tribe of Manasseh was counted for one of the tribes of Israel. This is consistent with Revelation 7:5 which records Manasseh as one of the twelve tribes of Israel from whom the 144,000 are sealed. Consequently, although there is no direct and specific reference to Manasseh becoming a multitude of nations, it may be deduced that the tribe had at least two identities and, depending on the interpretation of who constitutes the tribes listed in Revelation 7 (whether they will be comprised of some Gentiles who were grafted in), it is logical to interpret the prophecy that Manasseh would become a multitude of nations has been, or will be, fulfilled.

Israel to return to Canaan

The last feature of Jacob’s prophecy to Joseph is recorded in Genesis 48:21: “*And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers*”.

The promise to Joseph that Israel would return to the promised land was precious due to the length of time the nation of Israel had been in Egypt. Deuteronomy 34:1-4 records the Lord showing Moses the land that He had promised to Abraham, which promise had been confirmed to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5) and to Jacob (Gen. 35:12; 48:4). Joshua 3:9-5:12 records in detail the entry of Israel into the land and hence Jacob’s prophecy to Joseph was fulfilled.

Prophecy to his sons

A short time after he prophesied about Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob prophesied about his sons: “*And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days*” (Gen. 49:1).

He prophesied about each of his sons individually. They are too extensive for all of them to be included in this article and so only those relating to Levi and Judah will be addressed. However that is not to deny the significance nor the accuracy of each prophecy.

Levi

Genesis 49:5-7 reads: “*Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel*”.

The majority of the message relating to Simeon and Levi refers to events which were already history. The reference to them being “*instruments of cruelty*” might refer to their slaying of Hamor, Shechem and “*all the males*” (Gen. 34:25-26). The **prophecy** contained in the message is that they would be “*divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel*”.

The concepts of division and scattering are complementary—a division into smaller parts is necessary for anything to be scattered. However the division and scattering of the tribe of Levi was of greater significance than a mere division.

The divisions of the tribe of Levi are recorded in 1 Chronicles chapters 23 to 26:

- There were 38,000 men aged 30 years and older (chap. 23:3);
- They were divided into 5 groups (chap. 23:4-5);
 - ⇒ 24,000 were set to work on the tabernacle;
 - ⇒ 6,000 were officers and judges;
 - ⇒ 4,000 were porters;
 - ⇒ 4,000 were musicians;
 - ⇒ Aaron and his sons were separated to serve in the tabernacle (chap. 23:13);
- David further divided the sons of Aaron into 24 lots (chap. 24:4);
- The musicians were divided as detailed in chapter 25;
- The porters were divided as detailed in chapter 26.

Thus Jacob prophesied in minute detail about his own sons and two of his grandsons. Surely He was a “*holy man of God who was moved by the Holy Spirit*”.

Judah

Genesis 49:9-12 records Jacob’s prophecy regarding Judah: “*Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father’s children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine;*

he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk”.

Brethren to praise Judah

The first prophecy which Jacob uttered concerning his son Judah was that Judah’s brethren would praise him.

The thought behind Judah’s brethren praising him is not so much a verbal expression but rather reverence. Strong’s Concordance gives the meaning of the Hebrew (#3034) as “...to revere or worship...”. A wide variety of English words is used to translate it: the statement that Judah’s brethren would praise him may be exemplified by the statements which follow.

Hand in the neck

Jacob prophesied that Judah would have his hand “*in the neck of his enemies*”. There are several passages of Scripture which imply that this expression means the destruction of one’s enemies. Three examples are:

- Deuteronomy 28:48: “*Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee*”;
- 2 Samuel 22:41: “*Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them...*”;
- Psalm 18:40: “*Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them...*”.

Consistent with the idea of Judah being given power to destroy his enemies is God’s appointment of him to lead the Israelites in the battle as they entered the promised land: “*Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand*” (Judges 1:1-2; 20:18).

Brothers to bow down

Jacob also prophesied that Judah’s brothers would bow down to him. That prediction might be a reference to the tribe of Judah’s future role of leadership. Bezaleel, the man chosen by God to oversee the manufacture of the tabernacle and its furnishings, was of the tribe of Judah (Exod. 35:30); the tribe of Judah was the first to give their offering in the tabernacle (Num. 7:12); the tribe of Judah led the pilgrimage from Sinai (Num. 10:10-14); one of the two kingdoms of Israel after the nation divided was named Judah (2 Sam. 2:4); Judah was the lawgiver (Psa. 60:7); both King David and King Solomon were of the tribe of Judah (Matt. 1:2-6); Judah will be the first to be saved (Zech. 12:7); the tribe of Judah is the first tribe to be named as the tribe from which the

servants of God were sealed (Rev. 7:9), all of which may be interpreted as hallmarks of one who was preferred above his brethren.

Lion’s whelp

Jacob termed Judah as “*a lion’s whelp*” (Gen. 49:9). Revelation 5:5 identifies Jesus as the “*lion of the tribe of Judah*” and so Judah, as a whelp (or young lion) appropriately indicates Jesus’ human heritage—Jesus’ human genealogy was by the tribe of Judah: “*For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood*” (Heb. 7:14).

Consequently, notwithstanding natural Israel’s acknowledgement of Judah as the premier tribe, it will be to the spiritual Judah to whom all mankind will bow the knee: “*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil. 2:9-11). The future subjection of the whole world to Jesus as King cannot be excluded from the prophecy of Jacob.

The sceptre

Yet another feature of Jacob’s prophecy regarding Judah is that “*the sceptre would not depart*” from him “*until Shiloh come*”. The term “Shiloh” has been interpreted to mean the Messiah (Young’s Concordance), but the only instance where that meaning may be attributed is Genesis 49:10. Every other occurrence refers to “a place in Palestine” (Strong’s Concordance #7887—and with which Young’s Concordance agrees).

Perhaps the significance of the reference in Genesis 49:10 is that the Israelites first set up the tabernacle there after entering the promised land (Joshua 18:1), and it was the place where God revealed Himself to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:21). Both of those events are consistent with Jeremiah 7:12: “*But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel*”. It is possible that the meaning of Shiloh in Genesis 49:10 is the presence of God on earth and, if so, it might have been fulfilled at Jesus’ first advent (Matt. 1:23) in accordance with the interpretation that Shiloh refers to Jesus Christ.

Whichever interpretation is correct, Jacob accurately foretold God’s dealings with Judah. Likewise his prophecies regarding Ephraim, Manasseh, Levi and all of his sons qualified him as a holy man of God who spoke as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit.■

THE MANGER AND THE NAPKIN

The period between Christmas/New Year and Easter is spiritually rich for Christians. The day of the year when Jesus was born into the world is not explicitly stated in Scripture and therefore all proclaimed dates of His birth are derived. Most deductions are based on a combination of the day of His crucifixion and the prophecy in Daniel 9:27: “*And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease...*”. Adopting the time scale of a day for a year (Ezek. 4:6), one week (7 days) represents seven years, which corresponds to Jesus’ earthly ministry of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, followed by $3\frac{1}{2}$ years after His death when the gospel message was confined to the nation of Israel. He was crucified on Passover Day and $3\frac{1}{2}$ years prior to that day gives a day for His birth as early in the month of October.

Nevertheless the date traditionally celebrated by mankind at large as being the date of His birth, December 25, provides a stimulus for the Christian to meditate upon God’s wondrous love in sending His only Son to earth, to a realm much lower than that in which He had previously dwelt, and the period until Easter becomes a period of reflection about the trials He endured from His birth until the terrible death He suffered amongst thieves on the cross.

However Christmas has become a time of spending, stress, overindulgence and at times riotous behaviour. In such a flurry of activity it is easy to lose sight of the significance of His coming and the simplicity of the event. The following essay attempts to capture some of the true sentiment of His birth.

His coming: the manger

“Long ago a young peasant woman was given the task of being the mother of a special baby. She wasn’t anyone important, she didn’t dress in the latest fashion, she didn’t live in a luxurious palace and at the time of receiving the news she was to have this baby she wasn’t even married.

Her baby was born in a dirty stable, a place where animals slept, ate and did what comes naturally. No satin sheets or bright colours to wrap the baby in; no cot with clean linen and maids to assist the young mother.

Those who were the first to receive the news of His birth were shepherds tending the sheep. The news wasn’t given to kings, princes, religious leaders, merchants—those who were considered to be the important people. It is beneficial to reflect on the simplicity of the first Christmas.”

His death and the napkin

The end of Jesus’ life, and the discovery of His resurrection, also bear reflection.

John 20:1-10 reads: “*The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home*”.

The napkin was not with the other grave clothes but was wrapped together and in a place by itself. A knowledge of Hebrew tradition gives some insight into the significance of it being separate from the other clothes.

In Hebrew tradition the folded napkin had to do with the Master and Servant.

When the servant set the dinner table for the master, he made sure that it was exactly the way the master wanted it.

The table was furnished perfectly, and the servant would wait, just out of sight, until the master had finished eating. The servant would not touch the table until the master had finished his meal.

When the master had finished eating he would rise from the table and leave the napkin in a ruffled state on the table. The servant would then know to clear the table.

However, if the master folded his napkin and laid it beside his plate when he left the table, the servant would not touch the table because the folded napkin meant that the master was coming back. The Master who folded His napkin when He left the tomb was also coming back!■

TO THE INTENT

In Ephesians 2:11-13 the Apostle Paul reminds the Gentile Christians at Ephesus of their heritage: “*that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh... were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ*”.

He continues in chapter 3 to explain that it was by revelation that he now understood “*that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel*” (Eph. 3:3, 6).

In verses 7 and 8 (Ephesians 3:7-8) he tells the Ephesians that he was made a minister so “*that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*”, and in verse 9 he confirms that he was to make all (that is, both Jew and Gentile) “*see the fellowship of the mystery*”, that the Gentiles were to be “*grafted in*” to be part of the “*Israel of God*” (Rom. 11:17-23; Gal. 6:16).

Then follows verse 10 (Ephesians 3:10): “***To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God***”.

Verse 10 may be interpreted to mean that the intent of Paul’s ministry was to enable “*the principalities and powers in the heavenly places to know the manifold wisdom of God*”, and that their knowledge would be brought about by (or through) the church. However that interpretation gives a different purpose for his ministry from that stated in other verses—Romans 11:13 reads: “*For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles...*”; no mention is made of ministering to the “*principalities and powers*”. Also, in both of his letters to Timothy he confirmed that his purpose was to preach to the Gentiles—1 Timothy 2:7 reads: “*Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle... a teacher of the Gentiles...*”, and in 2 Timothy 1:11 he repeated the statement that he was a “*teacher of the Gentiles*”. Thus it is clear that the primary purpose of Paul’s ministry was to preach to the Gentiles and not to “*the principalities and powers in heavenly places*”.

Principalities and powers

However, having said that, it is necessary to clarify who is meant by “*the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*”. One interpretation is that they were those in authority on the earth when Paul wrote.

However it is suggested that interpretation is negated by two factors:

- The word “*heavenly*” is translated from the Greek “*epouranios*” (Strong #2032) which is defined as “*above the sky*”—that is the spiritual realm; and
- There is no other Scriptural support for the understanding that the purpose of Paul’s ministry was to educate the worldly authorities—indeed he was acutely aware that those in authority would not know anything about God’s calling and the grafting in of the Gentiles: “*For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness*” (1Cor. 1:22-23).

Another suggestion is that the words “*principalities and powers*” refer to the church. The interpretation is based on verses such as Ephesians 1:3: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*”; and Ephesians 2:6: “*And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*”. However, while those verses refer to things spiritual in contrast to things of the earth, it is unlikely that the term “*principalities and powers*” in Ephesians 3:10 refers to the church because the church is mentioned separately in the verse.

The remaining interpretation of “*principalities and powers*” is that it refers to the angelic realm. There are some texts which indicate that the angels have an interest in the events on earth, one being 1 Peter 1:12: “*Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into*”. The reason why the angels desired to look into the “*things*” that were being preached at that time is not mentioned, nevertheless the fact remains that they did so.

Another text which indicates that those in the angelic realm are interested in the events on earth is Revelation 12:12: “*Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time*”. The devil may well have been interested in the events that were occurring on the earth at that time because they indicated his tenure over it (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and implied that his demise was imminent.

To the intent

Having established that the term “*principalities and powers*” refers to the angels, it is necessary to investigate the sense in which it was intended that they should know the manifold wisdom of God.

The expression “*to the intent*” is translated from the single Greek word “*hina*” which Dr Strong defines as: “#2443: in order that (denoting the purpose or the result)”. It occurs 620 times in the New Testament.

It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the meaning of “*hina*” in every instance where it occurs, suffice it to say that there are some instances where the meaning is clearly “purpose”, other instances where it clearly relates to result and yet others where its meaning is unclear (the phrase could mean either purpose or result). Consequently a word study of “*hina*” does not provide an unequivocal meaning of “*to the intent*” in Ephesians 3:10.

The result

Since it was not the purpose of Paul’s ministry to educate the “*principalities and powers*” it is appropriate to investigate the alternative meaning of the Greek “*hina*”; that is “the result”.

If “*hina*” is understood to “denote the result” (rather than the purpose) of Paul’s ministry, Ephesians 3:10 means that **one result of Paul’s ministry** was that “*the principalities and powers in heavenly places*” (that is, the angels, Satan included) would come to understand, through the calling out of the church, the manifold wisdom of God. It remains to establish whether that could be the case.

The manifold wisdom of God

The meaning of “manifold” is that one act accomplishes or demonstrates more than one function. Such is the case with the calling out of the church and the grafting in of the Gentiles.

Some of the several aspects of God’s wisdom that are made manifest (that is, become apparent) by the calling out of the church are:

- That Jesus would be “*the firstborn among many brethren*”—that is, God would have others to reign with him (Rom. 8:17, 29);
- That God has the power to choose whom He wishes to fulfil His purposes—He is the “potter and His creation is the clay” (Rom. 9:21);
- That He is able to use whom He wishes to accomplish His plan; Ephesians 3:9-11 states that He has chosen some Gentiles to be part of the church, and He has grafted them into His chosen nation, making them adopted sons of Israel—“*the Israel of God*” (Gal. 6:16);

- That He is working to a time scale: “*Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow..*” (1 Pet. 1:10-11); “*Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*” (Eph. 3:5)

One **result** of grafting in the Gentiles has been to make known several aspects of God’s plan.

His eternal purpose

Ephesians 3:11 goes on to state that the events described in the previous verses are “*according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*”. Consequently the Apostle is stating that the calling out of the church and the acceptance of the Gentiles into the fold have been part of His eternal purpose, and that the angels now know of those details. Some verses which state that the calling of the church is part of his eternal purpose are:

- “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved*
- “*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev. 13:8). It has been God’s plan for His Son to be the world’s redeemer “*from the foundation of the world*”; and
- “*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd*” (John 10:16). It was His plan to graft in the Gentiles long before the conversion of Cornelius.

The calling of the Gentiles to be fellowheirs with the natural seed of Abraham is a feature of God’s plan that reveals the manifold wisdom of God, and its accomplishment through the Apostle Paul’s ministry enabled the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (that is the angels) to learn of that manifold wisdom. They need to know that they are “*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be the heirs of salvation*” (Heb. 1:14) so that they fulfil God’s purpose. Not only so, but also that those to whom they minister will include Gentiles. ■

LOVE BEARETH ALL THINGS

The Apostle Paul's statement that "*love beareth all things*" (1 Cor. 13:7) presents a challenge to every Christian.

In general terms, a person may be classified as either Christian or non-Christian; the former profess to be living in accordance with Christian principles—"the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10)—while the latter do not. The challenge for the Christian is to bear all things from both Christians and non-Christians.

Bearing fellow Christians

An irritation from one who professes to be a Christian can be more difficult to bear than one from those who do not profess to be Christian. One factor which might make the irritation more difficult to bear is the tendency to forget that every Christian is being assailed by the Adversary and, in spite of being justified in God's sight, is also fighting against the weaknesses of the flesh. It is easy to assume that a Christian should be perfect.

As well as reminding oneself that no contemporary in the flesh is perfect, another factor that can help one to bear another's weaknesses is to remember that God has placed both in the body: "*But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him*" (1 Cor. 12:18). Such a realization should remind one that God is building His temple with the stones He has chosen and it is not the province of anyone to question His choices.

A still higher ideal

There is a further situation that requires an even higher standard of forbearance—that of withholding any action when one believes that another should be corrected. One example is that of the Apostle Paul who withheld admonishing the Corinthians because he realised that immediate correction would not have been beneficial for them. His objective always was to further God's work and so he wrote: "...Nevertheless we...suffer (forbear) all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:12). The Apostle's love for them was such that he chose to bear it, and that silently, until the time came when he believed correction would benefit them and not be to their detriment. Likewise it is incumbent upon every Christian to "...let all things be done unto edifying" (1 Cor. 14:26), which might mean bearing all things, at least in the short term, so that the other might "grow in grace and knowledge" (2 Peter 3:18).

Notwithstanding the above, there are times when the Christian might be unable to forbear. In such cases

the Lord's instruction must be followed: "*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican*" (Matt. 18:15-17).

Bearing afflictions from the world

Bearing irritations from those who do not profess to be Christian might be easier because their fruits reveal who they are (Matt. 7:20) and the distinction may be clearly seen. That is not to deny that the irritations might be severe and hard to bear. However the challenge for the Christian is to "*love your enemies*" (Matt. 5:44) and it might be that loving one's enemies is the ultimate test in bearing all things.

Bearing silently

One further aspect of bearing all things is to protect or shield the other from criticism by covering their defects rather than making them public—suppressing criticism rather than flaunting it. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words states that the meaning of the Greek "stego" is "**primarily** to protect, or preserve by covering". The situation is indeed as the Wise Man wrote: "*Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins*" (Prov. 10:12), and hence the Apostle Peter wrote "*Above all things have fervent charity (love) among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins*" (1 Pet. 4:8).

Jesus' example

In all of the above respects Jesus is the supreme example—He was the perfect pattern. When dealing with His accusers He did not act with revenge but said "*The Lord rebuke thee*" (Zech. 3:2; Jude 9). Even when He was led to the slaughter He opened not His mouth but suffered all things silently (Isa. 53:7).■

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