

Words of Help

from the Scripture of Truth

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CONTENTS

Appropriating Faith	1
According to His Purpose.. .. .	4
Abraham: God's Covenant	9

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WORDS OF HELP

A Magazine for Believers

EDITORIAL

As a new year opens before us and the world scene grows ever darker, is there any sign of the world turning in its desperate need to God, or of its being more ready to receive His Christ? On the contrary, while some leaders of the "churches" talk as if Christianity were merely one of the world's religions, and others seek accommodation with antichristian communism, persecution rages against the Church in roughly one third of the countries of the world.

Yet there is abundant cause for rejoicing in the rapid spread of the Gospel, especially by means of the broadcast and the recorded message, and in the renewed interest of youth.

Thus as the believer's thoughts turn increasingly with confident hope to the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ, he knows that the day is not far distant when every nation and tribe and tongue will have received the witness of God's love in the Gospel. This, even more than the rapid spread of evil, tells us that the Lord is near. Let us therefore, as Peter says, be diligent that we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless, and helping by every means the progress of the Gospel.

Note. Owing to the increased cost of postage, "WORDS OF HELP" will in future become a bi-monthly instead of a monthly magazine.

APPROPRIATING FAITH

“Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that I have given unto you, as I said unto Moses”. (Joshua i.3)

The land of promise was given to Israel; but in order to be enjoyed it had to be appropriated. Unless their feet trod its soil it was useless to them. Every inch that they claimed was their own; unclaimed, its value could not be realised. It is precisely the same with regard to “spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” which are given to us by God. We must claim them if we wish to enjoy them.

There are many who complain of the lack of peace, liberty and power; but the secret of their poverty of soul lies in the fact that they do not step out on the promises of God in child-like simplicity of faith. In other words, they do not claim and accept what God has *already* given them.

Both the Old and the New Testaments agree that this is the principle of joyful success — appropriation by faith. The first says, “every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given you” (Joshua i.3), the New Testament says, “according to your faith, be it unto you” (Matthew ix.29).

Faithless Israel

The people of Israel had been pilgrims in the wilderness for forty years, and the faithless generation that had previously rebelled had all died out, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. These believing men lived still; but only they, for faith alone inherits the promises. *Forty weary years* were occupied with the journey which could have taken *eleven days* (Deut. i.2) — years that the Psalmist described as “the provocation, the day of temptation in the wilderness”; and of which God said, “forty years long was I grieved with this generation” (Psalm xcvi.8,10).

Those years were used by God to teach them important lessons; and much concerning themselves and their God that their hearts could have learned in no other way. Their utter inability to keep His commandments, their obstinacy, pride

and perverseness, were all brought out fully. They were humbled and taught dependence upon God.

Finally, when the discipline was over, and unbelief had, for a time, died out, the nation approached the land of promise as believers. By faith they were to pass through the waters of Jordan, and with the river and wilderness behind them, their enjoyment of the promised land depended upon their continued exercise of faith. The land was occupied by powerful enemies, how were they to be dispossessed? By faith. They had only to tread upon the land to make the place so touched their own. Trust in God had to be exercised; they were to step personally on every plot to claim it as their own.

Faithless Christians

The application of this to ourselves is simple. The unbelief which arises in the heart when on the very verge of the enjoyment of the promises, the consequent wanderings, failure and discipline involved, are facts with which few have been unacquainted. Murmurings have filled the heart, even if they have not been given voice. Although each fresh display of impatience and mistrust has brought new manifestations of the grace of God, His goodness has not quenched unbelief nor shamed us into faith.

What has been the consequence? Years of wilderness life — backwards and forwards, but no real progress. The failures more numerous than the victories; the presence of the “serpents” and the “scorpions”, and the unsatisfied longing in the land where there is “no water”. May not the lives of some Christians be well described in the words of the hymn —

*Where is the blessedness I knew
when first I saw the Lord,
Where is the soul-refreshing view
of Jesus and His Word?*

Inheriting the Promises

Yet can we not see how a loving God has used such years of wandering to teach us lessons which we might have learned in

an easier school had we not doubted? The land must be appropriated by faith. In no other way could Israel obtain possession of Canaan; in no other way can spiritual Israel inherit the promises. Faith would have been sufficient then; it alone is needed now. But it must be faith in action. It would not have been the slightest use for the people to have seen the land and heard the promise. They must in simple trust, step forward for it to become their own.

Neither will an inactive faith help anyone. Indeed, there is no such thing as an inactive faith. There is, it is true, an intellectual assent to spiritual things which even the devils give. "Thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble; but wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James ii. 19). A faith which never moves the possessor to act or to works is a dead and perhaps even a *diabolical* faith, it is useless; it wins no victories, it can bring no peace.

There will always be many difficulties in the way of our Christian progress. The world, the flesh and the devil will certainly assail us, and our own resources, ability and courage are no match for these. Onward progress is not only commanded, but its secret is revealed — faith in the promises of an unchangeable, omnipotent God. But the secret of progress is faith, the childlike trust of one who is helpless, in the power, love and will of Him Who is mighty to save. Taking Him at His word, the enemies disperse, the difficulties vanish. Faith, resting on the promises, steps out on to the good land and by that act of venture turns promises into realities —

*Laughs at impossibilities
and cries, It shall be done.*

We are not to wait for feelings, for the evidence of sense, before we believe. To the world it may be a leap in the dark, but to the child who knows his Father's voice, it is no such thing — it is a reasonable trust. Learn to be a believer — not one who staggers at the promises of God. Doubt no longer, He Who cannot lie said, "Behold I give you the power to tread

on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (Luke x.19).

Grasp then by faith the promises of God and you will find that more, much more, lies before you to be subsequently realised. "According to your faith be it unto you". Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that I have given unto you".

T. D. SPICER

ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE

It is good for us, in this day when so many old and apparently established things are passing away before our eyes, to be reminded of God's eternal purpose which He is steadily bringing to pass.

In Romans viii. Paul writes of the present state of the creation "made subject to vanity", to futility and frustration, as a condition which believers share with those who know not God.

It is important to recognise the fact that since man's fall the world is *not* as God would have it, and sickness, suffering and death seem to strike indiscriminately. The Lord Jesus "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil," but His work was not allowed to continue. The world must wait till He returns in order to experience again the blessing of "the Lord that healeth thee" (Ex. xv.26 and Ps. ciii.3).

Things are often so puzzling that we do not know even what to pray for. But amidst all the uncertainty Paul reminds us that "we do know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

"To them that love God", that is, to those who want to see His will carried out, and that in their own lives. As another scripture says, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Note that it says that all things

work together for good. We have no need to suppose that there are any exceptions to the "all things", but it is not that everything that happens in itself is good for us. Rather it is that God is able to work everything together for ultimate good to those called according to His purpose.

The story of Joseph provides an illustration of this. The jealousy and hatred of his ten brothers caused great suffering both to Joseph and his father; the wickedness of Potiphar's wife brought Joseph fresh sorrow; yet these were among the means God used to bring glory to Joseph and consequent blessing to his family, to all the land of Egypt and many more besides. God's ways to us, as has often been remarked, appear to us now like the wrong side of a pattern, but when in the glory we see the right side, this working together for good in all its wonder will be apparent to us.

Paul writes of believers as those "called according to His purpose," and in the next sentence he elaborates this. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestine to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."

Here is His purpose for us — that we should be conformed to the image of Christ, made perfectly like Him. All that happens here is working together towards that end. Not that it is only "events", for these are only some of the means that God uses in working out His pattern for our lives. Certainly He looks for our intelligent cooperation, using every means of grace, but He intends to have His own way with us even where we may fail. Some likeness to the Saviour is even now wrought in us by His Spirit amid the trials of the way, and this, we are promised, will be perfected when we see Him as He is.

His God is our God, His Father our Father, and so we are His brethren — He the Firstborn, pre-eminent in every way. A great company of brothers from every quarter of the globe He is preparing, to be His companions in the day of His glory!

In another scripture (2 Tim. i.9, 10) Paul reminds us that our part in this glorious destiny is not according to our works, which could only bring us condemnation. "Who hath saved us,

and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ."

These are wonderful words, and we can only be humbled as we think of this divine eternal purpose towards us, entirely independent of any worthiness of ours. Yet they contain a difficulty which may well puzzle us, namely, how does this eternal purpose go along with the free proclamation of the Gospel to every creature? How can the Gospel proclaim salvation to "whosoever believeth", if God's purpose was settled before the world began? We may gain some help here from the story of Joseph. It is clear that those instrumental in bringing Joseph into prison in Egypt (where he met Pharaoh's butler and interpreted his dream) were doing their own will freely, acting entirely according to the impulses of their wicked hearts. Yet in so doing God's purpose was fulfilled. Joseph said to his brethren, "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good, to save much people alive."

It was just the same at the Cross. Wicked men — Judas — Caiaphas — Pilate, were all seeking their own profit, and doing their own will without pressure or constraint, yet Peter is able to say that all took place according to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God". They meant it for evil, but God had a purpose of good. Wicked men did not so act *because* God had willed it so, but because their hearts were evil. God's purpose for good was fulfilled *in spite of* all man's efforts, and Satan's efforts, to defeat it. We may marvel at the wisdom of God, but we cannot understand how His purpose is compatible with human freedom. No doubt we shall one day. But the fact that it is seen to be so in the cases we have mentioned can help us to see how it is so in the more obscure cases of individual belief and salvation.

While we know that the mighty working of God's Holy Spirit in a man's soul is the only thing that can make him conscious of his need, yet in the end it is man's own will that must bow to God — though in doing so he is fulfilling the divine purpose. For if we over-emphasise God's sovereign action, so as to

make man's response like the movement of a puppet when a string is pulled, we merely make man a puppet. But God made him a moral being and such he is still, in spite of the fall. Unless man is morally free to obey or disobey, his obedience is valueless to God. God could not have loved puppets. Yet in the end we shall see that God's purpose is fulfilled, and let us praise Him for the love which foreknew us and predestined us for such a place of blessing.

CHRIST THE CENTRE

In Romans viii. the divine purpose is brought in against the background of human weakness and frustration, but in Ephesians i. we get a different view. There we are shown it as that in which His own love and grace are displayed. Let no-one say, "Oh, this is just doctrine", for God has revealed the fulness of His gracious purpose towards us so as to draw out our love to Him. These are practical things because they lift our thoughts above ourselves and the immediate present to that realm where God is working. So the apostle begins with worship: "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 in this view of God's purpose we are shown how everything depends on, and is in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. See how Paul brings this out.

First he says that God has chosen us in Christ before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love.

His love could not be satisfied with anything less than our perfection, but it is "in Christ", for everything depends upon that great work of Christ for us. As at the beginning we were cleansed from sin through faith in Him, so God will have our actual moral condition worthy of Him — like Him.

Second, we were predestined to become God's sons through Jesus Christ, to be before God in the circle of His love. This is indeed to the praise of the glory of His grace, that those who were once rebels should be, not only pardoned, but brought

into favour in the Beloved Son. Thus God's favour toward us is measured by the love He has for His Son.

Third, in Christ we are redeemed through the shedding of His precious blood, all our sins being forgiven through the riches of God's grace. We are thus free from all the bondage in which we were once held — we are in Christ, Who is risen from the dead. As He has nothing more to do with sin and death, so are we assured that this freedom is ours in Him, and soon will be in actual fact.

All this displays God's abounding grace, and in this His wisdom is shown to us, for who but He could have bridged the gulf between Himself and the sinner? Moreover in this also His grace is displayed, that He has revealed to us not only what He has already done, but His secret purpose that He kept hidden in past ages. We are not to imagine that *man* is the centre of things, but it is His beloved Son that will be seen to be not only the foundation of all blessing, but the centre and head of all things. As Paul writes, "That in the administration of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are on earth and which are in heaven."

So when the divine purpose has arrived at its full consummation, there will be the whole universe subjected to Christ; but there in the centre will be not Christ alone, but Christ as the Firstborn Son among a great family of sons. Sons indeed, but yet also servants, as the apostle John writes: "And His servants shall worship Him, and they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads." Made perfectly like Him, and in His presence for ever, the height of bliss will be to worship before Him, as the Lamb that was slain. But there is no need to wait till we are in heaven to begin worshipping. It is a poor thing to be so taken up with ourselves — even with our own salvation — that we have no taste for worship. Let us ask ourselves, have we learned what it is to be worshippers?

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

ABRAHAM

GOD'S COVENANT

(Genesis xvii, xviii.)

It is true that God had made a covenant with Abraham previously, promising to give him the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, but in this chapter He speaks of a more extensive covenant. Thus in verse 7 of chapter xvii. God says, "I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."

"To be a God unto thee" — these are simple words, but their import is without limit. All that God is — His love and power and goodness, His infinite resource — was engaged on behalf of those whom He took for His people. His covenant, though always valid for those who trusted in Him, looks forward for its perfect fulfilment to the day when Israel at last abandons all other trust for Him alone. "I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, all the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and *I will be their God*". To have the land only, in undisputed possession, was not enough. The last words give the key to their unlimited blessing.

When Abraham was ninety nine years old, and his natural hopes of offspring were completely dead, God appeared to him again. He announces Himself as God Almighty, God All-sufficient. To Abraham God says, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." That is, in full and absolute trust. Then He repeats a former promise, that he should have a multitude of descendants. As Abraham prostrated himself before Him, God announces His covenant. It is at this point that God changes his birth name of Abram (= high father) to Abraham (= father of a multitude), as He promises "a father of many nations have I made thee."

While the term "multitude" may refer to his natural descendants, "many nations" seems to point forward to the present time when men of all nations who are "of faith" may count

themselves as children of Abraham (Rom. iv.16; Gal. iii.29). And Abraham is, as God promised him right at the beginning, a blessing to all the kindreds of the earth, in that through him Christ came.

It is noticeable how often the pronoun "I" occurs in this chapter, as God speaks of what He will do. We must not think of the covenant as a sort of agreement between God and Abraham — it is rather God's declaration of what He binds Himself to do. Abraham's part was just to acknowledge it and submit to the sign of the covenant — the circumcision of himself and his household. This symbolised the purity required of those belonging to God as His people, distinguishing them from the nations around. It implies death to the flesh, but the spiritual meaning which we have in Christ is brought out only in what the death of Christ means to us — dying to sin. As Col. iii. says, "In Whom ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ."

And now God reveals His intention (which we remarked Sarah was not able to anticipate by herself) to make her the instrument of His purposed blessing. "Sarai" had hitherto been her name, but now Abraham was to call her Sarah, or Princess. "And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her."

Now we are so accustomed to think and speak of Abraham's faith, that it comes as a surprise to read that his response to this gracious announcement was to laugh at the very idea of a child being given them at their advanced age. And he begs God to let Ishmael fulfil the role of the seed promised to him.

Thus although Romans iv. tells us in regard to this that Abraham was "strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able to perform" we see that Abraham did not attain this strength all at once. But God, in his unfailing patience and grace, repeated the promise which Abraham had ridiculed, "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac:

and I will establish My covenant with him". What a God is ours!

God moreover accepted Abraham's plea for blessing to Ishmael (blessing which, we remember, He had already promised to Hagar), but repeated that His covenant was to be with Isaac. He was the child of promise, whose birth was not according to nature, but by the power of God Who brings life out of death. And there was to be no more delay, but Isaac was to be born in the next year. We hear no more of Abraham doubting, and he duly acknowledged God's covenant with him by carrying out the circumcision as God had instructed him. Then the Lord appeared to him again.

THE FRIEND OF GOD

Genesis is a most remarkable book, and chapter xviii. one of its most remarkable chapters. Abraham believed God, and obeyed God implicitly. Now God was to treat him as a friend (Is. xli.8), visiting him in his tent, receiving his hospitality, and revealing His plans to him.

When Abraham sat in his tent door in the heat of the day and three men stood by him, Abraham knew at once that they were no ordinary men. No-one would travel at that hour of the day, neither had anyone seen them approaching. Also Abraham seems to have divined at once that two of them were attendants, and he addresses himself to the Other, calling Him "My Lord". Yet inasmuch as God was pleased to appear as a man, Abraham respects this, and his attitude is a remarkable blend of courtesy, deference and friendliness.

He offers his hospitality as to visitors, but himself hastens to get things ready, even running to the herd to select a calf. And Abraham was 100 years old, and a great man. Then while they consumed the meal, Abraham stood by them under the tree.

It seems that the Lord had a special message for Sarah, who apparently still had not grasped what God had promised to

do. His question "Where is Sarah thy wife?" alerted her, but the promise "I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son" left her still unbelieving, ignoring the Lord's "certainly".

Sarah laughed inwardly in her unbelief, and received the rebuke "Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Abraham indeed had also laughed the time before when God gave him the promise, and the Lord did not rebuke him; but Sarah seems to have continued in her unbelief in spite of the Lord's repeated promise. But the New Testament says, "By faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed." Faith was slow in coming, but when it did come, proved the truth of the word of the Lord Jesus that faith as small as a mustard seed could remove a mountain! Sarah did, at last, "judge Him faithful who had promised" (Heb. xi.). This then is the key to faith: reliance on God's faithfulness.

GOD PURPOSE MADE KNOWN TO ABRAHAM

God now unfolds to His "friend" His purpose regarding Sodom and Gomorrah. He explains why He was able to confide in him. Abraham was, He said, to become a great nation, a blessing to all the nations, and also, one whom He knew would "command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." What a commendation!

But Sodom's wickedness cried to heaven for judgment, and so the Lord revealed His intention of giving them one final test. "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know." The two attendants then turned to go to Sodom, apparently to carry out what the Lord had said, but the Lord remained to hear Abraham's prayer.

We can be sure that God told Abraham of the impending doom of Sodom and Gomorrah in order to draw out his con-

cern and prayer for Lot, and we wonder whether there is ever a prayer that God grants that He does not also inspire. His prayer here is an encouragement to us when we are uncertain what to ask. For he did not see any other way of saving Lot except by sparing the whole city, so this is what he asked God for. And the Lord fulfilled his desire while not answering in the way Abraham expected, or requested.

We may think how much better if he had asked for Lot's deliverance at once, but we can take encouragement from the patient way the Lord allows him to diminish the number of righteous persons for whose sake the city might be spared. Indeed Abraham understood the need to balance the claims of righteousness against the needs of individuals — surely one of the great problems of righteous government anywhere. Indeed, when we ponder Abraham's question, "Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" we can only conclude that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is not to be taken as other than a very special case. Natural calamities are not to be taken as examples of God's judgment, as indeed the Lord Jesus showed (Luke xiii.). When the Lord Jesus returns, then judgment will be truly selective.

"And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham." What a beautiful ending to this divine visit! "Communing" surely speaks of communion, of fellowship, of that purpose for which God made man — to commune with him. And that is to be our portion for ever.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

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CONTENTS

Continuance	13
The Resurrection of Jesus	17
Practical Thoughts Based on Nehemiah	21
Assurance (inside front cover)	

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been built (Chap. vi) sought craftily to meet Nehemiah in a plain, but with the devious purpose of injuring him. Nehemiah, however, was not led astray by this for he said, "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down; why should the work cease whilst I leave it and come down to you?" Various devices were tried. but Nehemiah was not distracted.

May we learn these practical lessons from this man who brought comfort and encouragement from the Lord to re-build the walls of Jerusalem, a work which came to fruition despite pressures both from within and without. May we be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

R. D. MAHERS

ASSURANCE

On our way rejoicing,

Gladly let us go;

Jesus is our Leader,

Conquered is our foe.

Christ without, our safety;

Christ within, our joy;

Who, if we but trust Him,

Can our hope destroy?

(J. S. B. Monsell)

CONTINUANCE

How often we find the exhortation to continue pressed upon us in the Scriptures! We are living in a day when the tendency with many is to give up what they once held and valued, and to turn aside to other things. Yet while there may be much around to discourage us and cast us down, there is every encouragement in God's word to continue in the things of God. Let us consider some of the occasions when such exhortations occur.

It is recorded of the early Christians that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts ii.42). How refreshing it is to see the perseverance of these followers of the rejected but risen Lord! "Great grace was upon them all". Though today there is often a decline in "first love", in whole-hearted devotion to the Lord, and in steadfast continuance in spiritual things, great grace is still available to us all.

Continuing in the Lord's word.

Our Lord said to those Jews who believed in Him, "If ye continue in my word, ye are My disciples indeed". This shows that faith leads to discipleship, which in turn depends upon the acceptance and application to oneself of the Lord's teaching. Mere passing impulses do not make disciples: abiding in His word is the condition of true discipleship. The Lord went on to say "and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The truth brings its own liberating power, and where the word of God is known and practised, the disciple is set free from sin and from the traditions of men to enjoy the liberty of devoted subjection to His will.

Continuing in the Lord's love

The necessity of obedience is again stressed by our Lord in John xv, and is linked with abiding in His love. The followers of Christ are marked out as those who are loved by Him with a love that can only be measured by the Father's love to Christ.

Then He adds, "**Continue ye in My love**". The enjoyment of our communion with Him as well as our power in testimony depends upon our abiding in the conscious sense of the love of Christ. We can only continue in His love as we walk in the path of obedience, as He goes on to say, "If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love." It has been said that a child who pursues his own will, in disobedience to the parent, has very little appreciation of the parent's love. So it is with us as disciples of the Lord: it is only as we walk in obedience to His revealed mind as given to us in the Scriptures that we shall have the enjoyment of His love. We need to keep ourselves in the love of Christ as one would abide in the sunshine by staying in the place where the sunshine falls. Let us see that we retain the realisation of His love by walking continually in the path of obedience, keeping our eye upon Him as the great Exemplar, as He says, "even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

Continuing in the grace of God

The great apostle of the Gentiles opened his missionary labours in Pisidia with a discourse at Antioch which had encouraging results (Acts xiii.). Very clearly he had set forth the Gospel of the grace of God, bringing his message to a climax with the statement "Be it known unto you . . . that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Such was the effect of the message upon the hearers that as they were going out they kept asking that these words might be spoken to them on the following sabbath. Many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to **continue in the grace of God**.

Has this exhortation no voice for us? Surely we too need to continue in the grace of God which has brought salvation to us (Tit. ii.11). We do well to retain in our souls the sense of that wondrous grace of God Who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; that grace into which we have been

brought by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true grace of God in which we stand (1 Pet. v.12).

Continuing in the faith

During the course of the same missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to **continue in the faith** (Acts xiv.20-22). How beautiful it is to notice the pastoral care of the apostles for the spiritual welfare and growth of those recently brought to the Lord through their preaching! They regarded the establishing of the disciples as a necessary part of their work in the gospel, and they urged the need for continuance in the faith, particularly in view of the difficulties and trials to be encountered, or as they express it here, "that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God."

Jude in his epistle gives warning of the apostacy that would characterise the last days, and says, "It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should **earnestly contend for the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints." While the newly converted need to be exhorted to continue in the faith, it is necessary for us, in this day of increasing evil to be stirred up to **contend for the faith**, that deposit of truth which we are responsible to hold fast (2 Tim. i.13). For on all sides the truth is being given up and denied.

Continuing in the truth

Paul gives a similar warning in his second letter to Timothy. He writes, "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. **But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of**" (2 Tim. iii. 13-14). Paul thus directs Timothy to the source of all guidance and strength for his own path, and in so doing shows how believers in all ages may be fortified and preserved from evil and from the power of the enemy. The security of believers in the midst of surrounding corruption is to be found in continuing in the holy Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto

salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. If we abide in that which we have received from the word of God, we shall not be carried away by the so-called progress of modern thought or human opinions; we shall be preserved by the certainty and consequent enjoyment of salvation through the written word.

Continuing in prayer

A further exhortation to continuance is found in Col. iv.2, where the apostle says, "**Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.**" How frequently in the Scriptures the need for prayer is stressed! (see Eph. vi.18; Phil. iv.6; 1 Thess. v.17; Jas. v.16; 1 Pet. iv.7). The habit of persevering prayer is of the greatest importance. Prayer is the outcome of communion with God; we are to abide in the consciousness of His presence and of our dependence upon Him. We learn to talk to Him as a child to its father, and to wait quietly before Him in order that we may hear His voice as He speaks to us. We are encouraged to bring everything to Him in prayer, assured that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us (1 John v.14). If we are to pray effectively we must be careful of our walk before God — it is the fervent prayer of a righteous man that availeth much. Here we are told not only to continue in prayer but to watch in the same, and that with thanksgiving. We need watchfulness and sobriety lest we should have merely our own personal interests before us instead of seeking that His will should be carried out. And thanksgiving for blessings already received should accompany our prayers always.

The apostle adds, "**praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.**" The suffering apostle valued the prayers of the saints, and it is our privilege to remember the Lord's servants in our prayers that they may be helped in their labours, and especially those in prison that their faith may be sustained.

Continuance in praise

Our series of seven exhortations to continuance is completed by Heb. xiii.15: "By Him therefore let us offer the **sacrifice of**

praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." Let us continue in praise. We are exhorted to go forth unto Jesus outside the camp, bearing His reproach, and as pilgrims seeking a heavenly home we are to occupy ourselves with His praises. Praise is "the fruit of our lips confessing His name" (JND). It has been said that there is one thing that God appreciates more than all else, and that is Christ Himself confessed to God. True praise is simply offering up to God the fragrance of Christ. This is our happy privilege and should be our continual occupation.

May the consideration of these scriptural exhortations promote in us a greater awareness of the increasing evil in the world today, and of the danger of drifting, perhaps imperceptibly, away from the truth of God. Our safety is to walk closely to our Lord, and to abide in His word; as the apostle reminds us, "Let that which ye have heard from the beginning abide in you: if what ye have heard from the beginning abides in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father" (1 John ii.24. JND).

R. A. CREETH

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

This article is written for, or as addressed to, those who, though well acquainted with the New Testament, are not committed disciples of Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus, next to His death, is the most important event in the whole history of the world. For if He rose again, He is placed entirely above the power of death, so that death can never touch Him again. Death, which lays low the whole of mankind, has been defeated.

This is nothing like the raising of Lazarus, who by the power of Jesus Himself, was brought to life and came out of the opened tomb bound with graveclothes. It is plain that he resumed the kind of life he had lived before, in the bosom of his family, and evidently with the expectation that he would die again in the natural course of events.

With Jesus it was totally different. His sudden appearance in the midst of His disciples showed that He had entered upon an entirely new mode of existence, to which the laws of time and space seemed to have no application.

Yet He emphasised that His *body* was risen — He was no mere ghost. He encouraged the disciples to handle Him; He ate and drank with them, on at least two occasions; He talked with them freely, and at length.

Now if He thus rose again, *He is alive today*. Instead of thinking of the resurrection merely as a past event, we must take account of the stupendous fact that Jesus is *a living man* now and always. If He were merely a man this would still be a stupendous fact, but now we cannot but see that His resurrection is the justification of all that He taught in the days of His flesh, including His claim to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Moreover, He is, as He said, the appointed Judge of all men, living and dead. And His resurrection makes this clear, that if He rose from the dead He is able to raise others, so that death does not provide a way of escape from His judgment.

He also said, "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life". Thus He is the Saviour, the only Saviour, for all who put their trust in Him. As Peter declared, "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins."

And if He invited the weary and heavy laden to come to Him, the promise that He would give them rest is shown not to be an empty one, for He is *able to do* all that He said. And the experience of those who have sought to follow Him is that every word of His promise is true.

EVIDENCES OF THE RESURRECTION

For us who live in the 20th century, is it possible to speak of "evidences" of what took place in the 1st century? The New Testament indeed tells us of the Resurrection as a fact — is it possible that it is after all "a cunningly devised fable"?

Now we maintain that, distant as the Resurrection is, its truth rests upon evidence that is completely overwhelming.

First, the books of the New Testament, recording as they do the confident belief of their authors that Jesus was risen, are witnesses to this confident belief. Although we only have copies of the books, or rather copies of copies, these give certain evidence that the originals once existed.

Let us consider one of these New Testament books that deals largely with the Resurrection, namely, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. Here is a letter the genuineness of which speaks for itself. For it was obviously written to correct the many and various evils in the young church at Corinth, and to answer questions that they had written about. It deals with the Resurrection as just one of these matters. The genuineness of the letter is attested by the writer's evident concern about the state of the church, and his anxiety about the spiritual condition of his converts. These things cannot be successfully faked. That Paul was the author likewise shines out clearly.

Now some in the church were perhaps muddled about the doctrine of resurrection in general, and to correct this Paul begins with the resurrection of Christ, as a fact which he had preached to them as a fundamental truth of the Gospel, and this leads him to show how incontrovertible was the evidence for Christ's resurrection. He lists some of the appearances of the Lord — to Peter, to the Twelve, to James, and to over 500 brethren at once, of whom most were still alive. Then, he says, He appeared to me also. We must remember that Paul had been not long before a bitter and determined opponent, whose prejudice against Jesus of Nazareth had only been broken down by seeing Him on the Damascus road. In answer to the question, "Who art thou, Lord?" he received the answer "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest."

Then as afterwards he came into contact with other Christians, including the apostles, he found everywhere that confident belief of which we have spoken. Here then is the source of that confident belief — it came from those who themselves had seen the risen Lord, or had been in close contact with others who had. The whole church was permeated with it. Nearly all

the New Testament writers refer to it. The whole of Christian teaching is based upon the Resurrection as a fact.

Coming next to the accounts of the Resurrection in the four gospels, we are struck by the entire absence of any attempt at constructing a coherent, consistent account of events. And though at first some statements appear inconsistent, they are in fact easily reconciled. Two facts which emerge clearly are first, the empty tomb, and second, the incredulity of the disciples. If they believed, it was because they were compelled to.

THE EMPTY TOMB

As has often been pointed out, the whole Resurrection story would have collapsed if anyone could have produced the Lord's body, and thus Christianity would have been stillborn. Yet it is plain that no-one had any interest in removing His body.

Of the three parties — Pilate, the chief priests, and the disciples, Pilate cared nothing at all; the chief priests had everything to gain by guarding the body, as indeed they did. They wanted it in the tomb to prove Jesus a deceiver. As to the disciples, though later accused by the chief priests of stealing the body, their despair and desolation could only have been increased by its presence. When His prophecies of rising again, later returned to their remembrance, they could only have concluded that, if not a deceiver, at least He had been deluded.

This leads us immediately to consider the disciples' incredulity. The women's stories were evidently dismissed as unreliable — the outcome of their intense grief — and only gradually were the men convinced when He appeared first to Peter, then to all the disciples. Even so they "believed not for joy" until He gave them indisputable proof that He was really there — a man among them — by eating, and letting them feel Him.

Now it is passing strange that anyone should still question a fact so well established as the resurrection of Jesus, until we remember the power of prejudice. The New Testament makes clear that the enemies of Jesus, who had received from the soldiers set to guard the tomb an account of all that they had

seen and heard, including the angel's message to the women, "He is not here, but is risen, as He said" (Matt. xxviii.11), remained unconvinced. The simple fact is, they did not want to believe. To admit, even to themselves, that He was risen, would have meant their submission to Him. For that they were not prepared. The question is, are we prepared? As we said earlier, if He rose, He is alive today.

There is another thing important to remember. It is not just a question of believing the fact of His resurrection. The Gospel message is to acknowledge Him as Lord, and to believe truly that *God* has raised Him from the dead. For He came as the Sent-one of God, Who died for our sins, and was raised again by God for our justification. To believe this is to receive salvation from God Himself. Jesus overcame death, not for Himself, for He was the Prince of Life, but for those who believe in Him, who will share in His victory.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

PRACTICAL THOUGHTS BASED ON NEHEMIAH

This Old Testament book has some very practical lessons for us in these days.

Jerusalem had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar, the great majority of the inhabitants had been taken into captivity and the city and the temple were desolated. In accordance with the divine word to Jeremiah (Jer. xxv.11 and xxiv.10) — for God's word never fails — a remnant returned from captivity after 70 years to re-build the Temple and re-people the land. The walls of the city were still broken down and it is at such a time that Nehemiah was used by God for the task of re-building the walls.

The opening verses of the book that bears his name set the scene. The meaning of the name is instructive. Nehemiah was the son of Hachaliah. The father, Hachaliah, was no doubt born during the days of the captivity and his name means "Forgotten of Jehovah". His own parents thought that God

had abandoned them. We may experience the Lord's chastening hand but His eye is ever upon us and He does not forsake His own people. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby" (Heb. xii.11). Hachaliah had learned that lesson for himself and so his son was given the name that meant "comfort" of Jehovah. He did indeed bring the comfort of God to the troubled and dispirited Jews in their distress. In a world of difficulty and great need, are we imparting comfort and encouragement to our fellow Christians as well as proclaiming the "Good News" to the unsaved of the blessing, joy, rest and comfort that come through faith in Christ? Hachaliah had another son — Hanani — whose name means "gracious". He was prepared to recognise the gift that God had given to his brother Nehemiah so in verse 2 of the first chapter we read that he came with other Jews to the palace of the heathen king, Artaxerxes, where Nehemiah held a prominent position in the King's household as his cupbearer. In the New Testament we read of Barnabas, that he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith and he sought out Saul (later Paul) to help in the work at Antioch. (Acts xi, 24-26)

When his help was enlisted and when he heard of the dire condition of his people in their native land, Nehemiah was much moved and wept but his resource was in prayer to God. Are we indifferent to the needs and sorrows around us, or do we engage in intercession and prayer for others, and when we rise from our knees do we seek to serve them as we are able?

In his great prayer, four things are shown us. (1) Nehemiah reverences God and acknowledges God's faithfulness, v.5 (2) He had a concern for others and made confession of sins both his own and the people's, verses 6-7. (3) He claims the promises of God, verses 8 and 9. (4) He seeks as a result, the prosperity of God's work, verses 10 and 11.

Nehemiah's face betrayed his deep sorrow which did not go unnoticed by the King. At this critical moment this could have meant either prosperity or death. Instantly he prayed to the God of heaven Whose eye is ever upon His children, and per-

mission was granted by the King for him to go to Jerusalem to rebuild, with timber supplied for the palace and walls (Chapter ii.8).

God had exercised his heart and with this deep conviction he acted in His fear. He had a deep personal relationship with God which is vital if we are to be at all effective in His service. His exercise, comforting hand and strength encouraged others to join him in the work and they said "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for this good work. When God is at work, so is the Enemy and in this case Sanballat despised their efforts and laughed them to scorn. Nehemiah was by no means discouraged. "The God of heaven, He will prosper us and we His servants will arise", he said (chapter ii.20). We need to beware that Satan does not discourage us and deflect us from the purpose of serving God.

THOUGHTS SUGGESTED BY THE GATE-NAMES

Eliashib the high priest was stirred into rising up to build, and with the priests he built the sheep gate (chapter iii.).

We are reminded here of the Lord Jesus Who said "I am the door of the sheep, by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved", (John x.9). He was the good shepherd Who gave His life for the sheep.

The next of the 10 gates to be built was the fish gate. Having entered into blessing through the Lord Jesus, we hear Him saying to us, "Come after Me and I will make you fishers of men." We need to be sensitive to the needs of those around us and seek, by the Lord's help, opportunities to present Christ to the unsaved. We read that the Tekoites repaired but their nobles put not their necks to the word of the Lord. Are we actively engaged in the Lord's work or are we opting out? Now, no task was too menial for the apostle Paul. After being shipwrecked on the Island of Malta, he gathered sticks for the fire to provide warmth against the cold (Acts xxviii.2).

The old gate was next repaired. This calls to mind Jeremiah's

words, "Ask for the old paths, wherein is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jer. vi.16). We need to avoid on the one hand carrying on in traditional ways in a lifeless manner, and on the other adopting methods and ideas which while novel and maybe attractive, do not have the authority of the word. We need a vital energising Christian life, under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

The valley gate was then repaired. We have our valley experiences as well as those on the mountain top — the times of difficulty, distress, illness and trial of all kinds. During these times we can experience in a wonderful way, the Lord's presence with us. "Thou art with me, Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

The dung gate. The Apostle Paul could write — "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ." Are we prepared to count the things and advantages of this world as dross? The Apostle not only counted his position and advantage as dross when he was converted but many years afterwards having endured all manner of suffering and trial, he still counted these things as dross.

The fountain gate was the sixth gate to be repaired. Our Lord sitting beside Sychar's Well spoke to the Samaritan woman of the Holy Spirit which would be a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. Those who drink of the pleasures of this life would thirst again — no lasting satisfaction is to be found that way — but whosoever drinks of the water which the Lord Jesus would give would never thirst, no not for ever.

The water gate was then repaired. On the last day of the feast of tabernacles, the Lord Jesus cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Having thirsted ourselves and drunk there is a glorious overflow to thirsty needy souls around, whether they are Christians or no.

The horse gate reminds us of power and strength, as for example in Job xxxix, 19-25. The Lord by the Holy Spirit gives us all the needed power and strength for our service for Him below.

The ninth gate — the east gate — reminds us that the sun rises in the east. Before the break of dawn we see the morning star. Our Lord Jesus is spoken of as the bright and morning star (Rev. xxii.16) and this speaks to us of His coming again. The present period of trial is the night of the Lord's rejection but the Christian looks for that glorious moment when the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and with the trump of God. Christ is coming again — are we ready for Him? Everyone that has this hope in Him purifies himself even as Christ is pure.

The final gate to be repaired was the gate Miphkad which means the appointed place. The Lord Jesus has that appointed place for all His redeemed. Soon the Lord's words will be completely fulfilled. "I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John xiv.3).

The building of the wall produced a reaction from their enemies. (Chap. iv). They despised the work and they thought that the wall could easily be destroyed, but the people had a mind to work (may we have the same spirit for the Lord's work), and the breaches in the wall began to be filled. The enemy Sanballat and Tobiah and their companions, became very angry and sought to hinder the work. Satan comes in many guises. He attacks the work of God sometime as an angel of light, on other occasions as a roaring lion.

The enemy reaction only made Nehemiah and his workers more dependent upon God, and they gave themselves over to prayer and also set a watch day and night. We need to watch and pray. Half of the people wrought in the work and half were in readiness with their weapons prepared for any attack from the enemy. These enemies when they heard that the wall had

(continued inside front cover)

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from the Scripture of Truth

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CONTENTS

Brought to God	25
The Obedience of Faith	29
Bread from Heaven	33

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WORDS OF HELP

A Magazine for Believers

(continued from inside back cover)

—“this light bread”— as they called it. It is possible for us to lose our taste for the heavenly Manna, and sigh for the leeks and garlic of Egypt, but this would be our loss indeed.

THE HIDDEN MANNA

Just as God commanded Moses to fill a pot with manna and lay it up “before the Testimony”, so that in Canaan Israel might have a memorial of the food He had so constantly supplied to them in the desert, so the Lord Jesus promised to the “overcomer” in Pergamos (Rev. ii.17) that in heaven he should partake of the “hidden manna”. This must mean an eternal appreciation of the grace which brought the Lord down to become the bread of life. As the hymn so well expresses it:

There on the hidden bread
Of Christ (once humbled here,
God’s treasured store) for ever fed,
His love my soul shall cheer.

(J. N. Darby)

It must surely be true that we must feed on that Bread now if we would do so in heaven.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

BROUGHT TO GOD

It is a scriptural principle that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. xv.4), and the emancipation of the children of Israel from the thralldom of Egypt, and the establishment of them in the land of God's choice furnishes a graphic illustration of the believer's calling out of the world and his translation into his heavenly inheritance.

God would have His people always to remember the great deliverance He had wrought for them, and they were to say to their children, "We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. . . He brought us out from thence that He might bring us in, to give us the land which He sware unto our fathers."

Let us look at some of the different aspects of this mighty deliverance, and see how it depicts the eternal redemption that has been accomplished for us and the place of spiritual blessing into which we are brought in consequence.

Brought Out

It need scarcely be said that before they could be brought into the land which God had promised them, they must be brought out of Egypt where they were but slaves, and this great fact they are always to bear in mind, as Moses impresses upon them, "Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you from this place" (Ex. xiii.3). They are now a redeemed people, delivered from all connection with Egypt and its prince, and belong entirely to Jehovah, their Redeemer. So it is with ourselves, as Paul tells the Corinthians, "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. vi.19-20).

How significant it is that having reminded the people of their redemption Moses adds, "There shall no unleavened bread be eaten." With the knowledge of redemption comes divine insistence on purity in walk and ways. God looks for practical holiness from His people, as we are reminded in

Titus ii.14: the Lord Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” This entire separation unto the Lord should characterise us for the complete period of our lives, as typified by the seven days of the feast of unleavened bread.

We are thus taught in this passage that now that God’s people are brought out of Egypt there is a complete break with what has gone before; for Egypt with its misery and bondage was to be left behind for ever. Similarly with ourselves: we are delivered from this present evil world to be thoroughly devoted to the One Who has redeemed us to Himself at the cost of His own precious blood.

Brought Forth

In Deuteronomy viii. the children of Israel are warned of the danger of pride and forgetfulness that would beset them in times of prosperity. Moses says, “Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God . . . which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (vv.11-14). The context shows that they were brought forth into the wilderness to prove the almighty sustaining power of their God. The wilderness has been aptly described as the place of human destitution and of heavenly supply. Here it was that the children of Israel were to learn on the one hand what they were in themselves, and on the other what God was for them. “Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; Who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that He might humble thee, that He might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end” (vv. 15-16).

We too are passing through the wilderness, for we have no abiding place here. We are called to follow One Who was Himself a Pilgrim and a Stranger, so let us remember that the One Who has called us to such a path is the One Who alone can sustain us in it. All our supplies are from above. We have the Holy Spirit within us, an unfailing Fountain of living water, and

we are able to feed upon the heavenly manna, the Bread of God Who came down from heaven to redeem us to Himself. Now He lives for us, our great High Priest in heaven, ever living to make intercession for us (Heb. vii.25). As the hymnwriter beautifully expresses it,

“In the desert God will teach thee
 What the God that thou hast found,
 Patient, gracious, powerful, holy:
 All His grace shall there abound.”

Brought In

In that great song of praise with which the children of Israel celebrate their deliverance from Egypt, they give expression to God's purpose to bring them into the land of His choice. They sing, “Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established” (Ex. xv.17). Moses constantly reminded the people of Jehovah's intention to bring them into the land of Canaan according to His promise. See again Deut. vi.21-23.

The extreme fertility and fruitfulness of this land are described in Deut. viii. “For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it” (vv. 7-9).

How eagerly they should have taken possession of such a bountiful inheritance, and how happy and contented they should have been with such provision made for them! Alas, what slothfulness and failure we see in them! And yet are we any better? Are we diligently seeking to make our calling and election sure? (2 Pet. i.10). For have we not been given a heavenly inheritance that has to be taken possession of and enjoyed by faith? We are indeed blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. i.3). What wonderful blessings are outlined for us in this chapter — chosen in

Christ before the foundation of the world, marked out beforehand for adoption, taken into divine favour in the Beloved, having redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace! The redemption of Christ brings us to a vast spiritual inheritance, which is ours to appropriate and enjoy.

Jehovah reminded the people through Joshua, "Every place that the soul of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you" (Josh. i.3). So it is with ourselves today: the inheritance is given to us, but we need spiritual energy to possess it by faith and make it our own.

Brought unto Himself

This is the most precious aspect of all. Jehovah Himself says in Exod. xix.4: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and **brought you unto Myself.**" Not only delivered from Egypt with all its tyranny, not only brought forth into the wilderness to be cared for and sustained for forty years, not only brought into a land of rich abundance, but brought right home to God! It was His great desire to have a people for Himself, "a people near unto Him" (Ps. cxlviii.14). He not only delivered them from all their enemies, but gave them a special place of nearness and relationship. He goes on to make a wonderful promise to them, dependent though it was upon their obedience. "Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people . . . and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."

Peter takes up this language in his first epistle when he writes, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; which in time past were not a people, but now are the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter ii.9,10). It is to be noted that Israel's blessing was dependent upon their obedience, whereas our blessing as believers today is unconditional and rests entirely upon His grace and the redemption accomplished

at the Cross. Hence Peter can say, not "Ye shall be if ye obey," but "Ye are." For "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter iii.18).

Brought to Himself at His Coming

Our great Redeemer has gone back to heaven that a place might be prepared for us in the Father's house. He has said, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." Let us treasure this promise, and let us be constantly looking for its fulfilment. "Let us hold fast the confession of the hope without wavering; for He is faithful that promised" (Heb. x.23).

R. A. CREETH

THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

"Only be thou strong, and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left; that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua i.7)

One of the teachings of Scripture which we hold tenaciously is that of salvation by faith only without the necessity of the works of the law. The objection which is sometimes made, that this doctrine leads to carelessness and sin, is not a new one. It is as old as the days of the Apostle Paul and is dealt with and refuted by him in the Epistle to the Romans. In his argument, Paul shows that as dead men do not go on living in the world, so it is impossible that men who have died and been buried with Christ, can go on living in that to which they have died. "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. vi.2).

To go on living in sin is unnatural and irrational; but to walk after the commandments of God is natural and reasonable, since it is one of the purposes for which we have been

redeemed. To serve God, to walk in His way, to "keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John iii.22) and so to glorify Him, is, we may say, the great end and object for which redemption has been effected. To continue in sin is to go entirely contrary to the purpose which God had in view in our salvation. The people of God are "elect *unto obedience*" (1 Pet. i.2).

The Purpose of Deliverance

Looking at this point in the light which the typical history of the Children of Israel throws on it, we see that service to God, that is, obedience to His laws, could not be carried out until redemption had been effected, and that it was the end for which that redemption was wrought.

The very first announcement of their salvation was accompanied by an intimation of the object in view, "When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall *serve God* upon this mountain" (Exod. iii.12); and each of the commands to Pharaoh to release Israel from its bondage was followed by the words, "That they may *serve Me*." Seven times was the command repeated, "Let My people go." They could not serve God in Egypt. Deliverance from its power, and separation from its ways, must precede service; but once delivered from the condemnation that fell on Egypt, rescued from its power to enslave, and separated from contact with it by the barrier of the Red Sea, service to God was to find its proper place.

No sooner, therefore, were the people brought into the wilderness, than the revelation of God's will concerning them was made in the commandments given on Mount Sinai. On the very mountain on which Moses had been told that Israel should serve the Lord, the law was proclaimed; and the close connection between redemption and obedience was shown right at the beginning, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me*" (Exod. xx. 2,3).

This precisely foreshadowed the close connection which exists between the believer who is redeemed from wrath whilst

the slave of sin; and the obedience, which is meant to be the consequence of that redemption, to Him Who wrought the deliverance. We need to turn but to one or two Scriptures to see this truth clearly demonstrated.

In the prophecy of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, we find the promised salvation described in these terms — “That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hands of all that hate us . . . that we *being delivered* . . . *might serve Him without fear*” (Luke i.71, 74). How different from the bondage of a religion which hopes ultimately to attain to salvation by means of service! The soul that is endeavouring to establish its own righteousness by the works of the law is conscious that it is not yet free from condemnation; the burden of unforgiven sin still lies heavily; it has no peace, for “fear hath torment”. The same truth is expressed by the Psalmist — “O Lord, truly I am thy servant . . . Thou hast loosed my bonds” (Psalm cxvi. 16). He is only a servant when his bonds have been loosed. It is only when the fetters of sin are broken that we are free to enter the service of another Master.

The Object of Redemption

The object of redemption is the glory of God in the life of the believer, and that can only be achieved by keeping His commandments. Also, our entry into “heavenly places in Christ” is for the same purpose, and this we also learn from a consideration of the history of Israel.

As it was the fact that no service to God could be carried out in Egypt, so also it appears that even in the wilderness their service must necessarily be defective. True, the commandments were given and the complete directions for their life were minutely laid down there. Their service also commenced there, but it was only in the land of promise that those directions could be executed in their integrity: we find that the Book of Deuteronomy, their manual of service, repeatedly refers to the land as the scene in which the commandments of God were to be fully obeyed. This is deliberately stated, amongst other passages, in Deuteronomy xii.1 — “These are the statutes and judgements, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which

the Lord God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it" — and this obedience and keeping of the law, which was to characterise their dwelling in the promised land, is contrasted in verses 8 and 9 with the comparatively lawless and irregular habits of their life in the wilderness.

No less than between twenty and thirty times in Deuteronomy is it specially mentioned that the commandments have reference to their conduct "in the land whither they go to possess it." Since, therefore, service to God was the object of their redemption out of Egypt and that service could only be executed in the land of promise, it is manifest that to render such obedience to the laws of God possible was the object of their introduction into that land.

To what conclusion does all this lead us? To this, that our conduct as believers should correspond to our heavenly portion in Christ. The word of Christ must dwell in us "richly in all wisdom" (Col. iii.16) so that, knowing His will and His commands, we may live to His glory. This is the proper result and consequence of entrance upon the enjoyment of all those "spiritual blessings in Christ" which are typified by the richness of earthly blessings in Canaan. Therefore, God's purpose in uniting us to Himself in Christ is not that we may live in carelessness and independence of His rule; but that, on the contrary, as it was with the natural Israel so it is with the spiritual Israel — "He brought forth His people with joy, and His chosen with gladness: and gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the people; *that they might observe his statutes, and keep His laws*" (Psalm cv. 43-45).

Israel had no life in Egypt until saved by the grace of God; its childhood commenced then. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea xi.1). The nation was, so to speak, educated in the wilderness; and upon the completion of that education the people arrived at maturity and entered upon the possession of their inheritance.

Indeed, true, intelligent, joyful obedience is impossible until trust in a living Saviour, with Whom we are one by faith, is exercised. As the unbelieving generation died out before Jordan was crossed, so unbelief must cease before we can enter into

“the rest which remaineth for the people of God,” in order to “walk worthy of Him unto all pleasing.” “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal. iii.13). He died for us. We cannot, need not, undergo its penalty. He has borne it in our stead, and we are, by faith, in union with Him, beyond the reach of its condemnation. But, “He has left us an example that we should follow His steps,” for He said, “I have kept my Father’s commandments” (John xv.10); and, “I do always those things that please Him” (John viii.29). So we, too, if we wish to abide in His love, are to keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

T. D. SPICER

BREAD FROM HEAVEN

Attempts have been made to find a rational explanation for the manna on which Israel were fed in the wilderness, but without success. For the manna was not always there — it did not fall till Moses was instructed by God to promise it, and it fell round about the camp — not in every place. None fell on the seventh day, and a double portion fell on the sixth day. These facts do not fit a merely natural phenomenon.

It was then a miracle, and surely a most stupendous miracle. For it fell day after day for 40 years, and did not fail. By it the host of Israel, numbering millions, were fed. But we may well think that, great as was the miracle, it was not so great as the patience of God which He showed towards that ungrateful and unbelieving people.

When the people became hungry, they murmured against Moses, saying, “Why did you bring us here? Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die here of hunger?” But God responded in grace by promising and sending the manna. He also added, “that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or no.” His instructions were clear — they were to gather it daily, and twice as much on the sixth day, because there would be none on the seventh day. For the manna could not be stored, it had to be gathered fresh daily; it melted when the sun rose

high, and had to be gathered early. The need for close attention to God's instructions tested their willingness to abide by His word, and so it was throughout their sojourn in the desert.

It is noteworthy that the seventh day, or sabbath, is first mentioned in Scripture in connection with God's people when the manna was given. For the two things teach the same fundamental lesson. The sabbath was God's gracious provision, not only for their bodily refreshment, but also for their spiritual blessing. It ensured that the people had the opportunity to think of the God Who had so blessed them — even the slaves were not to be made to work — and the manna, as a food which came *directly* from God, spoke of man's real life as that which only God could nourish.

This is brought out in Deut. viii., when Moses reminded the people of God's dealings with them in the wilderness. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness . . . He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

For all food comes to us from God, but indirectly. Man has to sow and reap, and his food comes in the sweat of his face, but the manna came directly from God. In this it is like man's life, which came from a direct inbreathing from his Creator (Gen. ii.). Moreover natural food is needed and enjoyed by the lower animals. Only man has a need which "bread" cannot satisfy. Just as man was made different from the beasts by his creation (though like them in so many ways), so does he need that direct communication to nourish his spiritual life. All that is represented by the word "bread" — not food only, but all the natural needs of soul and body — must be supplemented by direct contact with God through His word. Of this then the manna reminds us.

Thus if the Israelites found no manna on the sabbath, it was because God had already provided for their bodily needs on the sixth day and they were relieved even of the necessity of gathering it. They could thus look up to Him with thanksgiving

and worship unreservedly, and ponder all His wonderful ways.

“Man doth not live by bread only, but *by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*” God’s word, unlike His providence, speaks to us directly, and makes a living link from Him to us possible.

For Israel God’s word took the form of the law. Now we know this could not give life to man directly, *i.e.* as the reward of keeping it; but it might do so indirectly, by leading a man to realise his sin, and so casting him upon God for mercy and forgiveness. This is how Old Testament saints obtained life. Though they may not have known the assurance that can be ours now through the completed work of Calvary, faith led them to know God Himself, and to rest in Him, as the Psalms abundantly testify.

Now in this day of God’s full revelation of Himself in the Gospel, we have abundant provision for all our spiritual needs. The glory of His salvation surpasses all that man’s mind could conceive, or his experience could suggest. Like the manna again, it is that which “thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know.” Yet how many still go on as though “bread” were all that they needed! Even believers sometimes seem content with it. We need conscious effort to keep us looking to Him Who, as the hymn says, is enough the mind and heart to fill.

THE TRUE BREAD FROM HEAVEN

After the Lord Jesus had fed the 5,000 He encountered the same spirit of unbelief and thanklessness as that displayed by Israel of old. After such a wonderful miracle, they demanded of Him a sign from heaven. They received the loaves, but did not appreciate the grace which gave them; their thoughts did not rise up to God, and so they did not value the One Whom He had sent. “Moses gave us bread from heaven — what dost *thou* work?” they said.

Jesus answered that not Moses, but His Father, had given the manna to Israel, and now was giving them the true bread from heaven. “For the bread of God is He which cometh down

from heaven and giveth life unto the world”.

Here is the *full* meaning of the manna: life coming directly from God in the person of Jesus, bread that satisfies and ministers eternal life to our souls. “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger.” And later He expanded this, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever (unlike Israel, who ate the manna and yet died): and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

In thus speaking of giving His flesh, the Lord was of course pointing to His death as the means whereby we sinners could be made partakers of His life. When the Jews did not understand, saying “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” the Lord expanded it still further: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.”

Their lack of understanding, expressed in the words already quoted, was quite inexcusable, for a figurative application of His words was obviously called for, and the sacrifices of the law, so familiar to them, should have led them to see at any rate something of His meaning. Had not John the Baptist already pointed Him out as the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”? Moreover, that by eating He meant believing was plain from His earlier words, “He that *cometh* to Me shall never hunger, and he that *believeth* on Me shall never thirst.” See also John vi.40.

It is unhappily the case that Christendom has fallen into a similar error to that of the Jews, in interpreting the “eating” He spoke of as being the literal eating of the Lord’s Supper, and supposing that the bread and wine do actually become the Lord’s flesh and blood. The simple figurative meaning of feeding upon Him by faith — of appropriating for ourselves by faith all the benefits of His atoning death, fully satisfies the meaning of His words in John vi., while our actual eating and drinking in the Lord’s Supper expresses the same truth symbolically.

FEEDING UPON CHRIST CONTINUALLY

If we *obtained* life by feeding upon our Saviour, so must our life be *sustained* by the same food. Jesus said, "As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." Throughout our journey through the wilderness of this world, He alone can sustain our souls. As Paul said, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." His commandments are our guide, the example of His own dependent walk is our pattern, and the peace and joy which characterised Him, which He gives to us (John xiv.27; xv.11), are our constant strength and stay.

To make these things a reality in our own experience, reading and meditating upon the word of God which tells us of Him needs to be a steady practice with us. Like Israel, we must gather the manna daily — it cannot be stored. Yesterday's guidance may not meet today's need. "Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates", says the Heavenly Wisdom (Prov. viii.34).

Let us remember that the Lord Himself has gone this way before us. Just as Moses wrote of Israel, "The Lord thy God led thee . . . in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger," so did the Lord Jesus humble *Himself* to become man, and in the wilderness was allowed to hunger, and was put to the test by Satan. In this He kept steadfastly to man's dependent place, waiting till the Father should end the time of trial. Quoting Moses' words, He said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Let us not grow weary, as Israel did, and give way to murmuring: but rather keep before our souls the example of our Saviour. Above all, let us not, as they did, despise the manna

(continued inside front cover)

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Words of Help

from the Scripture of Truth

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CONTENTS

The Nourishment of Faith	37
Abraham, continued	41
The Divine Workers XLIX	43
Elijah	47

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WORDS OF HELP

A Magazine for Believers

(continued from inside back cover)

ELIJAH SHOWS HIMSELF TO AHAB

In preparation for the great climactic events of Carmel, when God's power and authority were vindicated against the impotence of the false heathen gods that Israel had embraced, Elijah was told to show himself to Ahab. This contrasts with the command in chapter xvii. to hide himself, but both were equally of God.

At Carmel God manifested His power in answer to Elijah's prayer by sending fire from heaven to consume the sodden wood and the sacrifice, so turning the people's allegiance back to Himself. The false prophets of the heathen god Baal were destroyed.

It is often after we have experienced spiritual victories that we are most vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. Elijah at Carmel reached the pinnacle of his spiritual experience. Satan having suffered a big defeat, worked again through Jezebel. She was incensed at the news that Ahab brought to her, and she was determined that within twenty four hours she would kill Elijah.

The man who had previously faced the king and four hundred prophets, calling upon the people — "If God the Lord be God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him" — now fled from the threats of a wicked woman. We need the shield of faith where-with we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked (Eph. vi. 16).

Dispirited and sad, Elijah thought that he was the only one faithful to God, and asked for his life to be taken away. God spoke to him not through the fire and the earthquake but through a still, small voice. He was restored to communion with God, but was told to return and anoint Elisha as prophet in his place.

R. D. MAHERS

THE NOURISHMENT OF FAITH

“This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.”

—(Joshua i.8)

Does this exhortation apply to us as believers? Joshua was one who walked by faith, and we, too, are called to do the same. In taking these words to ourselves, however, instead of “this book of the law” we are to take all the Scriptures as our guide, knowing that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Tim. iii.16).

Truly, it is not by the works of the law, by obedience, good deeds, emotions or anything that comes from ourselves that we are justified and saved. “By grace are ye saved through faith . . . not of works lest any man should boast” (Eph. ii.8,9). We must have life before we can obey; for God does not give His law to dead men: or rather, if He does, it is to show that they are spiritually dead and utterly incapable of keeping those commandments. God gives life to the dead; and in the minds and hearts of His living children He writes His laws.

Once redeemed, saved, and adopted in Christ, success, prosperity and continued enjoyment of blessing, are dependent on the extent to which we retain, meditate upon, and obey “all that is written”. We may then take this command to Joshua as directing us to “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest” all Scripture, which was written for our learning.

Appropriation

The Word of God must be remembered and hidden in our hearts if it is to be meditated upon and obeyed. So important is this first step by those who hear it that the Devil is ever on the watch to prevent its being carried out. How often it is that even with our eyes on the pages of the Bible, or with the words of God sounding in our ears, the truths have frequently been snatched away by wandering thoughts. If they have been kept

in mind for a while, have not the cares of this life, the sights around us, or the many voices of the world soon distracted our attention; so that our reading or hearing has been but like the passing glance of a man in a mirror who "goeth his way and straight-way forgetteth what manner of man he was" (James i.24).

If the Word of God is to work in our hearts, to strengthen us for His service, or produce any effects in our lives, it must be received and retained. Like the roll given to Ezekiel and the little book to John, the command is to "eat it up", for only then can it be profitable to us. To Joshua, "this book of the law" was the Pentateuch; but to God's people today it is the complete revelation of the Spirit of God — Law, Psalms, Prophets, Gospels, Epistles — all in which to read and meditate, and obey. Let not sin, Satan, the world or the flesh, business or pleasure keep us from it, or cause us to forget it.

Meditation

The receiving and appropriating of the law of God is but the means to an end. Received and retained in the memory it is of little use unless it becomes the subject of meditation. The command therefore goes on, "Thou shalt meditate therein day and night."

The process by which benefit is received from that which we read or hear is precisely similar to that by which we derive nourishment from the food we eat. In this sense the words of the prayer which are often quoted, "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest," are true. It is to be "digested". This "book of the law" must be quietly, prayerfully, patiently thought over, if it is to be a source of strength and sustenance to our inner man. The Psalmist gives a description of the man who meditates in the law of the Lord — "He shall be like a tree planted by the river of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Psalm i.3).

There is no bondage in meditation, as there is nothing unpleasant in eating appetising food. "How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth"

(Psalm cxix. 103). It is true that we cannot always be engaged in meditation, we have our work to do, our responsibilities which call for our attention; but when these can be laid to one side there is our opportunity. Further, there is no need for us to withdraw from society because we meditate upon the Word of God. We are not to be recluses. True meditation does not make us unfit for the world of lawful activity. Was Joshua not a brave and successful soldier, David a wise and good ruler, Daniel a faithful and eminent statesman? Did their love for and meditation on the book of the law interfere with their earthly responsibilities? On the contrary, it gave to them strength and direction, besides one true object for which to do everything — the glory of God.

Is this how we give attendance to reading? Is our meditation for the glory of God, for the help and counsel of others and that we may grow in our spiritual life? Or does the world drive out the Word, do the daily newspaper or the writings of men command more of our attention than the Scriptures? Let us determine to honour His Word, to esteem the words of His mouth more than our necessary food (Job xxiii.12).

Obedience

But the purpose for which the reception and meditation of the law was enjoined on Joshua was obedience. This was to be the practical result of remembering and considering the commandments of God, and it was only when this was done that the first two processes were of any use.

There is no need for us to emphasise the importance to Joshua, the general of a large army, of thorough acquaintance with the law of God and of unhesitating obedience to its commands. Surrounded as they would be by false religion and heathen practices, it was the only path of safety for himself and the people; the only road to success. It is possible for the Christian, especially if he is keen, to search deeply, critically and even devoutly in the Scriptures, to arrive at some understanding of their message, and yet stop there. If his service lies in the instruction of others it is possible for him to spend much time in order to "rightly divide the word of truth", and yet

not make any application of that truth to his own soul. This activity does not measure up to true meditation, but it can easily be mistaken for it.

It is obedience to "all that is written" that is required. Joshua was not to pick and choose where he liked and neither may we. To begin this way will lead, ultimately, to the rejection of all Scripture. We cannot be judges of what is best. The place of soldiers, servants, or children is not to question commandments but to obey them. Some things may be in line with our desires more than others; some commands may find an echo in our hearts rather than others; but personal considerations are not to influence us. Mary's instruction to the servants at Cana of Galilee is appropriate for us all "Whatsoever He saith unto you do it."

Prosperity and Success

The consequence of remembering, meditating in and obeying the Word of the Lord was to be prosperity and success. "Then shalt thou make thy way prosperous; then shalt thou do wisely" (margin) and it is so still today. The Scriptures are full of descriptions of the joy and blessings that attend the obedience of the law of God. Moses said "Therefore ye shall keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land. . ." (Deut. xi.8). Hear Isaiah, "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isaiah i. 19). But, listen to that Prophet whom God raised up like unto Moses "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him" (John xiv. 23). Need we quote more?

The Bible is full of such declarations and there are many who can vouch for their veracity. There are those who have so walked in "the fear of God all the day long" that their characters, and almost their faces, have shone like those of Moses and Stephen, reflecting the glory of God. May we so "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" that "good success" may be ours. For in the keeping of His commandments is great reward.

T. D. SPICER

ABRAHAM

(Genesis xx., xxi.)

A noteworthy proof of the inspiration of the Scriptures, and of the reliability of its historical portions, is the faithful recording of the failures of eminent men among the people of God. We have already had Abraham's denial of his wife when he sojourned in Egypt, but that took place soon after he had become a pilgrim. We should hardly expect him to repeat the same fault when he was much older; we should not have thought he would put Sarah in danger when God had plainly designated her as the mother of the promised seed; we should not have expected fear of man when God had so plainly shown His favour toward him. Yet Abraham failed dismally in all these ways. The word of God records it all, without comment or excuse. To some people the lack of positive condemnation is a stumblingblock, but God's view of the matter is quite clearly shown, if we read intelligently.

Abraham's deceit, and Sarah's, are seen in contrast to king Abimelech's uprightness, as God reveals to him the true state of affairs. We are shown how God took care of Sarah, even in Abimelech's harem, and commands him to restore her to her husband.

The lesson for us in this incident is plain: we cannot afford for a moment to relax the attitude of complete truthfulness, either through fear or for any other reason, if we are to avoid the risk of betraying our Master. If Abraham could fail, so may we, for the flesh cannot be trusted; it is, as Jeremiah said, "deceitful above all things."

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC

Next we read of the birth of the long awaited heir. The first step in the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, "I will make of thee a great nation" had now been taken, and its miraculous character — for natural processes had long been dead in both Abraham and Sarah — puts a divine stamp upon the whole people who would trace their descent back to

Abraham. Yet Scripture makes it clear that only the possession of faith can entitle any of his descendants to be called his children.

Then also Isaac's birth reminds us of the birth of Christ (of Whom Isaac is a type), Whose conception was a far greater miracle, involving the setting aside entirely of natural processes as the Creator took a place in His own creation.

Who can picture the rejoicing when Isaac was born! His name means "laughter". Sarah said "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear me will laugh with me." No doubt she remembered her unbelieving laughter, and now, looking back she says "Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? For I have born him a son in his old age."

ISHMAEL CAST OUT

But now the problem of Ishmael once more rears its head. As Isaac grew, the incongruity of Ishmael's presence in the household — the son of a slave, and yet Abraham's son — became evident. At the great feast made when Isaac was weaned, Ishmael was caught mocking, and Sarah was so incensed that she demanded the expulsion of Ishmael and his mother from the household.

Hard as it seemed, this was the only way to solve the problem, and God commanded Abraham to do as his wife said. Though grieved for both Ishmael and Hagar, Abraham sent them away with bread and a skin bottle of water, to make their way as best they might. For a man with the resources at Abraham's command, it seems a miserable way to treat them, but God did not fail. When the bottle of water was spent, and Hagar was in despair, He revealed a well which she had failed to see. They made their way eventually to Egypt, where Ishmael found a wife and the fulfilment in due time of the promise that he should be father of a nation.

There can be no doubt that the recording of this incident has an importance far outweighing any light, favourable or otherwise, which it throws on Abraham's character. It is

treated as an allegory in Galatians chapter iii., the two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, representing the children of grace and of law. Those who are of the law have no permanent standing before God, and so Ishmael is cast out. The children of grace belong to Christ, the true Heir.

The last incident of this chapter (xxi) shows us Abraham's peaceful conduct as a sojourner in the land that God had promised to give him for his own. Abimelech acknowledges "that God is with thee in all that thou doest" but Abraham does not presume on this nor contend for his rights, but makes a covenant at his own expense to assure his claim to the well of Beersheba. There he calls on the name of the Lord, the *everlasting* God, for Abraham was not concerned with the present, but looked forward to the time when God would fulfil His word to His servant.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

THE DIVINE WORKERS XLIX

"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John v. 17)

Luke xxii. The work that the Lord Jesus had undertaken for the glory of God was drawing to its solemn yet victorious close. The divinely inspired writer does not restrict himself to recording events in a time-controlled sequence. All that he writes to Theophilus has the object of presenting the Man Christ Jesus as displaying the amazing wonder of God manifest in flesh. To this end he assembles the records of conversations, discourses, questions and replies as well as facts as to events in order to show their inward moral connection. The man, used as a Satanic instrument, is fully named but, in addition, there is the fact of his being "of the number of the twelve". To be with the Lord Jesus — even associated with His works of healing as well as hearing His word clearly did not give security from Satan's influence. Judas must have been conscious of hypocrisy and covetousness. Self judgement was essential — but was foreign to him. Satan's designs against the Son of God were thus advanced. Luke shows Judas and the chief priests

and captains seeking the way and the time to carry out their murderous plan. All were powerless until the divinely appointed moment. "And the day of unleavened bread came, in which the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying Go and prepare the passover for us, that we may eat." We read the careful instructions. They needed only to follow. The man with a pitcher of water would meet them — they had no need to search. "Follow him into the house where he goeth in." The Jewish householder is in submission to the mind of God. "The Teacher saith to thee, Where is the guest chamber where I may eat the passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished; there make ready". Ordered of God in honour of His Son, it would be His last passover — facing the hatred of its religious leaders who were determined upon His rejection and death. "And when the time was come, He took His place, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." There was deep love for them expressed in His words. As disciples, they had taken the passover with Him apart from their family circles. This was the last time until the time of fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. His cross, His suffering under the hand of God, would make this possible. "And having received a cup He gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among yourselves for I say unto you I will in no wise drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God come".

For generations the yearly feast had been observed — a commemoration of the night of death in Egypt and the protection of every firstborn of Israel for whom the life blood of a lamb had been given. Upon "the two side posts and upon the upper door post of the houses" was the insignia of death but they had faith in Jehovah's assurance "when I see the blood I will pass over you" (Ex.xii).

Now, the commemoration was to close. God gives His people symbols as promises and He fulfils these, His own undertakings. So do we hear the precious words of His beloved Son, about to become the fulfilment of the symbol of the Lamb of sacrifice, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with

you before I suffer.” It would be His *own* blood that would be shed — His *own* suffering in the forsaking by His Father and His God as He “bare our sins in His *own* body on the tree” (1. Peter ii.24). We see His prevailing love and His indomitable purpose continuing for the fulfilment of the symbol. The opening of the vast purposes of God is in His hand as “having taken a loaf, when He had given thanks He broke it and gave it to them saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do for a remembrance of me. In like manner also the cup, after having supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you”.

In this transition from the rites of the passover observance to the precious, intimate, unfolding of the divine purpose, in revealing the imminent death of Christ for sinful men, there is a wonderful truth. The Jewish memorial of national freedom was upheld — and this in face of Roman control. Their tribes were scattered among the nations and the evidence of their departure from God was obvious. Yet Jesus sat down with His disciples and expressed His desire to eat this last passover with them before His suffering. So, that which had descended to a national ceremony was transformed into an exposition of the divine plan for life — present and eternal — for repentant and believing man.

We are indebted to Jewish authorities for giving the order of Passover procedure in operation at the time of the Lord. It is sad to picture the families gathered in their houses commemorating a long past freedom amid present subjection to an alien power. In humble subjection to these circumstances the Lord Jesus gathered His disciple-family in the guest room of an inn. It was the custom that the head of the feast gave thanks and the first cup of wine mingled with water would be drunk. There followed the washing of hands. The table was spread — the pascal lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs and a dish of thick sauce to represent the mortar used in Egypt as slaves. Into this the bitter herbs were dipped and eaten. All the dishes were then removed and the meaning of the passover was explained to the children. The dishes were brought back and the history of the LORD'S passing over their houses in Egypt

was rehearsed. The bitter lives of their forefathers were likened to the bitter herbs held aloft and the unleavened bread was explained. Psalms cxiii and cxiv were read, and a prayer followed. They all drank the second cup of wine. The leader then broke one of the cakes of unleavened bread and gave thanks and they all partook of the pascal lamb roast with fire. As an ending of the supper they all took bread and some of the bitter herbs which were dipped in the sauce and eaten. They then drank the third cup of wine called "the cup of blessing". Finally, the leader rehearsed Psalms cxv, cxvi, cxvii and cxviii. A fourth cup of wine concluded the whole.

God as Judge is the pre-eminent message of the passover. Blood turns His eye from the sinner — He passes on as if there were no sinners in the house. But other truths were typified inside the house — truths beyond the intelligence of Israel — truths available to us as well. Partaking of the lamb was a symbolic owning that the blood on the door posts was the outflow of a life given in substitution for their own. Confession of that which deserved death was not to be lightly made. The bitterness of sin was to be realised "with bitter herbs" to be eaten with unleavened bread. There should be a real turning to God in repentance. God is Judge first — then Saviour. The blood showed the divine ground for deliverance — it was for the eye of God and it called for a moral re-action from those within. Was there response in repentance? Then faith in divine mercy through Christ would follow with unflinching certainty. The two are distinct — but never separated. Repentance is not mere acknowledgement to oneself of a series of wrongs committed. It is an act before God — a judgement of oneself as having a nature habitually capable of expressing itself in opposition to the Mind of God. So were the symbols before them emblems for ourselves.

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sakes he being rich became poor, in order that ye by his poverty might be enriched" (2. Cor. viii. 9)

EDWARD T. WOOD.

ELIJAH

(1 Kings xvii-xix)

Elijah, whose name means "Jehovah is God", appears suddenly on the page of Holy Scripture (chap. xvii.1), in a dark day in Israel's history, but we learn from the Epistle of James (chap. v. 16-18) that his own personal dealings with God began well before his public appearance. James tells us that he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months. Why did he pray thus?

The unholy marriage of king Ahab with Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, had resulted in the introduction of Baal worship into Israel. This was in addition to the worship of the golden calves which Jeroboam had brought in. It is a salutary warning to us of the disastrous effects of evil associations and companions.

The people of Israel, alas, needed little persuasion to adopt a new idolatry, and the drought that followed Elijah's prayer we must see as God's chastening to bring His people back to Him, while his prayer was the result of his communion with God about it all.

Elijah came from Gilead, a rugged country like the highlands of Scotland, producing men of a similar character, but his native temperament was not the source of his strength.

He learned God in the secret place of His presence and having done so, he was able to emerge from the sanctuary with the outstanding proclamation — "As the Lord liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall be neither rain nor dew these years, but according to my word." The almighty power of the living God was to be manifested to this nation which had forsaken Him for dead idols.

As it did not rain for this three and a half years, the country suffered drought. Turning for a moment to our own lives, let us see that we do not have a spiritual drought, with prayer almost non-existent. We need to maintain a consistent, virile prayer life both privately and among our families. The family altar is most essential in the proper spiritual development of young people. Attendance at the local assembly prayer meetings

is most important, and the poor support given to this meeting in so many cases is a cause of much spiritual weakness.

Elijah knew that intercession in secret led to effective, God honouring public testimony. "As Jehovah lives" he thunders forth. To some God seemed dead. The Lord Jesus said, "I am He that liveth and I became dead and behold, I am alive for evermore."

"Before Whom I stand". We are often more conscious of men than of God. This was not so with Elijah, nor was it with Paul, who could say "I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me."

ELIJAH IN HIDING

Elijah then had to learn to take one step at a time. Only after giving out the message was he told to go and hide himself by the brook Cherith. We have to learn to trust God for every step. Obedience leads to further direction from the Lord for the next step to be taken. So when the brook dried up he was sent on to Zarephath. Saul when stricken down on the Damascus road was told to go into the city and there it would be told him what he must do.

While hiding by the brook Elijah was to learn more fully of God, just as when the disciples came and told the Lord Jesus of all that they had done and taught, He bade them come apart and rest awhile. We are often too strong and full of self. Paul in Arabia and John in Patmos learned much of Christ in their isolation.

Elijah had to learn absolute trust in God. He was fed by the most unlikely creatures — ravens, which are carnivorous. He had to learn the need for obedience (verse 5). His faith was tested — the brook was drying up — the source of sustenance and refreshment. All that is of self has to be drained so that Christ may be seen shining through our lives. Under God's all-wise chastening hand, we may experience poor health, sorrow, reproach, loss of popularity and money and many other things in order to drive us to much more dependence upon the Lord. We must learn, too, to wait God's time, as

Elijah had to. Saul, we remember, was not prepared for this, and lost his kingdom as a result of his disobedience (1 Samuel xiii.).

After the brook Cherith had dried up, Elijah was sent to Zarephath, meaning “place of refining”, which was outside the land and the very place of Jezebel’s dominion. God can sustain us where the enemy has his power.

The poor widow of Zarephath gathering sticks in order to prepare the last meal before she and her son succumbed to starvation, received a searching request from the prophet to bake a cake for the prophet first. She did just that. The Lord Jesus said, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these other things shall be added unto you.” It was a very simple but intensely practical lesson. Do we put God first in our lives? What is our first consideration — is it the Lord’s glory, His interests, His work, the Church of God or is it our own interests or career? Certainly the Lord made good His promise, and the supply of meal and oil did not fail till the drought was over.

In the ingredients of the cake, the meal and the oil, we have illustrated both Christ as the food of our souls and the Holy Spirit Who makes the things of Christ precious to us. What appetite have we for the things of the Lord? Whether it is small or large, we can know that we can be fully satisfied.

Then later the woman’s son died, and she blamed Elijah for his untimely death. Elijah’s restraint under this provocation is a model for us. Instead of reacting strongly he treated her very gently. A wrong reaction whether at home or in public life can greatly hinder our usefulness for the Lord. On this occasion Elijah, under great spiritual exercise, prayed and stretched himself upon the child. He displayed great perseverance and also humility in coming right down to the child. God heard his cries and healed the boy. Have we similar concern for the unconverted around us, so that we might be on our knees in prayer to God so that precious souls might be turned from darkness to light, from spiritual death to eternal life?

(continued inside front cover)

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from the Scripture of Truth

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CONTENTS

The Warfare of Faith	49
Abraham: The Offering up of Isaac	53
Under His Wings	57
Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs	60

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WORDS OF HELP

A Magazine for Believers

(Continued from inside back cover)

the very singing helps our being filled with the Spirit, in that while we sing we are completely taken up with our glorious Saviour, that is of course if our hearts go with what we are singing!

This is true also of assembly singing. We know that the use of a book of prayers hinders the free action of the Holy Spirit in leading to prayer and praise, but of necessity we must use a book of hymns! True, the Spirit may guide us in the *choice* of hymns, but unless our hearts are thoroughly engaged with what we are singing, it can become little more than a mechanical exercise. It is a good thing to ponder the meaning of each familiar line as we sing it, so that we may sing with the spirit and with the understanding also (1 Cor. xiv.15).

But to return to the apostolic exhortation of Eph. v., let us ask ourselves, are we singing Christians? If not, perhaps it is that we are not filled with the Spirit? It must be acknowledged, however, that many excellent believers rarely sing. But can any of us afford to neglect this exhortation? Must it not be to our own loss if we do?

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

THE WARFARE OF FAITH

*Now Jericho was straitly shut up. . . .
and the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I
have given into thine hand Jericho,
and the king thereof, and the mighty
men of valour. (Joshua vi.1,2)*

On the eve of their entering, possessing and enjoying the Land of Promise, God's rich provision for them, the Children of Israel were confronted with a tremendous obstacle. Jericho, strongly fortified, and occupied by an enemy that was determined to resist them to the very utmost, stood in their way. There is teaching in this situation for the Christian. We may consider the city of Jericho as representing that which, although garrisoned by the enemies of the Lord, is yet to become part of His inheritance.

The Situation

Jericho was part of the land which was called the Lord's Land (Lev.xxv.23); not only as a portion of the earth which He made, but as a spot in that territory which He had specially marked out for His own dwelling and for the manifestation of His glory. From what we read in Scripture it must have been a particularly attractive place. It was called the "city of palm-trees" (2 Chr.xxviii.15); and we are told that the "situation of the city" was "pleasant". It was inside the boundary of that stretch of terrain which God had promised to give to Abraham. In the purposes of God, therefore, Jericho belonged to Him, although long usurped and occupied by those whose wickedness made them His enemies. Now the time had come when it was to return to rightful ownership and God said to Joshua, "See, I have given into thine hand Jericho".

There are many such places—the hearts of men—the thrones of which are occupied by the god of this world. Strongholds of sin, which are, nevertheless, given to Him Who is the Captain of our salvation, and which are to become His possession. There were those in Corinth in whose hearts Satan ruled; "fornicators, covetous, idolators, railers, drunkards, extortion-

ers" (1 Cor. v.11); who turned every gift of God, every natural power, talent and advantage, into opportunities for means of serving sin. But as the Apostle Paul came to that city, armed with the Sword of the Spirit, it was said to him, "speak, hold not thy peace, for I have much people in this city" (Acts xviii. 9, 10). The attack was made in faith, walls fell down in many hearts, and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptised" (Acts xviii.8). From the moment of deliverance—their redemption—they were God's inheritance, in whom He would dwell and be glorified.

The Objective

It is not given to us to know those whom it is the purpose of God to bring into subjection to Himself; but it is true that He has "many people in this city", many Jerichos as it were. Everywhere there are hearts that are still in subjection to sin, the world and Satan, but which it is His purpose to subdue unto Himself. His command to "preach the Gospel to every creature", is for us to obey without distinction. The heart of every unsaved soul, of each one who is still under the domination of the wicked one, is, or ought to be, a Jericho against which we are to advance in faith.

Of whom have we the right to say that he is beyond the reach of the Gospel, the power of the blood of Christ? Surely, of none. Is it not right, therefore, that we should see in all with whom we come into contact, who are not yet subject to Christ, strongholds in which a usurper is in command, but which yet may become "cities of palm-trees", the very dwelling places of the Most High?

To all outward appearance the assault upon such seems often a forlorn hope. Like Jericho, they appear "walled up to heaven". How are the soldiers of Christ, of whom not many are "wise. . . not many mighty" (1 Cor.i.26), to capture such citadels? The poor captive to sin, mistaking the purposes of God towards him, imagines that to yield to Christ is to lose everything that makes life happy and enjoyable. Further, knowing that the demand is for an unconditional surrender, he entrenches himself in his position and determines to keep out God at all costs.

Jericho, however, must surrender; everything evil is to be purged out, the unbelieving powers to be exterminated; and where sin had abounded, grace must much more abound. In Jericho, sons of prophets were to dwell; and the waters, long bitter, were to be healed; later, blind eyes were to see and that which was lost would be saved. This was God's purpose—one of love and blessing.

The Enemy

It is warfare with no insignificant enemy. By tremendous powers are the hearts which we seek to win for our Master, garrisoned; and moreover, they are more in earnest to retain possession of them than the king of Jericho was to keep his pleasant city. The enemies with whom we have to contend in fighting the Lord's battles are not weak or unskilful. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph.vi.12). What a description of the hosts of evil! Mighty, subtle, experienced, diabolical, are the powers which fortify every heart that is not subject to the law of God.

It is against such an enemy that as soldiers of Jesus Christ, we are to fight. Let us not under-estimate his strength and resources; and with a full realisation of his potential will come also the confirmation that of ourselves we can do nothing, and we shall cease from ourselves and look to Him Who alone is able to bind the strong man and so spoil his goods.

At first sight it may be difficult to understand the utter destruction of the inhabitants of Canaan which was to be carried out under the command of God. As we read the book of Leviticus, however, we find a description of the sins of which these people were guilty; iniquity so horrible that, in the words of Scripture, "the land is defiled and vomiteth out her inhabitants" (Lev.xviii.25). As in the days before the flood, violence and vice had reached such lengths that God, Who is long-suffering and not willing that any should perish, was compelled to say, "the end of all flesh is come before Me; the earth is filled with violence. . . I will destroy them with the

earth" (Gen.vi.13). To Abraham He said "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen.xv.16). Four centuries were to pass and now they were to be cast out, the portion of God's earth which they had defiled was to be rid of their corrupting presence.

When Jesus sent out the twelve on their mission, "cast out devils" was His command, and He gave them power to do so. In Mark's Gospel we read that the promise that accompanied the final command of the Saviour was, "in My Name shall they cast out devils" (Mark xvi.17). They were to claim the hearts of men that were possessed of devils, demoniacal power was to be expelled, its dominion taken away, and its place to become the habitation of the Holy Ghost.

The work is still the same today. The hearts of those who are not subject to Christ are under the power of the devil. He rules their wills, blinds their minds, deadens their consciences and claims the whole man. But he is a usurper. Those same bodies, minds and spirits are the creation and property of Another, and the "prince of this world is to be cast out" (John xii.31). The duty of the soldier of Christ is clear. He is to preach the Gospel to every creature.

The Promise

The promise of the mighty God is on our side. "See", He says, "I have given into thine hand Jericho. . .". It was with this assurance that Joshua set his army in array and advanced to the assault of the city. They were already conquerors.

In the conflict with the powers of evil in these days, the same promise is our strength and encouragement. Was it not the same assurance that was given by Jesus to those who were sent to undertake the apparently impossible task of casting out devils? "Behold", He said, "I give unto you the power to tread on serpents, scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (Luke x.19). Was it not in the same confidence that later, Paul attacked, sometimes single-handed, the citadels of Greece and Rome? He knew that the counsel of the Lord must stand, that His Word must accomplish that which He pleased, and prosper in the thing whereunto He sent it.

This is our strength and encouragement still. This same omnipotent Lord is on our side. Though the enemy is mighty, though superstition and indifference seem still to rule, though the pleasure of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are in command of many fortresses, though Satan and sin have the upper hand in many situations; God is yet our "King", working "salvation in the midst of the earth" (Psm lxxiv.12). The word of Jesus Christ is still true, "all that the Father giveth Me, shall come to Me" (John vi.37).

Let us remember that our enemy is already defeated. The victory has already commenced. Soon, "yet a little while", and the full and final victory shall be won. He Who "was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John.iii.8), will make short work of destruction. Let us then encourage one another to be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might", and in His Name, we can go out and say that "we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us" (Rom.viii.37).

T. D. SPICER

ABRAHAM

THE OFFERING UP OF ISAAC (Genesis xxii)

We rightly regard this chapter as the climax of the story of Abraham. His faith had been tested again and again, and his obedience was demonstrated by the whole course of his pilgrim life, yet now God calls him to meet a far sterner test. God says, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

This tested him in more than one way. First it tested his own heart's attitude to God. It was one thing to say that he put God first in everything, but when it came to giving up his own beloved son—to die—to be made a burnt offering—obedience to such a command seemed more than flesh and blood could achieve.

The words of the command recognised this, seeming to

underline the vastness of the sacrifice. It was "thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest". Moreover it seemed to call in question all that Abraham had learned of the goodness and faithfulness of God. How *could* God take back the son He had given—the reward, too, of so much patient waiting? And how could God's promises of blessing to him come to pass if Isaac died? Was God inconstant or changeable in His declared purpose?

Yet Abraham obeyed without question, rising up early the next morning to begin the journey of three days or more to Mount Moriah. Here was the proof that faith had given him a triumphant answer to all the questions, for though doubtless he could not understand why the sacrifice was required of him, yet he believed (as Hebrews xi. tells us plainly) that God's promises and God's purposes would not fail. God was able to raise his son from the dead. Had not the very birth of Isaac shown God as able to bring life out of death? And so when Abraham told his servants to remain behind, and he and Isaac went on alone he said, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, *and come again* to you."

The three days' journey gave ample time to ponder these things, and Isaac's question "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" brought out his father's inspired answer, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering." The words go ringing down the centuries to the very day when John the Baptist pointed out to his disciples "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

For this offering up of Isaac did not, as we know, take place. The trial of Abraham was allowed to go to the point where he took hold of the knife to slay his son, but no further. The artist has indeed pictured the father's hand raised with the knife, but not so says the Scripture. Abraham had proved his obedience, proved that the will of God was the dominating thing in his life. God says to him, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me."

These are striking words, for we would have thought that

Abraham had proved again and again that he feared God. Yet it might be said that a man would do much to obtain promises such as Abraham had received, if his heart were occupied with his own prosperity. But now Abraham had shown that the will of God was everything to him. Satan could not say, as he had said of Job, Doth he fear God for naught?

However, there is much more to be learned than the proof of Abraham's obedience. For when we consider it, it was always impossible for Isaac to be offered as a sacrifice. Only a sinless victim would do—an animal, at least, was free from sin! So when Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw a ram caught in a thicket by its horns, he offered it up as a burnt offering *instead of his son*. Here is the unique character of this offering on Mount Moriah—God, not man, provided the sacrifice. There is not another such case in the Bible. Abraham's words had come true.

Can we miss here the lesson of substitution? The victim provided by God Himself died instead of a sinful man—but of course, it was only a foreshadowing of the true Sacrifice.

Yet though Isaac could not be the sacrifice, it is in Isaac, the only son of the father, his well beloved, that we see foretold the true character of the Lamb of God when He should appear. And perhaps the unfolding of this wonderful fact was the underlying purpose of God in His call to Abraham to sacrifice his son.

THE BLESSING

“And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham the second time, saying, By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, that because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice.”

Now if we look carefully at these words we see some promises which Abraham had already received *i.e.* that God should

bless him, and multiply his seed, and that all nations should be blessed in him. But two promises are new—that his innumerable seed should be victorious over their enemies, and that in Abraham's *seed* (not just in himself) all nations should be blessed. Now Paul points out in Gal.iii.16 that this last promise, using as it does the singular 'seed' (not seeds, the numerous multiplied descendants) refers to Christ.

Now whether it is the renewal of old promises, or the addition of new, what is noteworthy is that these promises are spoken of as a reward for Abraham's obedience. It is "*because thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son*" that the blessing, with all the solemnity of a divine oath, is bestowed. We may be inclined to ask, How could promises once given absolutely, now be made a reward for obedience—referring, of course to the earlier promises? But this is the wonder of God's sovereign grace, that while all blessing proceeds from Himself, yet He loves to bring people into the secret of His purposes, so as to co-operate with Him, and ourselves help, in our little measure, to bring about the blessing He seeks to bestow. He also wants to see exhibited in our own ways the grace which we have so bountifully received. As Paul says, "Ye are Christ's epistle."

So to Abraham, who had willingly yielded up all to God, it was given, not only to have the blessing of God in the multiplying of his family, but to enjoy the inestimable privilege of being the forefather of the promised Redeemer, the true Lamb of God. And if He was to be, like Isaac, a well beloved, only son, but yet the Lamb of God's providing, who could He be but God's own Son, *His* well beloved?

Did Abraham understand this? We cannot know for sure, but did not the anguish of his father-heart give him the key? At any rate, as we ponder the words "and they went both of them together" do we not obtain some little perception of what the sacrifice of Calvary meant to the divine Father? For He also did not withhold His only Son, Whom He loved, but delivered Him up for us all. And it is perhaps a confirmation of this thought that when God said to Abraham "*because thou hast not withheld thy son*" the expected words "*from Me*"

are *not* added. For what application could they have when the type was fulfilled?

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

UNDER HIS WINGS

“He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust” Psalm xci.4.

It was a lovely spring morning in 1970 when an unusual incident was seen to occur in the garden of a West London home. A group of sparrows and other small birds gathered on the lawn were enjoying the scraps of food that had been thrown there for them. Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, a brownish grey streak came down from the sky and a sparrow lay dead on the grass, killed in an instant by the sharp beak of a sparrow hawk, and was as quickly carried away. The fact that the sparrow had no refuge when the hawk struck led the writer to reflect upon the scriptures and thoughts which are the substance of this article. These thoughts are well expressed in the words of the hymn:

*“As the bird beneath her feathers
 Guards the objects of her care,
 So the Lord his people gathers,
 Spreads his wings, and hides them there:
 Thus protected,
 All their foes they boldly dare.”*

This beautiful simile expresses the salvation, the security, the comfort, the assurance and the joy of those who take shelter beneath the wings of the true and living God, who hide beneath the shelter of the precious blood of Christ, and abide in His constant and unchanging love.

There are four main thoughts.

1. Under His wings there is Refuge—a Hiding Place.

The wing of a bird outstretched to cover her young forms a perfect arch. The bones that form its construction, although light, are intensely strong and give the greatest possible protection to the young birds which shelter there. David fleeing from

Saul, who sought to kill him, hid in a cave in the mountains. But was it a secure hiding place? David knew a better—an impregnable refuge! So he writes, "My soul trusteth in Thee: yea in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge" (Psalm lvii.1.). This expresses his resolve. His request is found in Psalm xvii.8. "Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of Thy wings". Then in Psalm xxxii.7 there is the realization, his request is granted, his prayer is abundantly answered, "Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."

The salvation that we need, both from the guilt of our sins and from the power of sin in our lives; as also from the subtle and persistent attacks of our arch-enemy, and from the trials, sorrows and difficulties of the pathway, is to be found only in the refuge that God has provided beneath the all-powerful sheltering wings of our Lord and Saviour.

2. Under His wings there is Love.

"How excellent is Thy loving kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings" (Psalm xxxvi.7).

The underside of the protecting wing of the mother bird is lined with the softest feathers. They provide warmth and comfort for the young birds which nestle there. This may be likened to the precious love of our gracious Lord which is known and enjoyed only by those who dwell beneath the shadow of His wings, who abide close to His loving heart.

A child deprived of mother love does not thrive and grow like one who is surrounded daily by the warmth and assurance that the mother's love affords. So for ourselves, we are the losers if we deprive ourselves of that which is our constant need, the present enjoyment of the warmth of our Saviour's love. It is for this reason that it is written "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21). And, "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John xv.9-10).

3. Under His wings we may safely Trust.

“I will trust in the covert of Thy wings” (Psalm lxi.4). When the hawk swoops, woe to the bird that is exposed to its fierce attack! But the little chicks who are sheltering beneath the protecting wing of the hen may trust there with absolute confidence. She will defend them to the death if necessary. After a prairie fire had swept across a country district in North America, a relief party rode out from another town to help. Near a charred, blackened cottage a hen was sitting on the ground in an unusual way with its wings spread out. It was now quite dead and had obviously suffered severely from the fire, the head and back being almost a cinder. A man moved the hen with his foot and three little chickens ran out. She had covered them with her wing in the face of the roaring fire, giving her life rather than that one of them should be hurt.

This is the lovely simile used by the Lord Jesus in His lament over Jerusalem, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not” (Matthew xxiii.37). It saddened His heart that when He had come from heaven to earth to save and shelter His covenant people Israel, they would not come to Him. In contrast to Israel’s unbelief, the book of Ruth records the sweet story of a Gentile stranger, born in the land of Moab, who had grown up surrounded by the wickedness and temptations of that idolatrous land, whom God called to Himself. In her heart she heard His call and responded, putting her trust in the true and living God so that Boaz could say to her, “The LORD recompence thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under Whose wings thou art come to trust” (Ruth ii.12).

4. Under His wings there is Joy.

“Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice” (Psalm lxiii.7).

In the Old Testament it is written, “Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart” (Isaiah lxxv.14); but this is exceeded

by the words of the Lord Jesus in John xv.ii, "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

There is no joy to compare with the joy of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, but for this joy to be unalloyed we must abide in full communion beneath the shadow of His wings.

There was a very blessed sequel to the incident recorded in the first paragraph of this article. A few months later the lady at whose home the incident occurred was admitted to hospital suffering from a disease which was to claim her life within a few weeks. It was there, during her last few days on earth, that she learned to pray in her own words, "Hide me under the shadow of Thy wings, Glorious Lord Jesus Christ." We may be assured that the Lord Who responded so graciously to the "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom" of the dying thief, received her under His wings also.

A. E. JORDAN

PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS

"Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph.v.19).

Some translators, perhaps not understanding how we can speak to ourselves in this way, render the words 'speaking to one another'. But singing seems a queer way of teaching or exhorting one another—it seems to smack of insincerity, akin to the practice of using prayer for a similar purpose. Now singing, even if we are alone, is a capital means of cheering and encouraging our hearts, by bringing the things of the Lord before us. It can lift us above circumstances, and remind us of our countless blessings. Thus we may speak to *ourselves*, and at the same time make melody in our hearts to the Lord, Who rejoices in our rejoicing.

Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

What are the distinctive marks of each of these? It is diffi-

cult to distinguish with any certainty between psalms and hymns, but the writer suggests that by 'psalms' Paul meant chiefly the Old Testament Book of Psalms. Though many of them are not entirely suitable for Christian use, many are, especially if it be remembered that the verse we are considering appears to deal with private rather than assembly use.

Now 'hymns' certainly have as their object the worship and praise of God, and of course of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in this are to be distinguished from spiritual songs. These last have as their themes the blessings which God has showered so abundantly upon His believing people. Thus incidental themes would include thanksgiving, exhortation and encouragement. It is obvious that many compositions are a blend of both classes.

Thus when we come together for worship and the remembrance of the Lord Jesus, hymns—in the sense suggested above—are appropriate for use. The glories of the Lord and the wonder of His love, the perfection of His redemptive work—themes such as these (this is no restricted *list*) are the material for the true hymn. But perhaps it needs emphasizing that a hymn is no mere recital of scriptural truths—however glorious and blessed—however accurately expressed. If it does not bring and keep the Lord Himself before the soul in such a way as to stir the heart, it does not deserve to be called a hymn.

In this connection the writer would record his belief that many hymns are quite unnecessarily spoiled by altering them, especially to make an 'individual' hymn into a collective one. Some, of course, such as "When I survey the wondrous cross" need little attention to effect this change; yet even then very little is gained. To pour contempt on one's pride is an intensely individual action, and to put it in collective terms and say "we pour" merely makes it that much less real.

"Be filled with the Spirit."

In this scripture, being filled with the Spirit is connected with its consequence in leading us to sing. There are, of course, many other effects. But the effect here is a reciprocal one—

(Continued inside front cover)

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from the Scripture of Truth

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CONTENTS

God's Redemptive Purpose	61
Abraham: Sarah's Death and Isaac's Marriage	65
The Praise of Men	68
New Testament Sacrifices	71

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WORDS OF HELP

A Magazine for Believers

(Continued from inside back cover)

ourselves have experienced, then we shall, if our praise is sincere, desire to imitate Him. And this is what He desires in His children, that His own love should find expression in them. His goodness has been displayed in a world of ruin and misery, and can we be indifferent to what so moved our loving God? So another scripture says, "While we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith".

Note the word "opportunity". It is not a legal claim, but rather a question of an opportunity to glorify God by showing a Christlike compassion.

"To do good, and communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

We might note that the exhortation is not addressed to the wealthy, but to those who a few years before had suffered the spoiling of their goods for the Lord's sake (x.34). But whether poor or rich, the call to give to those in need affords an opportunity to make sacrifices (yes, sacrifices) well pleasing to God. But this also must be "by Him", that is, in the name of our Lord and Saviour. In communist countries believers are again suffering—loss of employment, and heavy, impoverishing fines, because of their confession of His name. So Christian organisations which send help to them deserve every support from us. We may instance also help to the Lord's servants, and remember Paul's words of thanks to the Philippians who sent to supply his need, where he described their gift as "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God" (Phil. iv.18).

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PURPOSE

The time of Israel's deliverance from Egypt was at hand. The divine revelation to Moses at the bush makes clear that the plan emanated from God Himself. How beautiful and comprehensive the language! "I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. iii.7-8).

In considering Israel's deliverance from Egypt, our purpose is to see it as a foreshadowing of that great and eternal redemption which has been accomplished for us who believe in Christ Jesus. In this we shall find some great essentials of that redemption clearly illustrated.

We have already remarked that God Himself initiated everything: Israel had no hand in it at all. How this reminds us of our own lost and helpless condition! Dead in trespasses and sins, our redemption is entirely owing to God's mercy. Moreover Israel, at least, were the descendants of Abraham, and as such God calls them "My people which are in Egypt". They had some claim upon God's faithfulness. But Gentiles had not even this. They 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".

Yet it is the same God Who said "I have *seen* the affliction of My people . . . I have *heard* their cry . . . I *know* their sorrows . . ." Who is the author of *our* salvation. Here is the picture of God's love for a lost world, expressed in His own words. Thus as we consider the seven "I will"s in Ex. vi.6-8 in which Jehovah speaks of His sevenfold purpose to deliver Israel, we get glimpses of His eternal purpose in Christ.

1. Rest from their heavy burdens.

The first part of the message was, "*I am Jehovah, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians*".

How these poor slaves needed rest! Making bricks without straw was hard and constant labour made even more bitter by the lashes of their cruel taskmasters. Surely in the service of sin there is no rest, but the Lord Jesus Christ offers relief from the burden of sin and guilt. He says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" — rest of conscience first, for this is the initial need of the sinner, and then rest of heart for the believing one who is subject to Him. For He goes on to say, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls".

2. **Deliverance from the power of the enemy.**

"I will rid you out of their bondage." The enemy's power was to be broken, and the downtrodden slaves were to be completely freed. There is no escape from the bondage of sin and Satan but by the direct intervention of our great Redeemer. As those who have been redeemed we can give thanks to the Father Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. i.13). God's delivering grace comes to us not to provide comfort in the house of bondage, but to bring us into perfect liberty in Christ. "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

3. **Redemption by power.**

"I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments." Such is the sinful condition of man that redemption and judgment are closely linked together in the saving work of God. Before the children of Israel could be set free the judgments of God had to be poured out upon Egypt. And while the believing people were perfectly safe when sheltered by the blood of the slain lamb, their deliverance was not complete until God's stretched out arm had brought them through the Red Sea and destroyed their enemies. Then it could be said, "Thus the Lord saved Israel out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore" (Ex. xiv.30-31). Let us remember that our blessed Redeemer endured the judgment

of God against sin on the Cross, and the power of God then raised Him from the dead, triumphant over all His and His people's foes.

4. **God's claim on His own.**

"I will take you to Me for a people." God's great desire was to possess the people for His own, as Moses reminds them in Deut. iv.20: "But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto Him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day." The end of redemption is possession. "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price," Paul says in 1 Cor. vi.20. So Peter in his first epistle, Ye "in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God" (1 Pet. ii.10). Indeed we can say with the apostle John, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God . . . Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John iii.1-2). This is all the blessed fruit of redemption.

5. **Assurance of God's favour.**

"I will be to you a God." Not only would they be His people, but He would be their God. The more they entered into the fact that they were His people, the greater would be their realisation that He was their God, the One Whose divine resources could at all times meet every need and bring them into the blessing of full redemption. So here He says, "I will be your God; and ye shall know that I, Jehovah your God, am He that bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians" (JND).

How wonderful the message of the Risen Lord to Mary Magdalene, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John xx.17). The One Whom the patriarchs knew as the Almighty, and Whom Israel knew as Jehovah, has revealed Himself to us as Father. God has sent forth His Son that we might receive adoption as sons. And because we

are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father.

6. **The Promised Land would be theirs.**

"I will bring you into the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." God undertakes to bring the people into the land He had promised their fathers, thus bringing to fruition all His purposes of blessing. Does not this imply complete protection and guidance right on till His purpose is finally accomplished, and every one of His own is safely home in the land? Let us remind ourselves that we too have a great High Priest Who is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them. The fact that He lives for ever and intercedes for us ensures that we shall be brought safely through every trial of the pilgrim journey right on to the uttermost end of time. How assured the end if we have such a guide and protector! As the hymnwriter expresses it:

*"Most merciful High Priest,
Our Saviour, Shepherd, Friend,
'Tis in Thy love alone we trust
Until the end.*

*Thou wilt our souls sustain,
Our Guide and strength wilt be,
Until in glory, Lord, above
Thy face we see."*

7. **The promise of a great inheritance.**

"I will give it to you for a heritage." The land would be theirs to possess and enjoy, God's gift to His people, a lasting heritage. As strangers and pilgrims on earth we have a great and eternal heritage before us — "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away", reserved in heaven for us, and meanwhile we are preserved by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (see 1 Peter i. 3-5). Our Lord Himself assured His disciples, "In My Father's house are many mansions (or

abiding places). I go to prepare a place for you". And He has pledged Himself to bring us safely there, for He goes on to say, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also".

8. Assurance that all will be accomplished.

It is worthy of notice that the whole passage concludes with the repetition of the statement with which the message began: "I am Jehovah." He is thus the Yea and the Amen, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of their redemption. All is made to rest entirely upon Himself, and in no way depends upon their merit or behaviour. All is begun and completed by Himself, Jehovah, the Self-existing Eternal God. So for us it is in the Lord Himself, Whose name was called Jesus (Jehovah the Saviour), that we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Eph. i.7).

R. A. CREETH

ABRAHAM

SARAH'S DEATH AND ISAAC'S MARRIAGE

For over sixty years Abraham and Sarah had shared a pilgrim's life in the land of Canaan, and now Sarah had died. The Epistle to the Hebrews points out that the long sojourn of the patriarchs as strangers in the land which God had promised should be theirs showed that they looked for a city of which God was the builder. To have had a companion with whom to share this forward looking faith must have meant much to Abraham, and now that she had died he knew that she was in God's care till the time came to fulfil His promise. The Lord Jesus quoted the words spoken by God to Moses at the bush, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob" with the comment "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him". Sarah, now dead to Abraham, was not dead to God!

The question of Sarah's burial was approached by Abraham in the same spirit of faith. A burying place he must

acquire from the sons of Heth among whom he sojourned, and, as was the custom, when he made his need known, and indicated his wish to buy the cave of Machpelah belonging to Ephron, it was offered to him as a gift. But Abraham would not accept as a gift even a small part of the land of promise, until God Himself gave the whole of it according to His word. So he bought it; and "the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying place by the sons of Heth".

There seems little reason to doubt the identity (as it is now pointed out) of the site containing the carefully guarded tomb. Pharaoh's pyramids have been plundered, but not the tomb of Abraham and Sarah.

ISAAC'S BRIDE

Abraham was now 137 years old, but he had still 38 years to live. The Scripture notes that the Lord had blessed him in all things. What does this mean? We may perhaps read the statement in the light of Proverbs x.22, "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it." Abraham was blessed with great wealth, and a household which feared God (as the Lord Himself testified), and was therefore at peace, in contrast with Jacob's unhappy experiences.

Abraham now set himself to getting Isaac married, and, seeing the need to avoid the idolatrous Canaanites around him, planned to get him a wife from among his relatives at Haran. The importance he attached to this matter may be judged from the fact that he chose no less than his chief servant Eliezer, who had charge of all his affairs, to undertake it.

It was certainly a sufficiently responsible and indeed onerous task to find a suitable wife for Isaac, the long awaited heir, but Eliezer foresaw the further difficulty of persuading her to give up the city life to become a tent dweller. But his question "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me into this land; must I needs bring thy son back unto the land from which thou camest?" shows how he understood Abraham's feeling in the matter — that Isaac should go back

was just unthinkable.

Abraham's answer emphasized this, and then he added, "The Lord God of heaven, which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence". Thus Abraham in effect left the choice of Isaac's wife with God; his servant fully entered into this, as we see from his prayer by the well at Haran (Gen. xxiv.13,14).

Accordingly, Abraham made his servant swear to do as he had said. At the same time, if in the end the chosen woman would not come, Eliezer was to be free from his oath. How sure was Abraham's touch in all this! His own faith led him to promise God's help to his servant, but the servant must be left free — he must not be *compelled* to act on the faith of another. However, the story brings out how fully Eliezer did share his master's faith — a further tribute to Abraham, that the consistency of his faith inspired his servant to a like faith.

Abraham in person now disappears from the chapter, but yet seems to pervade it still. For the servant, appropriately enough never named, keeps the name of his master and his master's son in prominence, and himself in the background. Even his prayer is addressed to the "Lord God of my master Abraham". It is thus that the Holy Spirit is occupied with making known the glories of Christ, in order to gather out the Church as His bride in the coming day.

This is virtually the end of the Scripture record of Abraham's life, and as we look back we cannot but be struck by the way in which faith pervaded every aspect of his living. Truly he exemplified the saying, "The just shall *live by faith*, and what an example he has left us!

Note on chapter xxv.1-6.

The word "then" at the beginning of the chapter seems to be without authority, so that the verses 1-6 are not to be read as a sequel to chapter xxiv. It is merely a detached statement about Abraham's other sons. It is another indication of the divine origin of the Scriptures, and of the divine

purpose in the record of Abraham and his sons, that is, Isaac and Ishmael. What would not fit into the pattern is omitted, and added here for the purpose of record. That at least, is how it seems to the present writer.

When Abraham married Keturah is not stated, and though in verse 1 she is called a wife, her children are evidently included with the sons of the concubines in verse 6, as only Ishmael is joined with Isaac in the burial of their father (verse 9).

Abraham sent them away while he lived, evidently so that only the family of promise should be left, even as sojourners, in the land of promise.

E. H. CHAMBERLAIN

THE PRAISE OF MEN (part of a letter to a friend)

It gives me much pleasure to see your translation of — . I reserve the pleasure of reading it, or rather of having it read to me, for moments in which the Lord says to us as He did to the apostles, "Come ye yourselves apart . . . and rest a little". But I cannot refrain from telling you, my dear friend, that the pleasure that the appearance of your work gave me has been somewhat abated by the too favourable opinion which you have expressed in your preface respecting me.

Before I had read a word in your translation, I made a present of a copy to a very dear and sincere friend of mine, who brought me word that you had spoken in praise of my piety in your preface. The passage produced the same effect on my friend that it did on me, when I afterwards saw it. I hope, therefore, that you will not take in ill-part what I am about to say to you on the subject, and which is the fruit of a tolerably long experience.

Pride is the greatest of all evils that beset us, it is that which dies the slowest and hardest; even the children of the world are able to discern this. Madame de Stael said, on her death-bed, "Do you know what is the last thing to die in man? It is self-love".

God hates pride above all things because it gives to man that place that belongs to Him who is above, exalted over all. Pride intercepts communion with God, and draws down His chastisement, for God resists the proud. He will destroy the name of the proud, and we are told that there is a day appointed when "the loftiness of man shall be bowed down and the haughtiness of man shall be brought low".

I am sure, then, that you will feel, my dear friend, that one cannot do another a greater injury than by praising him and feeding his pride. A man that flatters his neighbour spreads a net for his steps, and a flattering mouth works ruin. Be assured, moreover, that we are too short-sighted to be able to judge of the degree of our brother's piety; we are not able to judge it aright without the balance of the sanctuary, and that is in the hand of Him who searches the heart.

Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, and makes manifest the counsels of the hearts, and renders to every man his praise. Till then let us not judge our brothers whether for good or for evil, but with becoming moderation; and let us remember that the surest and best judgment is what we form of ourselves when we esteem others better than ourselves.

If I were to ask you how you know that I am one of the most advanced in the Christian career, and an eminent servant of God, you would, no doubt, be at a loss to reply. You would perhaps cite my published works; but do you know, my dear friend, you who can preach an edifying sermon as well as I can — that the eyes see further than the feet go? Unhappily we are not always nor in all things what our sermons are; that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassingness of the power may be of God, and not from us".

I will not tell you the opinion I have of myself, for in doing so I shall probably all the while be seeking my own glory; and while seeking my own glory appear humble, which I am not.

The most eminent Christian is one whom no one has ever

heard speak, some poor labourer or servant, whose all is Christ, and who does all for His eye, and His alone. The first shall be last. Let us be persuaded, my dear friend, to praise the Lord alone. He only is worthy of being praised, revered and adored. His goodness is never sufficiently celebrated. The song of the blessed in Rev. v. praises but Him who has redeemed them with His blood.

Let us strive to bring our hearts into unison with that song in which we all hope that our feeble voices will one day mingle. This will be our happiness even here below, and contribute to God's glory, which is wronged by the praise which Christians too often bestow on each other. We cannot have two mouths — one for God's praise and one for man's.

May we then, do now what the seraphims do above, who with two wings cover their faces, as a token of their confusion before the holy presence of the Lord; and with two cover their feet, as if to hide their steps from themselves; and with the remaining two fly to execute their Lord's will, while they cry "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory".

Excuse these few lines of Christian exhortation, which I am sure will, sooner or later become useful to you, by becoming part of your own experience. Remember me in your prayers, as I pray that the blessing of the Lord may rest upon you and your labours.

If you ever print another edition — as I hope you will — strike out, if you please, the two passages to which I have drawn your attention, and call me simply "a brother and minister in the Lord". This is honour enough and needs no addition.

J. N. DARBY

Editor's Note.

It may be felt that the tone of this letter is somewhat severe, though doubtless it was provoked by rather fulsome expressions of praise. A man much in the public eye is of course specially open to Satan's attacks on the score of pride. Yet it is surely undesirable to encourage the niggardly spirit

which can never praise anyone or anything, a spirit which proceeds ultimately from jealousy and envy.

The Lord Jesus indeed condemned unsparingly the spirit which *seeks* praise from men (e.g., Matt. vi.1-6; John v.44; xii.43), but this is another thing altogether. We find that the apostle Paul frequently acknowledged the good in others, as for example Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. xvi.3,4); the unnamed brother in 2 Cor. viii.18; Epaphroditus (Phil. ii.25-30) and many others.

The core of the matter is surely that no man is capable of forming a true judgment of another, as indeed J. N. Darby's letter says, and what good anyone is able to do or what spiritual progress he makes is to the praise of Him Whose grace works in us.

One point seems to call for special mention. The letter states that God's reason for hating pride is that "it gives to man that place that belongs to Him Who is above, exalted over all". We must be careful that we do not attribute to God what is so hateful in man! Is it not rather that God hates pride because it frustrates His purpose of blessing for man, shutting him out from the knowledge of God — that gift above all gifts which He seeks to bestow upon us?

Nothing that man can do or say can diminish the glory of God, but pride in human achievement prevents man from seeing it. Likewise God seeks worship from man, not because it enhances His glory — as though it could! — but because it is the insight into the wonder of His wisdom and love and power which comes with worship that makes possible our highest blessing — communion with God. Thus it is another expression of His marvellous love, as He seeks to open to us those treasures — the knowledge of Himself in Christ. This is eternal life (John xvii.3).

NEW TESTAMENT SACRIFICES

"By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips confessing His name. But to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such

sacrifices God is well pleased." (Hebrews xiii.15,16).

A right emphasis in reading the Scriptures is always essential, and there can be no doubt, from the context, that the right understanding of the above exhortation depends on emphasizing the first two words: "By Him".

The Epistle to the Hebrews sets out to show, in a systematic way, the surpassing excellence of Christ the Son of God, as His people's hope, in His once for all offered sacrifice and His unchangeable priesthood; while in the verses preceding our text His people are warned against anything that competes with Him for our attention and devotion.

Two kinds of sacrifice are mentioned, in place of the many sacrifices under the old or Jewish dispensation, and both are intimately connected with His name.

To offer the sacrifice of praise to God *by Him* implies, first of all, that we cannot join with men of other religions — Jews, Mohammedans, or Hindus — in the worship of God, as is sometimes advocated today. Narrowminded or bigoted we may be called, but we must gather "outside the camp" (verse 13) to worship, that is, apart from any (even if they call themselves Christians) who do not acknowledge the glory of His person and the cleansing value of His blood.

Then "By Him *therefore*" implies that we take our stand upon all the foregoing truths of the Epistle. To offer acceptable praise to God we must have, as chapter x.22 insists, a purged conscience, and a life maintained in moral purity by God's holy word. It is to Him only that we owe the very possibility of this, and the Spirit Who comes to indwell those whom Christ has cleansed is the only power by which fallible creatures like ourselves can truly praise Him.

Now we may think it strange that to offer praise to God is called a sacrifice. What exactly do we sacrifice? Now this brings out the difference between the two dispensations, for the fact is, it is impossible for poor sinners, as we are, to bring anything of our own to God. All we can do is to acknowledge *His* giving. Like Abraham of old, we find that God must Himself provide the sacrifice — His own beloved Son. We must sacrifice every claim to be anything, or to bring

anything to Him, except our hearts' appreciation of the wonders of His love. Only, such worship, if it be real, cannot be done lightly. Preparation of heart is needed; we shall bring very little worship to Him on Sunday if we have never thought of Him all the week.

But the word "continually" reminds us that much more is meant here than attendance at a worship meeting once a week. "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together" is important, but continual praise ought to be the response from hearts that are feasting upon such a love as our Saviour's.

The fruit of our lips.

Why this emphasis on audible worship? Perhaps because, though only what comes from the heart can be acceptable to God, only audible worship can be a witness to Him. A prime function of the gathering of God's people is thus to bring our audible praise to Him. And though only one voice at a time may be heard in prayer or thanksgiving, all should join in the Amen so as to make the prayer their own — brothers and sisters alike. And every voice can join in singing, however unmusical the result may be to some ears.

Confessing His name.

This is the true translation. To acknowledge the worth of His name — that is worship, as the word implies. His name represents Himself, the glories of His person and His work. To acknowledge that all that we have and are we owe to Him, to proclaim the excellence of His salvation which itself displays His glory, to adore Himself as the source of it all — this is the sacrifice of praise.

Now in our scripture the sacrifice of praise is put first, because it is addressed to God Himself; the second kind of sacrifice — the communicating of our substance — we are exhorted not to forget; a sure reminder of the danger of our doing so.

If we praise God for His goodness, goodness which we

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