

# The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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## MEDDLING WITH THE MESSAGE

WE live in a time when the very fabric of society seems to be crumbling under our feet. Established values are being gradually eroded away and things which raised eyebrows twenty years or so ago now scarcely qualify for comment. For instance, the God-given ordinance of marriage, which is as old as time, is now regarded in many quarters as an old-fashioned (even quaint) custom which had little relevance to modern times. Old concepts and values such as the family unit are being replaced by happy 'hippy' communes and little children born there will be left guessing forever as to the identity of their parents. It used to be 'shocking' to be divorced but now divorces are about as easy to come by as a gun licence. In such a mind-bending world with the emphasis on purely material values it becomes increasingly difficult to determine what are the important things and what are the trivial – what is right and what is wrong – what is truth (Pilate had difficulty with it) and what is error – what is good and what is evil. This must especially be so for the younger generation and the children, and particularly so when one notices the 'with it' teachers we have teaching the children in schools. Unless our feet are firmly planted on very solid ground we are in danger of being swept along by this 'progressive' world and even with our feet planted on firm ground it is sometimes difficult to remain unscathed by these pressures and modern philosophies. The word of God is unchanging and those who endeavour to base their beliefs upon its pages are extremely fortunate. Here indeed is the measuring stick to use in the sizing-up of all the new-fangled philosophies of man. In actual fact they are not new philosophies at all but old ones with a new garb or a new slant – their origins however go back to the days of Sodom and before. In a world of change therefore, it is of incalculable benefit to mankind to have in every century the unchangeable word of God: like God Himself unchanging and true.

Think then how serious it is when man would try to interfere with that eternal word, to tamper with it or change it. It is one thing for man to deride the scriptures: to disbelieve the scriptures; to denounce to scriptures; to deny the scriptures; and even to disobey the scriptures but it is quite a very different thing when man would try to alter the scriptures. It is one thing to drink water from a dirt vessel but quite another to foul the spring. In "Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides" (1773) Dr. Samuel Johnson, on being shown around some of the more noteworthy buildings in Edinburgh, encountered in conversation Dr. James Robertson, the then Professor of Oriental Languages at the College Library and expressed the fervent hope that the production of Kennicot's edition of the Hebrew Bible would be a very faithful work. He explained his hope by his next remark, 'Sir, I know not any crime so great that a man should contrive to commit as poisoning the sources of eternal truth.' The apostle Paul, of course, many years before had

expressed the same sentiments, albeit in rather stronger terms when he said to the foolish and bewitched Galatians, 'as we said before, so say I again now, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.' (Gal. 1:9). The church members at Galatia had been bewitched and fooled by preachers they had listened to and it is surprisingly easy to be bewitched and fooled by persuasive and eloquent preachers. There is probably no better analogy with reference to the way the word of God has been disfigured and altered down the centuries than that of an imaginary river, crystal clear and pure at its source and so foul by the time it reaches the sea. The theological historian, as he studies the vast religious changes which have taken place in every century since Christ's time and has seen the emergence from time to time of some new denomination or preaching personality, is, it seems to me, like a man standing on a hillside looking down at the winding river in the valley below and regarding its passage from its source in the mountains to its muddied estuary at the sea. It is a valuable object lesson in itself to walk along the banks of a river, from its source to the sea and to observe how polluted it becomes as it passes along, especially through villages and cities. Indeed a River Purification Board has been set up for the very purpose of reducing the amount of industrial waste, effluent and general rubbish (in the form of old bed-ends, tyres etc.) being deposited in our rivers. Unhappily no such Purification Board exists for the restoration of the scriptures of God and as the Bible has passed through the centuries man has injected into it the machinations of his own mind, or else has siphoned some of it off and diverted it out of the way. The word of God was crystal clear and utterly pure when it left the hand of God, just like the fountainhead of the river, but now it has been soiled and fouled by the intervention of man. We would all drink from the stream at its source but few of us would drink from the river as it reaches the sea. Yet think how readily men drink from the 'Water of Life' contaminated though it is, and rarely examine it to determine its purity, or consider whether it be as pure as when it left the spring. Think of how man has mutilated the pages of the book of God (to change the metaphor). We mutilate it by grafting something to it or by removing something from it. We can by doing a little grammatical surgery on it, make it mean something quite different or weaken its meaning down to a point where it can mean nothing at all. We can circumscribe it and even nullify it by superimposing the 'teaching of the church' upon it, and attach to it an importance and interpretation prescribed by 'the church'. This is seen in extreme form in the Roman Catholic Church but it exists in milder forms elsewhere nearer our own doorstep. Joseph Smith needed special spectacles to read the plates but he was not the first to read holy writings with special denominational glasses, and doubtless many times we are guilty of reading God's word with our own special spiritual 'blinkers' on.

Dr. Billy Graham came to this country a week or two ago and spoke to all the local clergy on the question of 'Communication' because he considers, rightly in my view, that the denominational clergy in this land do not 'get through' to the masses with the real message, if indeed any message at all. He gave a television interview and made several very valid points while obviously avoiding giving the impression of being too critical. He said in effect (not in so many words) something most of us have been saying for years that the preaching ought to be more basic and we should get back to the old gospel. People are sick to death with the shilly-shallying, mealy-mouthed and wishy-washy type of sermon they are getting these days and are yearning for the solidity and quality of sermon of the 'old days' - when the people were given the word of God to digest. I am sure that there is a deep underlying desire in the hearts of the members of many of the large denominations for something really solid to hang on to in this changing world, and for some solid spiritual food to eat. Many languish in the slough of despond dying of spiritual malnutrition in their various churches. Existing on a diet of watered down little sermonettes spiced with touching anecdotes and an occasional inclusion of Aesop's fables. The problem would not exist, of course, had these churches not adopted the position of having a system whereby the laity would be spiritually fed by the clergy. The laity should feed themselves but part and parcel of the system is that the laity should be educated into the belief that the bible can only be understood and taught by the clergy, i.e. a 'college trained man'. The fallacy has been well taught that the scriptures should be left to the 'professional man' who because of his training and 'full time' commitment is

'a man apart'. We are inclined to regard this sad situation as one unique to the denominational bodies but, make no mistake, the danger is inherently ever present with any religious group which has 'Full-time college trained men' adopting the role of 'the preacher' or 'the evangelist' or 'the minister' or 'the priest' or whatever. Indeed when we hear such men talk of 'my congregation' the writing is already on the wall.

Woe unto us, then if we would alter, modify or vary the eternal truth of God or mutilate it by forced interpretations. Men wrest the scriptures to their own destruction. (2nd Peter 3:16). How successful are we at communicating God's word to the world? There's a question.

EDITOR

## FOLLOWING CHRIST (Part 2)

Followers of Christ.

It is important to observe, at this point, that all that has been said, so far, applies only to those who are disciples of Christ. Chapter 13 to 17 of John's Gospel contains the record of our Lord's dying testament to those who have obeyed His words. There is no doubt that His disciples had been immersed by John, the Immerser, in the river Jordan, just as Jesus had been immersed, when He said to John "thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt.3:15).

John 1:35 shows us that two disciples stood by John, the Immerser, when the latter said of Jesus, as he walked by, "Behold the Lamb of God". Now, if our Lord Himself thought it essential to be immersed, it is impossible to believe that His disciples were not likewise immersed, since He asked them to follow Him.

In fact, John 3:22 states that "Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Jordan: and there He tarried with them and immersed Verse 23 states, "and John (the Immerser) was also immersing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came and were immersed". Would His disciples immerse penitent believers, if they themselves had not been immersed? Surely not!

It is true, that at this point of time, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, but this had been promised to them by our Lord in John 14:15-17 when He said "If ye love Me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of Truth: whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: (no wonder John said in 1 John 2:15, "Love not the world, nor the things in the world"), but ye know Him: for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you").

We now know that this promise was fulfilled, fifty days after our Lord's resurrection from the dead, on the day of Pentecost, (so called from the Greek word meaning 'fifty'), (Acts.2:1-4). We also know that all penitent believers who have subsequently obeyed our Lord's command to be immersed and so become His children or sheep, likewise receive His Holy Spirit. (Acts.2 : 38-39).

The Christian Hope.

Do we fully realise, however, the importance and significance of this Holy Guest. Paul called it "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Each of these words is redolent with meaning. In effect, they mean that Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, dwells in each of His children; those who have been born again of water and the Spirit.

Nicodemus who visited Jesus by night (John, Chapter 3) could not understand this. Many still do not understand. To them it remains a mystery, and will continue to be so, until they decide to follow Christ and submit to the new birth by which and by which alone we receive His Holy Spirit.

In fact Paul says this was his task when he said to the Colossian brethren (Col.1:25-27 N.E.B.) "I became your servant by nature of the task assigned to me by God for your benefit: to deliver this message in full; to announce the secret hidden for long ages and through many

generations, but now disclosed to God's people to whom it was His will to make it known - to make known how rich and glorious it is among all nations. The Secret is this: Christ in you, the hope of the glory to come".

#### The Christian Reward.

When we allow these words fully to enter our understanding, we can only stand amazed at their staggering significance. Paul describes the secret of His indwelling presence as "rich and glorious". Christ in us. How can this be so - who are we, sinful men and women that we are that Christ should dwell in us; but is this not the extent of His love for us? Is this not why He died for us? Is this not why He asked those who believe in Him to be immersed, that they might receive His indwelling presence? And is not that necessary that we might have life eternal - that whosoever believeth in Him and is immersed should not perish, but have everlasting life?

For if Christ be in us His followers by our immersion, He who says He is the way, the Truth and the LIFE, who also said I am the Resurrection and the LIFE, how can we be anything else but raised to life eternal?

Evidently Paul thought so. He suffered the loss of all things that he might be found in Him. "All I care for is to know Christ, to experience the power of His resurrection and to share His sufferings, if only I may finally be raised to life eternal" (Phil.3 : 10-11). Indeed in verse 12, he says this is why Christ took hold of him. But is this not what Christ, Himself said in John 10 27-28:- My sheep hear my voice and I know them (how can He do anything else, if He is within us) and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life (the hope of glory) and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand".

What glorious words. What a glorious promise to all who follow Him.

#### Love the only way.

To John, writing in the sunset of his life, following Jesus meant that we should "believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave commandment. He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us" (1 John 3:23-24). "God has given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son hath not life. (1 John 5:11-12).

May we ever follow the Master by loving Him and one another, as He desires, "For so an entrance will be richly supplied to us, into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:11). Amen, may this be the lot of all who follow Him.

The hymn writer Charles Wesley aptly summed it up as follows:-

Father, we look up to Thee:  
May we in Thy love agree:  
Those, who art the God of peace,  
Bid contention ever cease

Make us one in heart and mind,  
Courteous, merciful and kind;  
Lowly, meek in thought and word,  
Like Thine own Messiah, Lord.  
May we for each other care,  
Each the other's burden bear;

Ready, when reviled, to bless;  
Studious of the law of peace.

Father all our souls inspire;  
Fill us with love's sacred fire;  
Guided by that blessed light,  
Order all our steps aright.

Free from anger, free from pride,  
May we thus in Thee abide;  
All the depth of love express,  
All the height of Holiness.

W. BROWN, DUNFERMLINE.

## TALKS ON THE TABERNACLE

"I have been requested to reprint the late brother Crosthwaite's talks on 'The Tabernacle' which appeared originally in the 'S.S.' in 1950. This I am happy to do and this month we begin with the first, and introductory, talk, There are 8 talks in all". Editor.

### Introduction

'Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary' (Hebrews 9:1).

THAT statement makes clear that the tabernacle and its services belonged to the covenant God made with His ancient people, Israel.

In our issue of April last we wrote of the two covenants (agreements) made between God and His people.

It would be a considerable help to the better understanding of the Scriptures if we continually kept in mind that all God's promises to the Jews were conditioned on their obedience to His Word. When they were brought out of Egypt, God said: '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, for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation . . . And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do' (Exodus 19:5-7). But they broke that covenant, and continued not in it, and God made a new and different covenant, making the first one old, obsolete (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:8-13). 'The law (old covenant) was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ' (John 1:17).

As Christians, we are under a new and better covenant. We are under law, not to Moses, but to Jesus only, and the Apostles He chose and inspired, and to whose testimony and teaching we are indebted for all we know of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### The Old Covenant was a Primary Stage

Paul shows clearly, in his epistle to the Galatians, that those under the old covenant were in a state of childhood and bondage. 'The law was our schoolmaster (tutor-slave) to bring us unto Christ.' As children at school begin in a primary department and are led on to higher standards, so God, in that primitive age, by types and shadows sought to prepare His people to receive spiritual realities. The Epistle to the Hebrews is an inspired commentary on the old covenant worship and service. A real grip of the teaching of that epistle would supply a key to unlock most Scripture problems.

#### The Tabernacle was built by Divine Command

God chose Israel, revealed Himself and His Word to them, intending that, through them, blessings would flow to all nations. He gave instructions to Moses concerning materials to be gathered for the tabernacle: and 'the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, . . . Let them make me a Sanctuary that I may dwell among them' (Exodus 25:1-8).

#### It was built for a Divine purpose

God was revealing Himself for closer fellowship. Previously their thought of God was of One everywhere present, from whose presence there was no possibility of escape. Now, specially, He is going to dwell among His chosen people. In the tabernacle, God was limiting Himself that they might see and know Him better. The incarnation was limitation. 'The word became flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled, margin] among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten from the Father) full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). Under the new and better covenant it is

no longer I will 'dwell among them,' but 'I will dwell in them, and walk in them.' The perfect future fellowship is thus described: 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away' (Revelation 21:3-4).

### **It was built according to a Divine pattern**

Time and again, Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, 'See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount' (Hebrews 8:5). Under that covenant they were not allowed to 'add unto' neither 'diminish ought' from the word and commandments of the Lord. The Old Testament Scriptures tell how swiftly and severely daring innovators were dealt with. There are beacon warnings for us. 'If they escaped not . . . much more shall not we escape,' if we tamper with the word of the Son of God. As there was a Divine pattern for the type (the tabernacle), so there is a Divine pattern for the anti-type, the Church of the living God. The Church is not a human but a Divine institution. It was the Lord Jesus who said, 'I will build my church.' The New Testament Church, built by the Divine Architect, and His inspired master-builders, the Apostles, is seen perfected and complete in the New Testament Scriptures.

If the New Testament Church is not the pattern for all time, then we have no pattern, and we are fools for pleading for a return to it. The Church of the apostolic age was the best and most powerful Church the world has ever seen. Back to the Jerusalem model must be our rallying cry. On the ground on which the first Church stood, and on that ground alone, can the unity for which our Lord prayed be attained and maintained.

We hope, D.V., in following articles to write of the building of the Tabernacle: the Way into the Holy Place: A Look Inside: the Priesthood: and the Holiest of All.

W. CROSTHWAITE

## **IT IS MY PSALM — IS IT YOURS ?**

"Yes, there are greener pastures, stiller streams,  
And music, baffling all earth's mortal dreams;  
Lead on, then, Shepherd - Lord new glory waits  
Ambushed in shadows just beyond the gates."

**PERFECT CONTENTMENT** - "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Psalm 23:6.

I have been watching this morning, for a while, a little sparrow, pecking away on our flags on the terrace, outside our window. The sparrow at the time of our Lord was worth five for two farthings, yet this one saw something I could not see. Now I wonder how many glorious and hidden truths we have not seen as we have considered together our very own Psalm. So you are invited still once more to follow your Lord to the green pastures, and then on to the still waters, and together let us still search out some of the unsearchable riches of Christ, from God's most precious word.

Recently we have had the privilege of a short visit to the Lake District, and realize the value of the Lord's advice, to come aside and rest awhile. The beauty and magnificence of the

handiwork of our loving Heavenly Father, was plainly manifested. The hills and the mountains with their splashes of colour, showing a little of their majesty. The trees some standing tall and erect, some looking distorted, yet with their roots anchored fast in the ground, showing with splendour different colours of green. The sheep grazing in pastures green, no doubt enjoying to the full the tender grass. Over the hedge one could see the contented cows munching away in the fields, evidently not bothered about the worries and problems of life. The lakes, silent, yet speaking in a loud and clear voice of the goodness of the Lord, no wonder that David said: "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."

You may say, and rightly so, what has your visit to the Lake District have in common with your theme of "Perfect Contentment?"

I feel sure that David who kept his father's sheep, would have plenty of time to muse, in the quiet of the countryside, perhaps leading up to this month's meditation "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

"The Lord is MY shepherd; I shall not want.

HE maketh ME to lie down in green pastures: HE leadeth ME beside the still waters.

HE restoreth MY soul: HE leadeth ME in the paths of righteousness for HIS name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for THOU art with ME: THY rod and THY staff they comfort ME. THOU preparest a table before ME in the presence of MINE enemies: THOU anointest MY head with oil; MY cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow ME all the days of MY life;

AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOR EVER."

I wonder how many sermons, you have heard, or how many articles you have read, on the place where David was to dwell in - for ever - "THE HOUSE OF THE LORD."

Strange isn't it! We can talk for quite a long time on our likes and dislikes, our homes, our families, our business, our favourite sport, our collectors pieces, our hobbies, our politics, our gardens, our roses, and a host of other things, but we do not talk so much about "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

We seem to treat that subject like a fever hospital of the old days.....a place to keep away from. Shall we seek to know more of "the house of the Lord," if we do we shall come face to face with the Lord Jesus, for as one writer said:- "The light of heaven is the face of Jesus; the joy of heaven, the presence of Jesus; the melody of heaven, the name of Jesus; the harmony of heaven, the praise of Jesus, the theme of heaven, the work of Jesus; the employment of heaven, the service of Jesus; the fulness of heaven, the Person of Jesus Himself."

#### WHERE IS THE HOUSE OF THE LORD ?

We could answer of course and say "Where God is!" and "Where Jesus is!" or we could give the child's definition of Heaven. "Heaven is the place where everybody loves everybody." The word of God undoubtedly teaches that "the house of the Lord," is above, somewhere "up yonder" so we turn "To the Law and to the testimony." Isaiah 8 : 20 and invite you to consider for our edification the following passages:-

"Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded."

Genesis 11 : 4, 5.

"look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel."

Deuteronomy 26 : 15.

"And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up E-li-jah into heaven by a whirlwind, that E-li-jah went with E-li-sha from Gil-gal.....

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and E-li-jah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

2 Kings 2 : verses 1, 11.

"For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him."

Psalms 103 : 11.

"Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory."

Isaiah 63 : 15.

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Matthew 3 : 16, 17.

"And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven."

Luke 24 : 51.

"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."

John 6 : 38.

"And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world."

John 8 : 23.

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Acts. 1 : 9 - 11.

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, (Spirit) looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

Acts. 7 : 55, 56.

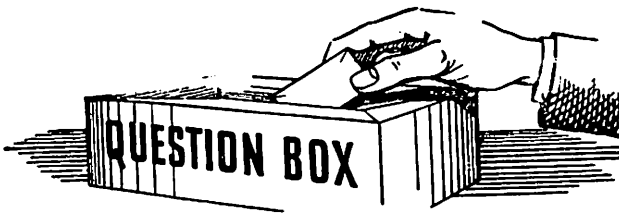
"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

"When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall no more,  
And the morning breaks, eternal, bright, and fair;  
When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore,  
And the roll is call'd up yonder, (Can you say.....I'll be there.)"

This month's exercise:- Read the 23rd Psalm, and pay particular attention to the 26 Personal Pronouns.

May the Lord's richest blessing be your portion.

LEONARD MORGAN.




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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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"We have a problem concerning the resurrection which centres around the scripture Matthew 27 verses 51-53. What we want to know is, "Was Jesus the first to be resurrected, and if so, what happened to the bodies of the saints in the tombs?"

THIS problem seems to hinge on the following points. Verse 51 speaks about an earthquake which rent the rocks and opened the graves. Verse 52 speaks of saints being raised, and then goes on to say (v53) that they "Came out of the tombs after his resurrection". This would appear to be after the resurrection of Jesus.

The questioner refers to the scripture which says that "Christ became the first-fruits of them that slept", yet here we read of bodies being raised before Jesus had himself been buried. This is indeed a knotty problem, and I feel sure that we shall do well if we are able to shed a little light on it.



### The Synoptists

It hardly seems necessary to explain to people in Churches of Christ what is meant by the Synoptic Gospels, but it is relevant to the question so I will do so. This was a name first used by a biblical scholar by the name of Griesback for the first three gospels, those of Matthew, Mark and Luke. This name was used because these gospel records present such a similarity in matter and from that they readily admit of being brought under one and the same view or synopsis. Therefore we must look to see how the Synoptists viewed this incident referred to in the question.

### The Gospel Records

The rending of the veil of the temple is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke, and the wording in Mark is similar to that of Matthew. Luke, however, connects it with the spreading of darkness over the earth, and the darkening of the sun prior to the death of Jesus. Matthew connects it with the earthquake which occurred after the death of Jesus, and which he alone mentions. Mark mentions it after the death of Jesus, but seemingly without any special connection with anything else. Let us tabulate all the events and see if they tell us anything.

	Matt.	Mark	Luke
1. Rending of veil	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Darkness	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. Earthquake	Yes	No.	No.
4. Cries of Jesus (Loud voice)	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. Reaction of Centurion	Yes	Yes	Yes
6. Raising of saints	Yes	No.	No.

So we see, Mark and Luke are silent on two very important events which Matthew records, viz., the earthquake, and the resurrection of the 'saints'. How could they have been unaware of so portentous events. Or was Matthew mistaken?

### Authority and Location

You may think this to be a strange heading but let me explain. What was the location of the gospel writers when Jesus was crucified? If they were at the scene of the crucifixion how could they have known about the veil of the temple being rent? It seems reasonable to believe that they were at the scene of the crucifixion for Luke records, "And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things" (Luke 23: 49). You will understand, of course, that the veil was the entrance to the Holy of Holies which was situated in the innermost recesses of the Temple. It follows, then, that if what we have said is true, the gospel writers must have had some authority for saying the veil had been rent; perhaps the authority was the priests, 'a great company' of whom became 'obedient to the faith' after Pentecost (Acts 6:7). Likewise, for any event of which the recorder was not an eye-witness, he must have relied on the authority of others who were eye-witnesses. This does not mean such reports would be untrue, but I think we all realise that if two people were eye-witnesses of an incident, and they were called upon to give reports, then those reports would be alike in essence but would contain variations of the incident. Such would be the case, I think, with the writers of the Synoptic Gospels.

### What about the Miracles?

So what about the earthquake and the resurrection of the saints? Do we disbelieve Matthew? Certainly not! That something extraordinary had happened is testified to be the exclamation of the Centurion (Mark 15:39). Furthermore, scholarship has it that Westcott, Ignatius, and Eusebius refer to happenings like this taking place.

The words used for 'resurrection' and 'saints' are unusual, though, The word for 'resurrection' occurs nowhere else in the N.T., nor in the Septuagint in this sense. The usual word in Matthew 22:23,28,30,31 and elsewhere, in Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles is a different Greek word. The word for 'saints' is found nowhere else in the gospels; and elsewhere in the N.T., the word is used always of christians. Perhaps these 'saints' are those who had accepted Jesus as Messiah before the crucifixion and Pentecost.

### What was the Purpose?

The rending of the veil would indicate that the special sanctity of the Holy of Holies was ended. That which had been screened off was now open to all, both Jew and Gentile. In Christ each christian is a high priest (Heb. 9:19).

Is it possible that the raising of the bodies was a manifestation of the power of Jesus over death and the grave? They were taken out of the graves; clothed with a resurrection body; and obviously given permission to appear in the Holy City to those who knew them. We are not told what happened to the bodies subsequently, and it is idle to speculate.

And what of the earthquake? Matthew again speaks of an earthquake concerning the moving of the stone from the Lord's tomb (Matt. 28:2). Mark and Luke do not mention this either. What all of them do say is that the Lord cried with a loud voice. Who can tell what majestic power attended that cry? We know that when God's presence came to Moses that the mountain shook. And when Jesus cried with a loud voice Lazarus came forth (John 11:43). Certainly, there were many strange and mighty events taking place when Jesus was crucified.

### The First-fruits

In the O.T. the idea is of the chief or principal part (Num. 18:12), or the earliest ripe of the crop or tree (Ex. 23:16). In the N.T. the presence of the Holy Spirit with the believer is said to be the first-fruit of the harvest of the crops (Rom. 8:23). As applied to the resurrection of Christ he is the first-fruit of all believers who have fallen asleep.

Matthew does not use the word and I am quite sure that it is not really relevant in the situation which we are studying, although some have suggested that this is what he had in mind when he had the raised bodies of the 'saints' languishing in their graves for three days until Jesus had risen.

It is true to say, of course, that people were raised from the dead before the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, but these people presumably died again. Paul says of Jesus, "who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. Christ rose never to die again, and in this context he is the first-fruits of them that slept. This is applied to the results of the gospel, for Paul teaches the Roman christians "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:5). This is why I believe that the Matthew passage is not significant in this respect, except perhaps as a portent of that which was to follow.

Well, dear questioner, I realise that I may not have removed all the doubts, but I hope I have said enough to stimulate some thoughts which will result in further study.

(All questions please, to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan, Lancs.)

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

AUGUST 1976

- |                   |                        |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1—Isaiah 58       | Romans 15:14-33        |
| 8—Isaiah 40:12-31 | Romans 16              |
| 15—Isaiah 7:1-17  | Matthew 1:1, 2 & 18-25 |
| 22—Micah 5:2-15   | Matthew 2              |
| 29—Isaiah 40:1-11 | Matthew 3              |

### PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

AT the beginning of his letter to Rome Paul states his desire and his reason for wanting to visit the church there - to impart spiritual gifts, and to preach there (1:10-15). In the

concluding chapters he explains his reason for writing the letter (15:14; 7:15). He has a high estimate of their ability to work together in mutual ministry for teaching both doctrine and behaviour. He admits they are not helpless without him, but he is deeply conscious of his very special commission from the Lord himself to extend the gospel among the Gentiles in particular, and Rome is the centre of Gentile influence. He had so laboured that churches were operating all through Asia Minor (our name) and Greece, but more distant places are in his programme, such as Spain (15:24). His full occupation over so wide a field had prevented his visiting Rome so far. He was planning to do so. His intention was not to waste time with an already flourishing church but to

get encouragement and practical help from her on the way. What a blessing it is that he thought well to write so thorough an exposition of the gospel teachings in anticipation of the visit! It was God's intention that provision should be made for future generations. Paul's plan at the time was to deliver the offerings of the Gentile Christians to Jerusalem. This urgent work must come first. The more distant work must wait. This immediate work was essential for the unifying of the church. It was a perilous undertaking with the possibility of rejection even in the church at Jerusalem where some regarded him as a renegade Jew advocating disobedience to Moses. Undoubtedly Paul knew how his enemies outside the church hated him, and would plot his assassination. Thus he asks for the prayers of his readers with the double thought that the gifts would be received with appreciation, and that he would be delivered from the enemies (15:30 & 31). Both requests were indeed answered, the latter not in the way expected.

#### Greetings and Acknowledgements

From the fact that so many names are in chapter 16, some have thought that this portion of the epistle has been somehow taken from another letter during the collection of manuscripts. We assume with general agreement among scholars that it is in its proper place, and consider that members of the church at Rome had met the apostle in his travels in the same way that Aquila and Priscilla certainly did. Their case is most interesting, and the close and happy relationship is significant of the holy influence of the gospel on human lives. When the edict of Claudius compelled Jews to leave Italy this couple went to Corinth. Hundreds if not thousands of Jews travelled into other lands, and when Claudius died returned to what would be their home towns. So in the good providence of God these two met Paul because they were tentmakers. They were either Christians before that or became so through his teaching (Acts 18:2 & 3). We may suppose they were Christians from Pentecost (Acts 2:10). They were mature in faith as we see by their instruction of Apollos (Acts 18:26). It may be that at Ephesus when opposition was dangerous they saved Paul's life at the risk of their own. Returning to Rome they used their home for accommodation to the church as we should almost expect (16:4). We are apt to miss some points

about Paul's life and the list of helpers opens our eyes to the ever widening influence of personal contacts among all sorts and conditions of men. Perhaps we forget this side of the lives of these great men or of Jesus himself. They walked, talked, ate, drank, dressed, washed, slept every day, and were thus in close contact and communication with their fellows. They lived the busiest of busy lives every day, and made contacts innumerable. That had been the experience of all those named in the letter. Many served Paul, some in outstanding ways. How their hearts would respond to the loving and gracious reference to those services and relationships. Men and women of christian character had enjoyed contact and exhibited love in action. Take time to notice each individual case, and think how much joy and blessing is involved. Fellowship is precious indeed. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). It seems Paul had quite a job to finish the letter, further thoughts cropping up as the farewells are being written. He has to include a warning against false teachers, and a final "doxology" (16:25-27).

#### Matthew

We shall be reading now for some months from Matthew's gospel. The life of our Saviour is fundamental to our faith, and reading the gospels must always have a prior place in our lives. Reference to Mark (2:14) and Luke (5:27) identify Matthew with Levi, the son of Alphaeus. This makes Matthew brother to James, called possibly "the less" (Mark 15:40), but there is doubt about identity. The important fact is that Matthew was a "publican" as he does call himself (Matt. 10:8), see other lists (Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). His occupation would involve writing in particular, and would fit him initially for his great work. We know little else but doubtful tradition about the man, but his dramatic calling and immediate response are clearly told. It would seem he was following a lucrative commercial life and had a house, to which he invited his fellow workers and friends when his decision to follow Jesus was made - "he forsook all" We can hardly realise what this meant to him. It cost him everything (Matt. 19:27; John 6:67-69). God used him in this wonderfully great way, the Holy Spirit "bringing to his remembrance all things whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). No compositions

outside the four gospels can compare with them in their description of God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Their value to humanity is quite beyond computation. Matthew had his own people in view when writing as is shown even in the first words, a quotation from Genesis, and his genealogy from Abraham onwards, the revered father of the race. His repeated quotations of prophecy and emphasis upon the kingship of Jesus are for Jews particularly. We observe a systematic grouping of teaching, such as the "sermon on the mount", the denunciations of the Scribes and Pharisees, the parables, perhaps due to His "clerkly ability".

#### Early Days

After the introduction by the genealogy the miraculous birth of Jesus begins the story of life, death and resurrection. Joseph's part is prominent. He is honoured by God, his character portrayed in few and clear words. That he was a good man is very clear. He had a grave responsibility and worthily carried it. He obeyed God, cared for mother and child, and so saved the child from the murderous design of Herod. We observe what seems to have been missed by many that Jesus was "in the house" when the wise men came, that "three" were not mentioned, and that Herod knew from what the magi had said, that Jesus might have been two years old when he attempted to stop the good tidings ever being told. What a picture of a sin-darkened heart we get, yet finally the hearts of the religious leaders were even darker, who put to death the Son of God! Oh! Envy, what a demon in a human heart! May the Lord enable us completely to shun it.

#### The Nazarene

We must suppose that the prophecy referred to is in line with Isaiah 53, where the humiliation of Jesus is set forth. It is not

quite certain what the word means but it is associated with lowliness. When Nathanael said "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) he must have known something against that town. The abuse since thrown at Jesus and His followers have fulfilled the word, and today Christians in many parts of the world are regarded with contempt. I was once told "I would come to your church but my friends might see me going in". So while at some times it was the "thing" to go, at other times it is regarded as a sign of mental weakness. In fact to be associated with Jesus is the highest attainable honour, and all who reject Him are doomed. "He that believeth not shall be damned". R.B. SCOTT

#### THE BIBLE SPEAKS

"They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me".

Nehemiah 4:17, 18.

#### CORRESPONDENCE CLASS

IT is hoped that as many as possible will participate in the proposed Correspondence Course, which, Lord willing, will commence in the August issue of the 'S.S.' The questions involved in the study will be printed in the 'S.S.' each issue and answers will hopefully be sent in by the next month following.

Answers to the questions to be sent to Bro. Edward Jess, 34 Charles Street, Penicuik, E.H.26, CH. Midlothian. This is just a brief advance notice of the proposal but it is hoped to print the first set of questions in the August issue and the subject proposed for study is "The early history of the church of Christ", or The Acts of the Apostles. EDITOR

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