

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

*Pleading for a complete return to Christianity
as it was in the beginning*

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FOR OUR ADMONITION

A few mornings ago, local people woke up to find that a huge well-known commercial building had disappeared during the night, and all that was left were some smoking embers and a few twisted girders. In a few hours a lifetime's business endeavour had been reduced to cinders. (And, of course, on a very much larger scale, the massive "Twin Towers" in New York, recently disappeared in a few hours). Such events highlight life's uncertainty, and convince us that we can never take anything for granted. Business empires, built up steadily over many generations, can very often disappear overnight because of fire, fraud, movements on the Stock Exchange, or political upheaval. Likewise a man can spend a lifetime in building up a good reputation (for personal integrity) and lose it in a moment because of some temporary lapse, or sudden indiscretion. Think of the number of respected schoolmasters who have had to move to another part of the country once they became Scoutmasters, or the number of vicars who have absconded with young Choirmistresses. There is, of course, a difference between *reputation* and *character*. It has been said that the nice, polished apples at the top of the barrel reflect the greengrocer's *reputation*, whereas the small damaged apples hidden underneath reflect his true character. Solomon said that "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches," but many have preferred the latter and in doing so have besmirched the former. "How are the mighty fallen," was David's lament at the fall of Saul and Jonathan, but many thousands of the much less illustrious have fallen since, and are yet to fall. "Pride goes before a fall" we read in Proverbs, and none of us can afford to be complacent, or too confident. Let him that thinketh he standeth beware, lest he fall. Changes can happen overnight - a lifetime's endeavour can perish in a few hours. Who knows what a day can bring?

WRITTEN FOR OUR ADMONITION. (1 Cor. 10)

When Paul exhorted the Christians at Corinth against the dangers of falling away from the Church, how did he go about the task? How did he accomplish his purpose? He cites to them a portion of Jewish history. In the previous chapter Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to avoid all that might cause *weaker brethren* to fall, and referred to the efforts that he, himself, made to avoid being 'a castaway'. Paul, after all, went to great lengths, and worked with his own hands, that he might not be a burden on any church, and that he might always show an example worthy of copy. Paul admits the truth of Moses' words, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox" as having reference to preachers (more than to oxen) but notwithstanding this he preached at his own expense,

and suffered all privations, lest he should hinder the gospel. Paul 'bent over backwards' in every situation that he might not offend a brother or cause a weaker brother to fall.

(1) **The Analogy.** In this chapter (10) Paul includes *everybody* - not just 'the weaker brethren'. The portion of Jewish history he cites begins with the Jewish exodus from Egypt to Canaan, acting, as it does, as a type of the Christian's journey from here to heaven, from sin to salvation. The flight from Egypt by the Jews began with their 'baptism' in the cloud and in the Sea (The Red Sea). The sojourn of the Christian likewise begins with emergence from the watery grave of baptism. The Israelites having thus fled from Egypt, escaped from Pharaoh, and entered upon their march, with Moses as their leader, even as Christians leave the Egypt of sin behind, and start upon a new life, with Christ at their head. *Theodoret*, one of the Church 'Fathers', endorses such an analogy and says, "The sea of transition (The Red Sea) represents the laver of regeneration, Moses foreshadows Christ, Israel the baptised disciples, the pursuing Egyptians are the sins left behind, and Pharaoh is a type of the devil." Having prefaced his remarks with the introduction of this general scenario, Paul proceeds to pursue his purpose and extract the lessons.

(2) **The Similarity.** Paul stresses that all the Israelites passed through the sea, and under the cloud, and "were *all* baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea". No preferential treatment was given - *all* entered the journey in the same way and on identical terms. So is it with the disciples of Christ in their baptism - *all* must pass through the bath of regeneration and *all* begin on the same footing and from the same starting point. There are no special dispensations for the favoured few. Similarly, says Paul, the Israelites did all eat the same spiritual meat (the manna) and drink the same spiritual drink (the spiritual rock which followed them, and that was Christ). Faced with these facts; that no preferential treatment was recognised amongst literal Israel, and that the analogy between the sojourn of the Israelites and the Christian life was a valid one, the Corinthians could hardly object to Paul's comparisons. All the Corinthians had been baptised and all were eating the same spiritual meat and drinking the same spiritual drink.

(3) **The Sins and consequences.** Notwithstanding all that God had accomplished on behalf of literal Israel, "God was not well pleased" with many of them, says Paul, and overthrew many thousands of them in the wilderness. "Now these things were our examples," continues Paul, "to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted." Many of the Israelites yearned to return to the 'fleshpots of Egypt', of course, just as there may be some in the Church who might occasionally cast a longing glance back at the practices of sin. "Neither be ye idolaters", says Paul, "as were some of them." To be guilty of idolatry does not necessitate the setting up of an icon or totem-pole and our bowing down to it, but such a sin can consist of *virtually anything* we allow to come between us and our Saviour. Paul then refers to the sin of fornication (which was one of the besetting sins of the Corinthians) and says that because of this sin 23,000 Israelites died in only one day (Num.24:9). "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents." Numbers 21 describes how the children of Israel "were much discouraged because of the way" and spake against Moses and against God, saying "wherefore hast thou brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" The fiery serpents bit many and "much people of Israel died". Paul in recounting the tragedy adds, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer".

(4) **The Lesson.** The Corinthians are thus invited to reflect upon what befell the children of Israel in their wanderings subsequent to their escape from bondage. Many Jews failed to see the land of glory because of the sins just described by Paul - (1) a desire for evil things: (2) Idolatry: (3) fornication: (4) Discontent in times of hardship: (5) a desire to return to old ways, and back into sin, "Now all these things" concludes Paul, "happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for *our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the world are come. *Wherefore*, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." God, apparently, still deals with sin in this final dispensation (in which *we* live) as He did with Israel of old, and so we should profit by a consideration of these historical facts. *Presumption* is the greatest of all dangers, and we are less likely to fall if we are conscious of the possibility. He who realises the danger will be on his guard. No-one is too strong to fall - none is immune.

IT CAN'T HAPPEN TO ME

Clearly Paul had never heard of the 'Once saved - always saved' doctrine which still seems to float about in the world. His admonition to the Corinthians to 'take heed lest they fall' was surely extremely foolish if they could not possibly fall. I suggest that the doctrine (Once saved - always saved) began in the Garden of Eden, and originated with the devil. God said to Adam and Eve "Thou shalt surely die" if you disobey - in contradiction the devil said, "Thou shalt not surely die". The apostle Paul says that Christians can readily fall - the devil says that Christians cannot fall. Paul was not alone in his many exhortations to steadfastness. The apostle Peter also urged his brethren "... to give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." Making our calling sure depends, it seems, upon us being *diligent*. If *we do these things*, says Peter, we shall never fall. What things? - adding to our faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience Godliness; and to Godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity (love). If *we do these things*, says Peter, we shall never fall. The New Testament teems with warnings, admonitions, exhortations, urgings and beseechings by Christ's apostles that we should "remain steadfast in the faith." The writer to the Hebrews laments the waywardness of the children of Israel and refers to God's disgust of them during their 40 years in the wilderness. He adds that Christians too could fall for the same reason - "Take heed brethren, lest haply there should be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God" Heb. 3:12. "Let us therefore fear" he says, "lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest any of you should seem to come short of it." (Heb. 4:1).

WHAT CAN SEPARATE US

Let us not be influenced by the 'Once saved - always saved' syndrome, even although it may come to us from fervent evangelical people. It is difficult to believe that Ananias and Sapphira, or Demas, died in a 'saved' condition. Neither let us place any confidence in man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for we see, even from our own short history as churches of Christ that men (and congregations) are liable to slide into denominationalism, and that each hundred years we need a fresh 'Restoration Movement'. A fire during the night can destroy a vast building - one generation of careless Christians can lead the Church into sinful (albeit popular) digression. It is easy to be swayed by the crowd and look for 'safety' in numbers. Human reasoning declared the *'Titanic'* unsinkable. "How are the mighty fallen" wailed David in stunned disbelief. "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" asks Paul, "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or

sword?" No, none of these things, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God." (Rom. 8:35). What then, indeed, can separate us from the love of Christ? *Only we, ourselves, can, External forces* cannot separate us from God's love, but *our own indifference* can. Like the Laodiceans, if we become lukewarm, Jesus will spew us out of His mouth. It is plain that we can separate ourselves from God's love because Jude exhorts us (21) to "Keep yourselves in the love of God". Jesus, Himself, said "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".

Who can tell what will be tomorrow? (Who could possibly have imagined the destruction of the Twin Towers)? We can never take things for granted in this world and, as Paul says, must be diligent and watchful. God has considered it necessary to remind spiritual Israel what befell physical Israel, and invites us to profit from the comparison. Presumption, or over-confidence, seems to be the real danger, and the feeling that it could never happen to us (to others, yes, but not to us). This doubtless prompted these words from Paul (v.12); "Therefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall". Falling, is, it seems, always a possibility.

EDITOR.

DEEP WATER

In Luke 5:1-11 we read of events as Jesus is just commencing His teaching ministry. On this particular day as He taught the Word of God, the crowds were pressing so close, that He could not adequately teach them. Seeing two fishing boats hauled up on the shore he asks Simon Peter (not yet a disciple) to take him out a short distance from the shore so that He might be better heard by the crowd from his floating pulpit. To our modern minds this would be a quaint scene with the shore lined with the Jews in their colourful robes and Jesus sitting in the boat teaching them.

Peter must have felt quite honoured and important as he took this new prophet out in his boat and listened to Jesus and watched the crowd. Peter would also feel the natural authority of Jesus that had drawn the crowd to follow Him. As a devout Jew, Peter would respect every Prophet of God even though he possibly knew Jesus was only a carpenter from Nazareth. Perhaps Peter would remember what Amos the O.T. prophet had said about his own background and calling. *'I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.'* Amos 7:14-15.

When He has finished teaching Jesus instructs Peter vv4-5 to "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." They had fished all-night and caught nothing. They must have been weary and ready for bed. I wonder if Peter felt like saying to Jesus 'You stick to joinery and preaching but leave the fishing to me!' But Peter answered "...nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." He was certainly very penitent when he saw the size of the catch, indeed he needed John and James to help land it. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" He knew that this was not just a good-luck catch and immediately recognised the authority and powers of Jesus. He was well rewarded that day for the use of his boat and for "Launching out into the deep"

We all like to live in the shallow and easy waters of life. We don't want to get out of our depth. We like to see where we are going so we paddle and don't venture into unknown or deep waters. Christianity is the great adventure of life where we are required to venture out by faith into deeper water. As Paul told the Corinthians *'For we walk by faith, not by sight.'* Paul had followed where the Gospel led. His own ministry was one non-stop experience. Quite literally he had gone in at the deep end for when shipwrecked he had spent a 'day and a night in the Deep.' 2 Cor 11:25. The apostles quite literally took their lives in their hands when they stood for Christ Jesus. They had learned from their time with Jesus, that, launching out into the deep was the norm for those who followed Jesus.

SOME EXAMPLES

Launching into the deep has always been a part of the call of God. Just consider the following brief examples.

ABRAHAM launched into the deep when he followed the call of God as Heb 11:8-10 tells us. **"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."** That journey through Egypt was not uneventful. Abraham feared for his life on a number of occasions yet he trusted in the promise that God had made to him in Gen. 15:1 **"Do not be afraid, Abraham. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."** Abraham lived in the Promised Land in his tent with Isaac and Jacob but it would be 430 years before the Jews finally inherited the Promised Land and settled there!

He faced a very uncertain future because his faith was placed firmly in God and so can we.

DANIEL was a godly young man of wisdom and courage but he was a prisoner-of-war in Babylon. Our advice might have been to "Keep your head down Daniel, don't cause any trouble." Self-preservation would have been an understandable attitude in the circumstances. He was an able and principled man as Dan 1:4 tells us, **"gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace. V8. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself"** Living by his principles, he went to the top and did serve before the king. Dan 1:21.

When jealousy reared its ugly head and his worship of God challenged, his faith stood firm. His courage was tested in the Den of Lions. He continued to live by faith and God blessed him so that he prospered even in a foreign land. Even when life had been hard and was getting harder Daniel could still launch out into the deep for God. Can we?

DAVID was the one who came from Shepherd boy to be King of Israel. The turning point of his life is generally perceived to be his challenge to fight Goliath, a giant of a man. Probably it occurred earlier when he defended the flock against a lion and then a bear and realised then that God was with him.

Goliath was a mountain of a problem for the Jews. King Saul was scared and he was probably the biggest and strongest of them all. They thought simply as soldiers faced with an insuperable problem. An enemy too big to be defeated by them! David, however, looked at it from God's side. Then David (1 Sam 17) said to Saul, **"Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Phillistine."** **"Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Phillistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God."** David's faith

was very direct. An uncircumcised man could not in his view resist the Living God! David was Saul's last desperate hope so he allowed David to go out as their national champion. The problem of Goliath was removed.

There was a natural progression to the faith of David from defending sheep to defending the faith. Both required solid faith and trust in God. David a good shepherd wrote Psalm 23:1-2. *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters."* Still waters are often deep waters. Deep in blessing as well as in testing.

There should be a natural progression and development to OUR faith. We should be testing and proving the Lord in our lives by launching out into deeper waters.

Malachi 3:10 *"Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."*

LAUNCHING OUT

As we launch out into the deep waters of life it is important to remember that Jesus was with them in the boat when they launched out into the deep. They were not alone. He was in control of the situation. As we launch out in faith we must have Jesus with us. Even though the waters look deep and dangerous, if Jesus is with us we will succeed.

If Peter the fisherman did question in his mind whether Jesus really understood the techniques of fishing then he is different to our modern doubting minds. Very often we feel our problems are so different that we question whether the biblical solution is adequate. Perhaps we would share in Peter's successful experience if we would launch out and stretch our faith proving to ourselves that the Lord's ways really work. Surely if Jesus is in the boat of our life we will achieve the objectives He sets before us. We will overcome the opposition and we will remove the obstacles and reach our destination.

It is worth noting that Simon Peter needed his partners to assist him with the huge catch of fish. We too, need one another to succeed in the Lord's work. We will achieve more in one another's company and partnership than we can alone. The fellowship of the saints is there to strengthen our faith and help us overcome.

We MUST launch out into the deep if we are to succeed for Jesus. We will not make good fishermen standing on the shore waiting. Peter had a very generous reward from Jesus, the catch of a lifetime, for fishing in deep waters. He also received a new mission and purpose in life, to be a fisher of men.

He still rewards those who launch out into the deep with him. Paul urged the Philippians to *"stretching forward... to press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* We can only fully enjoy the blessings of faith by stretching forward and testing the deeper waters with Jesus. The challenge of faith is to go out a little farther each day so that we can finally receive the blessing of God.

JOHN KNELLER.

HOW WILLING AM I?

What is your "turn-back threshold," your "give-up threshold," your "give-in threshold?" What does it take to make you give up or back up or shut up? How big or how small are the obstacles of the fears that keep you from being what you really want to be as a Christian? Here is hoping that you and the rest of us can be challenged to

cross some of our barriers that have grown up around us during past years - perhaps even some of those "insurmountable" barriers. Let us openly and honestly examine ourselves in order to see what it takes to change our "I can't, Lord" into "I am ready, Lord."

WILLING TO DO

"*What good things shall I do?*" That question of the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16) has us looking at a person who thought that he really wanted to do God's will. Upon surveying his relationship to the Law he could say, "All things have I observed," His question, "What lack I yet?" indicates a willing heart. How sure he wanted to be that he hadn't unintentionally missed something that he needed to be doing. And his disposition must have been "I'll do whatever is required!"

Then came the shocker: "If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shall have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me" (Matt. 19:21). That's a blow to the solar plexus! This "willing" young man is now forced to look at himself, at his past and future. He had thought he would do anything to please his Lord - *but* now . . . "he went away sorrowful: for he was one that had great possessions" (Matt. 19:21). He, at this time, could not bring himself to cross that threshold. That was his price.

How willing? Great possessions were his barrier. Surely through his brief mature life he had done many things and given many gifts. But this was a cardinal decision. Had he been less successful and prosperous, had he not been faced with the requirement of giving up so much, he might just have sold out, given the proceeds to the poor, and followed Jesus. Now he learns something about himself that he hadn't known - he was not really willing to go all the way in order to have eternal life. So, he sold out on his "willing to do" - going back to his life of splendour, with a sorrowing heart. Rejection! Dejection!

The rich young ruler isn't the only one who ever made such a wrong choice. Look at Demas. Of him the apostle Paul wrote, "Demas forsook me, having loved the present world, and went to Thessalonica" (2 Tim. 4:10). "Having loved this present world" - does that imply that he persevered until things became too threatening in Rome? Does it mean that he had served Paul until it appeared that he might himself become involved in some related consequences of Paul's conviction? Perhaps he had served valiantly and cheerfully. He loved the Lord, he loved His Master's cause, he loved Paul - but his service stopped at a given point. Loving the world was his downfall. This does not suggest he was grossly worldly, but it reveals his service to his Lord was not from an "all the way" heart. Paul's was a "come what may" faith and dedication; Demas was an "up to a point" faith.

WHAT IS MY PRICE?

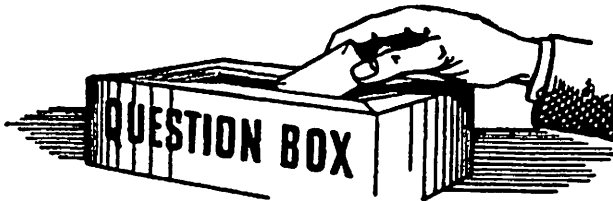
Crossing the norm-line. Let me prayerfully and purposefully resolve to step across that line which is the comfortable norm of my performance in any given area of service. Will you make the same decision? Coming to the point where we normally stop, where experience has established a "no further" barrier, let's move across! Let's for this once shove aside that "Wait," that "not today," that "Some other time" - and dare to do! This is the only way we can grow.

Does this mean that we will at times be inconvenienced? Indeed so. Does it mean that we try that which we have previously avoided because we were afraid? Certainly. Will the comfortable norms of expenditure (time, energy, money) be raised? They must be.

"I Just Can't Believe It." Oh, how the Lord blesses and uses those who are willing to be used to His glory! This is no "use me at my convenience" willingness, nor is it a "use me where I want to be used" volunteering. Rather it is a "Lord, use me where you know that I can best be used, doing what will be most valuable to the advancement of your cause" surrender to His leadership. Now what a surge of vigour and power is realised in life! So real is this, so rewarding, that the servant is heard to say, "I just can't believe it!" That's one of those expressions of gratitude and joy which might just as easily be said in the word "Hallelujah!" Wonderful! Praise the Lord!

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the Church and in Jesus Christ unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen." (Eph. 3:20,21)

C. ROGERS.



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

"What is meant by 'Harmageddon', in Rev. 16:16?"

There is no doubt that the world has in recent weeks experienced alarming, and even terrifying, events which have caused many to wonder just where mankind is heading.

Man's potential for self-destruction has never been more evident than it is today, and the half-veiled threat of the use of nuclear weapons that was recently made by Osama bin Laden, has fuelled people's anxiety. Are we heading for the end of the world?

Is 'Armageddon' just around the corner?

Well, in any time of international unrest, uncertainty or conflict, there have been those who have raised the age-old spectre of 'Armageddon'. Years ago the word frequently appeared in the "Watchtower" publications of the self-styled 'Jehovah's Witnesses', as they attempted to arrest people's attention.

Furthermore, the word has become something of a by-word; a synonym used to describe any cataclysmic event, whether real or imaginary.

What do the scriptures really tell us about 'Armageddon'?

Does the word, indeed, carry a warning concerning a mighty battle? And does it relate to a literal or to a figurative conflict in the 16th chapter of the Revelation where the word occurs? The explanations and theories which have been advanced as attempts have been made to explain 'Armageddon' are rather like the demons in the demoniac of Gadara; their name is 'Legion'.

Some expositors have claimed that 'Armageddon' represents '*the last great conflict between East and West*'.

Others explain it as '*the great universal conflict before the return of Christ*'.

And others, again, describe it as '*all the nations against the Church*'.

Not surprisingly, in the light of the present international situation some have seen it as a conflict between Christianity and the faith of Mohammed.

But, *do the scriptures, in fact, warn us of a literal battle, with armies taking to the*

field and employing all the weapons of modern warfare?

The Revelation; The Most Figurative Book in the Bible.

I think we should bear in mind, whenever we read the 'Revelation', that this 'conflict' is described in the most figurative and symbolic book in the scriptures, and remember, also, that every single figure, symbol or illustration that we find there, comes from elsewhere in the scriptures. In other words, *not one symbol, or illustration, used in the 'Revelation' comes from outside of the scriptures themselves.*

This means that to understand the term 'Armageddon' it is essential to go back to the Old Testament scriptures for guidance.

A Little History.

Before we do this, let us notice that the *one and only* reference to 'Armageddon' is found in the chapter already referred to, Rev.16:16, where, in v.14 it is described as '*the war of the great day of God, the Almighty*'. Armageddon is God's Day! And it is hinted at again in ch. 19:19-21, where it is described in terms which remind us of Ezek. 39:19.

"AR" or "HAR" mageddon?

The word 'Ar' means 'city', so that 'Armageddon' indicates the 'City' of Megiddo.

'Har' means 'hill', and, 'Harmageddon' describes the 'Hill' of Megiddo.

Just as there are in history, names of physical locations that tell familiar stories - such as 'Masada', 'The Alamo' and 'Waterloo'; names which remind us of great or special events, so, about 60 miles north of Jerusalem, there is a valley about 10 miles long stretching from the River Jordan to the Coast and enclosed by mountains at one end, which is called the '*Plain of Jezreel*'. Bible maps will also use the name '*The Valley of Megiddo*', the valley which is famous in the O.T. as the site of some of the bloodiest battles in Israel's history.

'Harmageddon' - the Hill of Megiddo - is still there. It is the hill upon which remain the ruins of 'Armageddon', the City of Megiddo, which is the ancient city that was formerly a Canaanite stronghold.

(I might add that I have personally seen the ancient Canaanite altar, which still exists at Megiddo).

The Significance of 'Armageddon' area.

A brief examination of the Old Testament will reveal how significant this place was in those days.

Judges 5:19 tells us that it was here that Barak defeated the Canaanites.

Jud. 7:33 records that Gideon fought against the Midianites here.

2nd Sam. ch.1, tells of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in that area.

2nd Kings 23:29, reports that the good King Josiah also died here, when he intervened in a battle with which he really should not have become involved.

Here, too, King Ahaziah was killed by Jehu.

In a word, the Valley of Megiddo was renowned in Old Testament history as the location of great battles and terrible events, so that it came to symbolise conflict.

First mentioned in Judges ch.4.

Jabin, king of the Canaanites, had oppressed Israel for 20 years, and the reason for his apparent superiority and invincibility was the fact that his army commander, Sisera, had at his disposal 900 war-chariots which supported his army.

And what weapons had the Israelites? None! Not a sword, shield or spear! (Judges 5:8).

This is because the Canaanites had followed the example of the Moabites before them, who, having conquered the Israelites, had disarmed them. They had stripped

them of their weapons. This was the usual policy in those days, designed to make rebellion impossible.

In 1st Sam. 13:19 we are told that there was '*no smith in Israel*'. At that particular time, the Philistines, who were oppressing the Israelites, did not allow them to work in metal because they did not want them to be able to make weapons for themselves.

Indeed, there was even a time when Israel's farmers had to go to the Philistines, and pay to have their tools sharpened, because the Philistines had obtained the secret of iron smelting.

This explains why Jud. 3:16 records that Ehud '*made himself a sword*' - an action which, under normal circumstances, would hardly have been regarded as a startling event, whilst ch.3:31, tells us that Shamgar fought the Philistines armed only with '*an ox-goad*' - a stick with a point on the end!

It is, therefore, not surprising that, when Sisera's army attacked the Israelites, they turned and fled.

So, what followed? Read Jud. ch.4.

In the mountains there lived a woman named Deborah, a prophetess, to whom the Israelites turned for advice. She stated plainly, "*You are not able to deal with this enemy. But God is!*" Then, at the right moment, she told Barak, "*Up! For this is the day when YAHVEH will deliver Sisera into your hands. Is not YAHVEH gone up before you?*"

The two armies faced each other. On one side there was the mighty army of the Canaanites, and on the other, the unarmed men of Israel. They met in the Valley of Megiddo and the seemingly impossible happened! the Canaanites were defeated.

But not by Israel, but by God.

In Jud. 5 we read Deborah's song of victory in which she makes it very clear that God Himself fought for His people. Notice v.20.

The Day and the Victory is God's

Now, this is the first Bible reference to 'Megiddo' and it is a story which reveals that when the need of His people was greatest, and His time was right, God Himself defeated their enemy for them, without His people lifting a finger to defend themselves.

Consequently, whenever the ancient Israelites, and the Jews in later years, heard the word '*Armageddon*', far from striking fear into their hearts, it was a word of comfort and encouragement, just as in N.T. times, the word '*Maranatha*' became a word of comfort for Christians.

Therefore, when, in Rev. 16:18, where '*Harmageddon*' appears again, God is telling the Christians that opposition raised against His people and His cause will meet with the same overwhelming defeat that was inflicted on Sisera. It will be God's Day and His conflict once again! He will inflict the final defeat of evil!"

This means that there is no literal, physical conflict predicted in the 16th chapter of the Revelation. The reference to Armageddon can only be properly understood if we recognize that it is God's assurance that the spiritual victory lies with His cause and His people, because His purpose must be accomplished.

God and Magog?

But someone asks, "*Is there not something about Gog and Magog*"?

Indeed there is; in Rev. 20:8. Here, again, we are carried back to the Old Testament, where the reference to these two names is found in Ezekiel 38.

'Gog' is said to be the ruler, and 'Magog' his kingdom; and, as we might expect, there has been a great deal of speculation as to the meaning of these two names, as

people have attempted to identify a particular individual and a particular nation.

They are not identified for us by Ezekiel himself. He merely predicted that a nation would come 'from afar' to fight against Israel. But, the prophet also said, that God would destroy this enemy without fighting on Israel's part, and the outcome would be that the Nations would see His glory.

I think it will help us to understand this passage if we know that the word 'Gog' is the ancient Sumerian word 'Gug', which means 'darkness'. Therefore, 'Gog' is the Prince of Darkness, and 'Magog' his kingdom, the Kingdom of Darkness.

Is further identification really necessary?

Here, then, in Rev. 20, we see that once again a piece of Old Testament history involving God's ancient people is used to bring comfort to the Church of the New Testament.

The important - and significant - fact which should always be remembered, is that this persecution by 'Gog and Magog' predicted in the prophecy of Ezekiel, represents the last persecution of God's ancient people in Old Testament times.

When the names re-appear in the New Testament, in the 'Book of the Revelation', they are used to predict the end of the persecution of the Church, and the defeat of Satan, the prince of darkness and those who serve him.

A Final Question

How can these references to Armageddon possibly relate to a literal, great, world-conflict?

Remember that the Valley of Megiddo is a very small valley in a very small country.

I suggest, therefore, that common-sense should tell us that the ideal of a *literal* battle, involving modern armies with modern weapons, in a *real geographical location* such as the Valley of Megiddo, is nothing short of ridiculous.

The scene is symbolic. It declares that, although the Church experiences difficult times as she faces persecution and false doctrine in her spiritual conflict, her final victory is guaranteed. Not because she becomes numerically or politically or financially strong, or strong in any other conceivable way, but because this is God's War and His Victory.

If you know this, you will realize that there is nothing to fear. Whatever the future holds in store for the World, The Church's future is secure, because the War is God's war and the Day is His day.

(Questions to: Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way,
Houston, Renfrewshire, Scotland. PA6 7NZ)

NEITHER HOT NOR COLD

(Rev. 3:14-22)

In the text, brethren, we find Christ Jesus speaking to the church at Laodicea. The words were aptly spoken because in reality, the church had missed the mark! Words of great importance and just as relevant today. The church then, in the real sense, wasn't alive. We need to heed these words. We should never make the mistake of thinking they apply only to others, and non-believers: as some do. The words were spoken to a believing church who in reality had slipped into thinking of themselves as spiritually elite. It is here we might take time to ponder on the words of Robert Burns;

"Oh to see ourselves as others see us."

Yes we need to stand back and take a new look at ourselves in praise, prayer, and

worship. It will do us nothing but good, that's for sure.

You see, brethren, the people of the Laodicean church could not see themselves as they really were. They failed to notice that their Lord was standing *outside* the assembly, and not in the midst. They had become self-centred wrapped up in their own little community, and could see nothing else. We, today, need to watch our for these symptoms.

The gospel and mission was failing and lacking the necessary vigour. In other words they had grown cold! (lukewarm) in their concern for a lost world. Does this ring a bell perhaps? They had failed to listen in the on-going sense. Now know this beloved, God truly speaks to those who listen. If we are not listening, or prepared to listen, we won't hear a sound.

Oh yes, the Laodiceans were convinced that they were on the right track (as did Paul in his early years), but note this, their self-sufficiency and spiritual arrogance, led Christ to say they were **"neither hot nor cold"**, and **"I will spit you out of my mouth"**. Now these are harsh words; strong words; that we might understand and be concerned. We need to be committed in the true sense. Beloved never allow the devotion of your heart to become callous. Pray that your mind will remain open and sensitive to the Spirit of God.

The Church at large needs a revival; an awakening; a stirring up in its thinking and working. I hope you can agree. We need to make it our goal never to lose sight of God's pre-eminence in our lives, and church.

To be able to listen, we must need to be awake. God still speaks. Beloved are we listening? Are we awake? Are you aware as to what is around you? If so, you have a ready ear. SO LISTEN...

ANDREW SHARPE,
Newtongrange.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

| | | |
|---------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Jan. 6 | Deut. 6:16-25 | Galatians 2 |
| Jan. 13 | Deut. 27:14-26 | Galatians 3:1-25 |
| Jan. 20 | Daniel 9:20-27 | Galatians 3:26 to 4:20 |
| Jan. 27 | Genesis 21:9-21 | Galatians 4:21 to 5:6 |

CONFERENCE IN JERUSALEM

This was the second visit Paul paid to Jerusalem after his conversion. The first had been eleven years earlier (1:18). Paul had become an apostle to the Gentiles and, of course, he was an apostle by Divine authority. Peter was an apostle of the circumcision or the Jews (2:7-8). They had different mission fields, but the same gospel was preached to Jew and Gentile (Romans 1:16). This is the same gospel we have to preach to Jew

and Gentile today.

The pillars of the Church in Jerusalem were James (the Lord's brother), Peter and John (9). They received Paul and Barnabas warmly and gave them the "right hands of fellowship" (9). There was a purpose in this. Paul wrote that "we should go unto the heathen and they unto the circumcision" (9b). Circumcision itself was still a "hot" subject and Paul had to contend with false brethren on this potentially divisive issue (3-5). Circumcision meant a return to bondage from the liberty found in Christ. I believe that, if it had not been for the apostle Paul, there might well have been a circumcision party and a non-circumcision party in the Church today. He later wrote: **"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing**

that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (5:6, N.I.V.).

PAUL OPPOSES PETER

Would Paul have opposed Peter if he had been appointed the first Pope? I think not. Peter, of course, was simply a fellow apostle. He was a great man, but a man not without weaknesses. We recall the wise words of our late brother Wardrop of Motherwell: "The best of men are men at the best."

The confrontation took place in Antioch. Why did Peter resort to separating from the Gentile believers and not eating with them? We should note carefully that the problem only arose when "certain came from James" (12a).

One variant reading, indeed, refers to 'a certain person' who 'came from James'. The message conveyed to Peter could have been to the effect that news of his free and easy intercourse with Gentiles at Antioch had come to Jerusalem and was causing a scandal to many good brethren there, besides hampering the mission in which James and others were engaged among their Jewish neighbours" (F.F. Bruce). So Peter was on the horns of a dilemma and we do not know how he responded to Paul's rebuke. Obviously, the matter was resolved in the end. To me the incident is very interesting because it reveals disagreements between apostles. Sometimes people talk of these great men as if they were angels. They were not angels, but fellow human beings with strong views and convictions like everyone else. The Holy Spirit told it as it was. I'm glad He did.

FAITH AND THE LAW

We must always remember that the gospel was first preached to the Jews. Many of them found it difficult to break completely from the traditions of their past life. Many also tried to keep the Law and keep the faith at the same time. So there was a devotion to a code and an

allegiance to Jesus, which Paul saw as an impossible compromise. To him, the Law had been abrogated by Christ. "For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). In other words, there is no more place for law in man's approach to God. The way to the Father is now through His Son (John 14:6).

It is impossible to be justified by law. The problem lies not in the law itself, but in the human being. No human being could keep God's Law perfectly because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The Law was perfect, but human beings are not. "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them. But that no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith" (3:10-11).

Our brother Wardrop at Motherwell often used to say: "The Law diagnosed the disease (sin), but Jesus provides the remedy". "Wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster (Gk. *paidagogos*) to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (3:24). The *paidagogos* was the slave in ancient times, who taught the young boy manners and morals and conducted him to and from school. He himself never entered the school. He left the boy with the one who could teach him. "So then the Law brings us to the door of Christ and leaves us there" (Barclay).

Paul looked to illustrate faith in action and he, therefore, turned to the father of the faithful - Abraham. What a man! He "believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (3:6). "He was declared to be justified before he was circumcised and a long time prior to the advent of the Law. And

he provides for us a genuine definition of the faith which justifies. Discounting the weakness of his own vital powers and the deadness of Sarah's womb, he 'remained absolutely convinced that God was able to implement his own promise. This was the *faith* which was counted unto him for righteousness' (Romans 4:21,22)" (W. Carl Ketcherside).

SONS OF GOD

This section of Scripture (3:26-4:7) is so uplifting. The greatest family the world has seen, is the family of God. To be sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus is a privilege about which we should tell the whole world. No slave could call his master "Abba, Father" (4:6). Paul wants to show us here that we are genuine children and that we can speak to the Father in a fashion that slaves were not allowed to use. "*Abba* is the word framed by the lips of infants and betokens unreasoning trust; *father* expresses an intelligent apprehension of the relationship. The two together express the love and intelligent confidence of the child" (W. E. Vine).

We read: "For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ" (26,27). In other words, we are clothed with Christ. In baptism, we put Him on as a garment. Why is baptism such a stumbling-block to so many? Paul, as an apostle, knew the importance of baptism from Jesus Himself. The great commission of the Master to His apostles was: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, 20a, N.I.V.). Jesus' ministry began with baptism and ended with His authorising

baptism.

HAGAR AND SARAH

We read in this section (4:21-31) of two women, two sons, two covenants and two Jeruselems. The subjects of the two covenants are distinguished by the expressions "**born after the flesh**" and "**by promise**" (23). Also one covenant was made at literal Mount Sinai and the second at figurative Mount Sion. To Hagar was born Ishmael; to Sarah was born Isaac. Hagar was the slave woman and Sarah was the free woman. "So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond woman, but of the free" (31). "Like Isaac, Christians are children of promise, not law. Their standing with God depends not on natural descent, but on the covenant of grace. . . In keeping with the action of Sarah, they are to rid themselves decisively of any tendency to legalism or the dominance of the Judaizing teachers, for they have been begotten from freedom for freedom. The true heirs of Abraham are not those who claim suzerainty of the law, but those who know the freedom in Jesus Christ" (Samuel J. Mikolaski).

True freedom is in Christ Jesus (5:1). Why then would any Christian want to be burdened again by a yoke of bondage? As there were legalists in Paul's day so there are legalists today. They make mountains out of molehills. They do not realise what really matters: "faith that finds expression in love" (6b).

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. How did God escort His people out of Egypt?
2. She was a Moabitess who came to Bethlehem.
3. He was the captain of Pharaoh's guard.

4. Moses said of this mountain: "The Lord shined forth from it".
5. Elijah hid beside this brook.
6. A strong man found some of this in the carcase of a lion.
7. Paul left this garment at Troas.
8. These two leaders of false movements were mentioned by Gamaliel.
9. Who kept a school in Ephesus?
10. Name the first disciple Jesus.

COMING EVENTS

Special Saturday Night Meeting
At KIRKBY IN ASHFIELD
 With Bro. Ernest Makin
 16th March, 2002
 at 7.00 pm

KIRKCALDY LADIES DAY
 18th May, 2002
(Details later).

GHANA APPEAL

Our Ghanaian brethren's enthusiasm to evangelise continues and so unfortunately, do cases of illness. Tropical countries are more susceptible to this than those with more temperate climates. Your contributions have been extremely helpful in both cases and we thank donors for their continued support.

Among current examples is a sister suffering complications after childbirth. A sister in another congregation has been admitted to hospital after suffering pain for six months.

Although the roof of their meeting place is still incomplete they have recently had ten baptisms. In another congregation there are five people with chronic disease and a three-year-old girl admitted to hospital, as well as two widows experiencing hardship. Individual brethren are keen to share their faith with others. One brother established a

congregation within travelling distance of his village and now, three years later, it has a mature membership of fifty six. He has now started another congregation with a membership of eighteen. They have built a meeting place themselves but require help in roofing it, as does yet another comparatively new congregation. Although traditional building materials must be used in towns, mud walls are permitted in villages and these, when cement rendered, are perfectly durable. However, roofing material has still to be purchased.

Through your support evangelism has been extended to more outlying areas. It has enabled illness to be treated and we have many brethren alive and well today who would not otherwise have survived.

Those wishing to help please make cheques payable to:

Dennyloanhead Church of Christ
 Ghana Fund and send to the treasurer
 Mrs. Janet Macdonald, 12 Charles
 Drive, Larbert, Falkirk, Stirlingshire.
 FK5 3HB Tel: 01324 562480

We very gratefully acknowledge the anonymous donation of £1,000.

OBITUARY

Motherwell: The church at Motherwell reports the death of a faithful and long-serving servant of the Lord - sister Rosina Longmuir. She died at the age of ninety-seven in Leslie House, Merry Street, Motherwell with her family by her side.

She had been a Christian since she was sixteen and her faith sustained her, therefore, for eighty-one years. She was one of God's great stalwarts and will be greatly missed by all the saints at Motherwell and by many others in the Slamannan District Churches of Christ. She outlived her beloved and faithful husband, Bob Longmuir, by twenty-six

years. Sister Longmuir will always be remembered for her kindness, generosity, hospitality and faithfulness. She never wavered from the narrow path and always looked forward to being with Jesus in her eternal home. She was a wonderful example to all saints everywhere. We extend our sympathy to her three children - Andrew Rosina and John - and to her five grand-children and four great-grand-children. The funeral service was conducted by brother Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell on Tuesday the 13th of November, 2001. The interment took place at Airbles Cemetery, Motherwell.

WILLIAM PURCELL, Secretary.

NEW SUBSCRIPTION RATE

Would subscribers please note the revised U.K. rate applying to 2002 is £10.00 as detailed below. Overseas rates are unchanged.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support and also for the additional gifts which enable me to send free copies to Third World countries. Your generosity is much appreciated by the recipients.

JOHN KNELLER, Treasurer.

A MATTER OF TIME

The story is told of three demons who were sitting in a coalbin in hell discuss-

ing ways to undermine the faith of a man about to make a decision to follow Jesus Christ. The first demon said "I know what I'll do. I'll go up there and tell him there is no God." The others shook their heads. "He won't accept that" they said. "He knows there's a God; he talked with him this morning." The second demon spoke up. "I'll reassure him by telling him there is no hell". The others shook their heads again. "He knows there's a hell," they said. "He's been there." Then the third demon said, "I know what will work. I'll just go up there and tell him there's no hurry." The others clapped. "That will do it," they said.

(Hugh Jones)

1. In a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21).
2. Ruth (Ruth 1:22).
3. Potiphar (Genesis 39:1).
4. Paron (Leuteronomy 33:2).
5. Chenth (1 Kings 17:3).
6. Honey (Judges 14:8).
7. Cloak (2 Timothy 4:13).
8. Theudas and Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:36-37).
9. Tyannus (Acts 19:1 & 9).
10. Andrew (John 1:40).

ANSWERS

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E-mail: john@kkneller.freemove.co.uk

Telephone: (01875) 853212 to whom change of address should be sent.

EDITOR: JAMES R. GARDINER, 70 Avon Street, Motherwell, Lanarkshire, Scotland. ML1 3AB. Telephone: (01698) 264064