

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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THE FULNESS OF THE GENTILES

Readers may recall that last month's article "The Sign Of The Times" was in response to a dissatisfied reader (who complained that the editor studiously avoids writing upon the present happenings in Jerusalem and Israel: failing to sense "The Signs Of The Times".) Readers may also recall that, for the same reason, the editor undertook to offer a few comments, in this article, on "The Times of The Gentiles". The N.T. talks of "Time and seasons"; of "Times of refreshing"; of "Times of restitution"; of "Signs of the times" and "Times of the Gentiles". Those who interpret current happenings in Palestine as fulfilment of prophecy, believe that "The times of the Gentiles" is ending and the Jews are now about to embrace the gospel in vast numbers. Let us, therefore, take a brief glance at "The Times Of The Gentiles".

Two verses provide the basis of interest: Luke 21:24, and Rom. 11;25.

Luke 21:24 says, "And they (Israel) shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled . . ." These words of Jesus refer to the sacking of Jerusalem in AD70 by the Romans.

Romans 11:25 says, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."

We notice that Jerusalem would be trodden down of the Gentiles "UNTIL the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled", and that blindness (in part) is happened to Israel "UNTIL the fulness of the Gentiles be come in". The presumption is, no doubt, that things are going to change AFTER "the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Before considering precisely what changes are likely AFTER "the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled," we should establish exactly what is meant by the phrase itself. The RSV renders it, "Until the full number of the Gentiles come in" (to the Church).

Moses Lard says, "Until the full sum of the Gentiles come in: that is, in to the Church. 'Full sum' - the words denote that portion or large number of Gentiles that are to enter the Church before the conversion of the Jews take place."

Macknight says, "I (Paul) must show you this secret, that blindness of the Jews, in part, will continue only till the generality of the Gentiles come into the Christian Church."

E.M. Zerr says, "Fulness of the Gentiles means until they have had a full time with the gospel, all to themselves while the Jews are out. Just when that fact will be

accomplished the apostle does not say."

William Barclay in his translation on the N.T. says, "**until the time allotted to the Gentiles runs its course.**"

From these random examples we can see that there seems a general consensus among some Bible commentators that the phrase "**until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled**" refers to a certain length of time during which the Gentiles would take advantage of the blessings brought by Christ, whereas the Jews during that time would spurn the gospel. However, a time, yet future, seems to be envisaged by these same Bible commentators, from Rom. 11:25, when the blindness upon the Jews will lift and "all Israel will be saved." **When** this process will begin and **how long** it will take no one seems prepared to guess. After all, for well nigh 2,000 years the Jews have shown no particular interest in Christ or the gospel and so we must still be in "**the times of Gentiles**" and, who knows, may yet be for another few thousand years. And how many thousand years will the conversion of "all Israel" take thereafter? Those who believe that the "end of the world is near" better think again.

If "all Israel" is to be saved, the vast millions of Jews who have already lived and died during the last 2,000 years *in rejection of Christ*, will surely knock a great hole in the term "all Israel".

THE CONTEXT OF PAUL'S WORDS

To understand the drift of Paul's statement (Rom. 11:25) we require, as always, to notice the context of his words. Ideally we should read Chaps. 8,9,10 and 11 of Romans, where Paul draws on all manner of arguments to contrast the limitations and failings of the Mosaic Law with the virtues of Christ, His gospel and His Church. Paul proves to the Jews that even the O.T. predicted the time when God would accept the Gentile on equal terms with Jews.

Paul, at this time, reflects gloomily upon the spiritual state of his own people, Israel, and laments that Christ, as predicted, had proved a stumbling-stone to them, and that because "**of their unbelief**" they, generally, had declined to enter the Kingdom of God. However, he quotes Isaiah as saying that "**Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, A REMNANT shall be saved.**" Indeed Paul insisted that his own "**heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.**" (*Presumably, if "all Israel" was going to be saved, Paul need not have worried himself in this way.*) "**For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.**" (Rom. 10:1).

Paul continues through Chap 10 to illustrate the shortcomings of Israel regarding God's Messiah (regularly quoting Moses and Isaiah) and shows that when Isaiah said, "**Who hath believed our report?**" he was, in fact referring to *Israel's refusal to accept the gospel of Christ*.

Moses, himself, predicted that God would provoke the Jews to jealousy by promoting the Gentiles: "**by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.**" (10:19).

In Chap. 11 Paul begins by postulating a question which may have entered the minds of the recipients of his epistle: i.e. Has God then, in effect, "**Cast away His people, Israel?**" He quickly answers it, "**God forbid. For I also am an Israelite.**" In short, *if Paul (an Israelite) could be saved by the gospel, so could the rest of the Israelite nation:* in exactly the same way. By elevating the Gentiles to a position on

level terms with the Jews God had not cast away the Jews: they, with the Gentiles, *had equal opportunity to embrace the gospel* and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In the event, the Gentiles had quickly grasped the opportunity, whereas the bulk of the Israelite nation had treated the blessing of Christ with disdain. Paul, elsewhere in this epistle, reminds everyone that **"the gospel of Christ"** is God's only power unto salvation, **to the Jew first** and also to the Gentile, and that the Kingdom of Heaven had been preached by the twelve, and the seventy, *exclusively* to the **"lost sheep of the House of Israel"**. Likewise, when the gospel of Christ was preached, subsequent to Pentecost, it was preached firstly to Jews. Although Paul was to be **"a light to the Gentiles"** he laboured initially with Jews and, when travelling, the first place he made for was the Synagogue. In fact, until Philip preached to the Samaritans and Peter preached to Gentiles (Cornelius), the Church *consisted solely* of many thousands of Jews. And so the Jews had every opportunity to receive the gospel and enter the Church, especially bearing in mind that the gospel was **to the Jew first**, and also to the Greek. Paul eventually became disenchanted with the Jewish reaction to the gospel, and when the Jews at Antioch **"spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming, Paul and Barnabus waxed bold, and said, IT WAS NECESSARY that the word of God should FIRST have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."** (Acts 13:46) To support his contention that "a remnant" of Israel would, in fact, be saved (and this is a far cry from "all Israel" being saved) Paul quotes the occasion when Elijah, in hiding, complained to God that the children of Israel, after throwing down God's altars, forsaking God's covenant and slaying God's prophets with the sword (so that Elijah was the only one left): were now intent upon finding Elijah to put him to death. **"But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved unto Myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then AT THIS PRESENT TIME ALSO there is a remnant according to the election of grace."** (11.5). And so, it seems, that the saved "remnant" *was in process in Paul's day* and not something reserved for "the Millennium".

THE BIG "IF"

The latter part of Chap. 11 strikes a note of caution directed towards the Gentiles. Although Israel, by and large, had fallen by the wayside, and the Gentiles had proved to be ready beneficiaries of the gospel, God would use the situation by trying to provoke the Jews to jealousy (11:11). Under the O.T. economy Israel had had the pre-eminence, and the Gentiles **"had been strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."** But now, in the gospel age, the roles seemed reversed, in that the Gentiles were now pre-eminently followers of God's Son, whereas the Jews had not only spurned Him but crucified Him. Paul hoped that even he, personally, might **"by any means, provoke to emulation them which are my flesh (Israelites), and might save some of them"**. Paul hoped, by the preaching of Christ, **to save some of his countrymen** and states that **"if they abide not still in unbelief"** they can be reconciled again to God. *That was a big "IF"* and 2,000 years have passed without any appreciable change in the attitude of Jewish indifference. That was how things stood in Paul's day, but what did Paul say of the future? Paul, cautions the Gentiles not to be smug or complacent in their favoured position, because the roles could easily be reversed again and the Jews, **"if they abide not still in unbelief"**, could be restored again to God's favour. **"For,"** says Paul, **"I would not brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits:**

that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved . . ."

CONCLUSION

And so, where does all this take us? At the end of the day we must all make up our own minds as to what is meant by "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in", and David Lipscomb in his Commentary agrees "it is a difficult question and so receives different answers from different people".

Certain points should be noted:-

(1). We are not told **how long** "the times of the Gentiles" would last, whether 100 years: 1,000 years or even until Christ returns. As remarked earlier, 2,000 years have already passed wherein the Jews have shown little interest in the gospel. We should also note that the word "Until" does not always signify some activity **thereafter**. For instance Michal had no children UNTIL her dying day (2 Sam. 6:23): she certainly had very few children **after** her dying day. "**UNTIL the time of reformation**" (Heb. 10:9) does not suggest earthly activity **thereafter** nor does "**UNTIL the times of restitution of all things**" (Acts 3:21). Thus "**UNTIL the times of the Gentiles**" might not signify activity **thereafter**.

(2). "**And so all Israel shall be saved**" does not mean that every Jew will be saved any more than every Gentile will be. Paul says he agonised that "**he might save some of them**". Why agonise to save "some" if "all" are going to be saved. The phrase "**And so**" (all Israel will be saved), means "*in this way*". "All Israel" will be saved, **in this way** if they are going to be saved at all. *In what way?*: the rest of the verse tells us: by faith and acceptance of the "Deliverer": Jesus Christ. That was **how** "all Israel" would be saved. In any case, Jesus, Himself, said the broad road to destruction contains the masses, **and few** would find the K. of G.

FEW (not "all") will be saved.

(3). *There is nothing to be gained* by Jews returning to Palestine. Jews must become Christians (and lose Jewish identity) and they can be Christians equally well in any part of the world. Paul, on his travels, made hundreds of Jewish converts, but did not seem to advise them all to "head for Palestine": in fact, they established churches in their own locality.

(4). If, after "**the fulness of the Gentiles be come in**" there is a period of time when Jews are converted in great numbers: this, as stated previously, will surely be cause for great rejoicing but they will receive no special dispensation, and will have to embrace the gospel like anyone else. This possibility does not, however, bolster any idea of a "millennium" or "1,000 years reign." The Jews will require to undergo their dramatic conversions **prior** to the coming of Christ, for, on that day, all opportunities of obeying the gospel will cease. We are presently living 'in the last days' or 'last times' (Acts 2:17) and there will obviously be 'a last day' (John 6:39) when momentous events will occur. *Christ will return* on that day, (1 Thess. 4:16). *The General Resurrection* will also take place that day (John 6:44). That day will also be *Judgment Day* (Matt. 25:31). This will not happen over a period of time but "**in the twinkling of an eye**". The then living will join the resurrected dead to meet the Lord in the air and all shall be changed. *The earth will be destroyed that same day* (2 Peter 3:9) " . . . **the earth and the works therein shall be burned up**". The gospel is to be preached in all the world until Christ returns: thus there seems little room for 'A Millennium' or '1,000 years reign'.

Readers will have noticed that neither of the two verses featured in this article (Luke 21:24 or Rom. 11:25) say anything whatsoever about "signs". "The Times Of

The Gentiles" would come and go, it seems, without any accompaniment of signs from heaven. In any case, it is difficult to see any reason why there should be any such signs, or what they could possibly accomplish. The Jews are certainly not "written off" by God, for He still loves them and wants to save them, but like all others, only through the gospel of His crucified Son.

EDITOR.

WAS JUDAS BLAMEWORTHY? (Part 1)

Is Judas Iscariot unjustifiably maligned?

The Religious Broadcasts producer of BBC: GMR asked me to discuss live on "Easter Sunday" whether Judas is unjustifiably maligned. The counterpart would hold the view that Judas was really a very much misunderstood person who really had good intentions at heart. I realised that I would have to brush up on "Judas" and this is a summary of my studies.

As it happened no sympathiser came to champion Judas, so I had almost ten minutes of broadcasting answering the interviewer.

I did wonder could anything positive come out of taking such a negative position? Would presenting the case against Judas create a negative reaction towards Christianity?

What an unpleasant subject!

It is said that in early Christianity Judas was seen as the epitome of Jewishness and formed the basis of anti-semiticism. That surprises me because all of the twelve were Semites, including our Lord. There are no grounds for anti-semiticism based on the character of Judas. The subject here is "Was Judas blameworthy?"

Uttering the very name Judas makes one feel awkward. That could be why his namesake the Lord's brother is rendered "Jude" in English translations. Judas was a common name. Another of the twelve Apostles was also named Judas. He was distinguished from Judas Iscariot as "**Judas . . . not Iscariot**". (John 14:12)

Even thinking about the events culminating in Judas' betrayal and suicide conjures up an uncomfortable sense of horror. (Imagine the depth of the remorse that drove him to plunge himself beyond death into "the awful unknown". Many outside of Christ see death as the entry into the "Awful unknown".)

There is a gut feeling that there may be a bit (only a bit, mind you) of a Judas in all of us. Perish the thought - but could we be as blameworthy as he? On the other hand we live in the "no absolutes" era. Any feeling of guilt we might experience is considered to be a psychological malfunction. So it is forcefully asserted that it is wrong to suggest that any action could be considered to be either right or wrong.

Is there perhaps a desire to excuse Judas in order to excuse ourselves?

The living God says: "**Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil; . . .**" Isaiah 5:20.

Even if we have to do it - sin is still sin - and the least in the kingdom of heaven are those who not only sin but also advocate it. Matthew 5:19.

The purpose here is to see if Judas was blameworthy.

But surely he had to do it didn't he?

Does not John, four times in the AV, record Judas as the one who "**should betray him**"? So it is claimed Judas **had** to do it - he had no choice because it was part of the Sovereign plan of God. The AV phrase "Who should betray him" would now be better

rendered "Who was going to betray him".

Foreknowledge and "What Ifs"

But, it is argued, what if Judas had not betrayed Jesus - then there would have been no crucifixion - no resurrection - no Christianity - so he had to do it - Does it not say "The Son of man goes as it is written of him"? Matt. 26:24, Mark 14:21, Luke 22:22. However, even though the Son of man was to go "as it is written of him", it does not say that Judas had to be the prime mover. Judas is left without excuse, for it goes on to say "but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed. It is good for that man if he had not been born".

There are numerous "What ifs" in the scriptures. For example: What if Adam hadn't sinned and no-one had died - What would have happened to the ever increasing population in this small planet?" We could speculate for ages as to what might have been - but the facts are: Adam did sin, and Judas did betray the Lord.

But didn't the scripture have to be fulfilled?

As Jesus said ". . . none of them is *lost* save the son of perdition (i.e. son of ruination); that the scripture might be fulfilled." John 17:12.

There are two things to be borne in mind about God's predestinations:-

(1). God's character is holy. He is not a respecter of persons Acts 10:34. He does not force any person into being damnably sinful against his will. James 1:13-17. Suggesting God arbitrarily damns some and blesses others, risks blaspheming the Holy Spirit of God. Matthew 12:31-32. He is "not willing that any should perish" 2 Peter 3:9. He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live". Ezekiel 18:23,32,33:11.

(2). God's foreknowledge forms the basis of His predestinations (Romans 8:29), not the other way round.

Also in the passage quoted - John 17:12 - Jesus "lost" Judas. To be lost - Judas must have been all right to start with, but somewhere along the line he revealed the characteristics here referred to as "the son of perdition". "Perdition" means ruin/ruination. It became evident he was disposed to being disruptive. He wasn't born bad - he transgressed - he "fell" - "Judas by transgression fell" from apostleship. Acts 1:25. He was chosen personally by the Lord (Mark 3:13). He started off on an equal footing with the others. He was entrusted with the communal money bag. Later he was "lost" (John 17:12) and "fell" (Acts 1:25).

But didn't Jesus choose him knowing he would betray him?

It's suggested that Jesus must have known that Judas would betray him when He chose him because "he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" John 2:24-25. Also didn't He say in the upper room "I know whom I have chosen - but that the scripture might be fulfilled: He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his head against me." John 13:18, and early in His ministry say "Did I not choose you twelve and one of you is a devil?" John 6:71.

These passages do not say that Judas had evil intentions when he was chosen as an apostle. In fact there is a note of sadness in Jesus statement "Did I not choose you twelve . . . ?" coming as it did after many of His followers had forsaken Him and Jesus had asked the twelve "Will ye also go away?" Peter's impulsive yet beautiful answer "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." was met with the despondent "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

The word "devil" (diabolos) means a slanderer, maligner, subversive talker. It's

the word from which we get diabolical. Already Judas had begun to make disruptive remarks.

But Jesus sent him out telling him to get on with it.

In the upper room, after saying it was happening "that the scripture might be fulfilled" he told him "What you do, do quickly" John 13:18,27.

There comes a point when God's Spirit stops striving with men (Genesis 6:2) and He abandons them to their own devices to suffer the consequences. Didn't God abandon the idolaters of old to pursue their alternative lifestyle and to reap the consequences (Romans 1:26-27). Another example is when Israel wanted a king like the nations around them in preference to God being their ruler. He warned them of the consequences. Then when they were obstinately unrepentant, God "gave them a king in his anger and took him away in His wrath." 1 Samuel 8:7-20 & Hosea. 13:11. Let us be warned - "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" Hebrew 10:31.

In the upper room, Judas had already taken on board the Devil's - the arch-maligner's idea to betray the Lord. His heart was wide open for Satan to gain entry, which he did after Judas accepted the morsel of food the Lord offered him. From then on it was outright antagonism ("Satan" = Adversary). It was then, when Judas was all keyed up to do his dastardly deed, that the Lord told him "What you do, do quickly" John 13:27.

It is possible for those who trust God to be *indwelt by God* (1 Corinthians 3:16). It should not be thought strange that Judas having taken on board Satan's plan (John 13:2) should become *indwelt by Satan*.

ALLAN ASHURST.

(unfortunately, due to its length, this article has had to be split into two parts.
Part 2 will (D.V.) appear in the next issue.)



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

Question: "In Matthew 27: 51-53 we read, 'many holy people who had died were raised to life'. Have we any way of knowing who these people were, why they were raised, and what happened to them?"

The straightforward answer to these questions has to be "No!"

Having said this, the three verses in Matt. 27, from which the questions are derived, are well worth examining because they record details of the extraordinary events which occurred when the Lord 'dismissed his spirit' - voluntarily died - on the cross.

1st. The beautiful curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place - was torn from top to bottom, symbolising that access into the Presence of God had become possible. And, of course, as has often been observed, the fact that this curtain was torn from the top *downwards*, rather from its lower hem *upwards*, indicates that this was a miraculous event.

2nd There was an earthquake. Since Judea lay in an area of the Middle East which was notoriously subject to earthquakes, this would not, in itself, have been regarded as

very unusual. The fact that the earthquake occurred *when* it did, marks it out as more than mere coincidence; hence, its effect on the Centurion in charge of the soldiers who carried out the crucifixion (v.54).

3rd *Certain graves were opened by the earthquake and their occupants brought back to life.* I think we should notice that Matthew, writing many years after the events had occurred, 'concertinas' them chronologically, as though they all happened at once, when in fact, some time elapsed between them.

The 'collapsing' events in this way, is a literary device not uncommon in biblical historical accounts. **Joel 1:28-29** is an example in which we see that events which were separated by centuries were recorded as though they occurred one after the other.

In other words, when the earthquake opened their tombs, these 'saints', holy 'ones' or 'righteous ones', did not come to life immediately and emerge from their tombs, but did so three days later. It is plainly stated in verse 53, that they emerged out of the tombs *after* the Lord Jesus Himself was raised.

Their resurrection followed His own and was made possible by it, and thus constituted both a striking testimony to the power and efficacy of His redeeming sacrifice and an assurance of the resurrection of all who have faith in Him.

I suggest that it is *possible* to accept this explanation of what happened, but it is surely *impossible* to believe that these people came to life and *remained, alive in their opened tombs* for three days.

4th. *These resurrected 'holy ones' then entered the city.* Remember that the dead were never buried within Jerusalem's walls. This was regarded as unlawful, because even to touch the dead, or even a tomb, was to contract religious defilement.

5th. *And many people saw them alive in the city.*

These statements are all made by Matthew in the simplest and plainest of terms, so we cannot possibly fail to understand what he is telling us. This means that the options open to us are extremely limited - and equally plain.

SOME ATTEMPTS AT AN "EXPLANATION"

We must either accept that these events occurred as recorded; or we must give attempt to explain them away.

It is not surprising, since what Matthew records are indeed miraculous occurrences, that all kinds of supposed 'explanations' have been advanced in order to discredit the record. Here are some of them.

1) *"No corroborating evidence has been found, which supports what Matthew records."* We have only his account, and the critics therefore claim that it is reasonable to assume that if such amazing events had occurred, other Gospel writers would also have mentioned them.

But it does not follow that Matthew's record in these verses is unreliable because it has no parallel in the other three 'Gospels'. If this is the way in which the reliability of biblical records must be judged, we shall find ourselves having to discount other passages in the Gospels, simply because they record events which are not mentioned by other writers. That would be plain foolishness.

2) *"Even if we accept that certain graves were opened by an earthquake, the story of bodies being raised was only the result of someone's over-active imagination."*

In other words, someone saw the opened tombs and mistakenly *assumed* that dead people had been brought back to life and, as often happens, the story grew with the telling! A rumour was soon circulating which claimed that these 'resurrected' people had been seen in the city.

However, this argument does not explain verse 54, which tells us that *the 'centurion' and those who were with him* - i.e. - the Roman soldiers on duty - *'saw the earthquake and what took place'*. Were they also suffering from over-active imaginations? Verse 54 states that it was the witnessing of what transpired when Jesus died, which filled the Roman officer and his men with such awe that they said of Him, *"Truly this was the Son of God!"*

3) *These verses do not really belong to the original Gospel according to Matthew, but must have been added to the record at some stage."*

This is often the argument which unbelievers use when they have nothing else to fall back on! Deny the genuineness of the record!

But, Alfred Plummer, whose scholarship is still widely recognized, tells us in his commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew, that *"there is no textual evidence that the passage is an interpolation."*

Having said all of this, the fact remains that there remain questions which we may ask but which we cannot answer.

Who were these 'righteous people'? Were they men and women of God from Old Testament times, such as His servants the prophets, perhaps? That word 'saints' is really an Old Testament word, first found in **Deut. 33:2-3**, and tombs of the prophets may still be seen in the area around Jerusalem.

Were they people who had lived during the Lord's earthly ministry; righteous people such as Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist? Or Joseph, the husband of Mary, who, almost certainly, had died before Jesus was crucified?

There were others, also, who rejoiced to see the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies, of this we may be sure. But we can say nothing further.

We noticed that they appeared to 'many' - not to everyone.

If they really were people of New Testament times, perhaps this means that they appeared to people who had known them during their life-time, their friends and relatives and others who shared their hope.

And what happened to them? Where did they go? Here, again, we are confronted with a mystery which we cannot solve. Though a range of weird and wonderful solutions have been suggested through the centuries.

Some expositors have even suggested that these 'holy ones' were raised to witness to the fact of the resurrection of the Lord Himself, and that, having borne witness, they later returned to their graves! This seems to me to present an eerie - even incredible - picture of these resurrected people calmly going back to their tombs to lie down and die again!

Perhaps there is something to be learned from the account of the raising of Lazarus, found in **John ch.11**. The passage tells us that when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead great crowds came to see him and believed in Jesus because of him, to the intense annoyance of the Jewish chief priests. But we are not told how long Lazarus lived, or what became of him afterwards. We may, of course, be absolutely sure that he did not live for ever, and we must assume that, sooner or later, he died again.

This may be what happened to the 'righteous ones' referred to in Matthew's history. They lived for a time, and then died.

As was stated at the commencement of this article, we cannot hope to find, or offer, an explanation of these amazing events. Yet even though this is true, neither can these things be explained away!

It is impossible to dismiss what Matthew describes as mere fantasy. We must,

therefore, either reject his account as untrue *because we cannot explain it*, or accept it as fact, *even though we cannot explain it*.

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EVANGELISM

Christ's mission on earth was to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). He said of himself, "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom of many (Matt. 20:28). Paul wrote, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners . . ." (1 Tim. 1:15).

Jesus knew what his objective was and he died to accomplish it. The writer of Hebrews said of him, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of Death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). In His death Jesus exemplified a truth he had earlier taught His disciples. He had said, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:23-24). Every person who has ever been saved, and every person who will ever be saved is a fruit of Jesus' death.

What Christ has done, he now invites his followers to do. After making the statement concerning dying wheat and producing fruit he said, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be; if any man serve me, him will my Father honour" (John 12:25-26). Jesus is telling us that to follow him we must do what he did. He laid down his life for others, so we too must lay down our lives for others.

In the words of the Great Commission we are told by Mark, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). The Commission is clearly stated. God's desire is for "every creature," every person, to hear the gospel of Jesus. But, even with the clear-cut instruction to tell others about the crucified and risen Saviour, the job is not being done. What is it that keeps God's people from telling others about Jesus? What hinders us?

FAILURE TO BE SPECIFIC IN GOAL SETTING

Our goal should be to share the gospel of Christ with "every creature" - every person within our own city first then the country, then the state, then the whole world (Acts 1:8). How many are you going after in your community? One thing is sure, we won't reach any more than we go after. Likely we will reach less than we go after. Too often we limit ourselves by the size of the church building, but it is apparent that the New Testament Church had no such physical limitations. It reached a membership of 3,000 the first day. In a short time there were 5,000 men. They went after every person in Jerusalem and literally "filled" their city with the doctrine of Christ (Acts 5:28).

Jesus is Lord! He is the goal giver. He has given us the assignment - "every creature." "And why call ye me. Lord, Lord and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). In the first century God's people were faithful and "preached the gospel to every creature under heaven" (Rom. 10:17-18; Col. 1:5-6,23). As we look at their

strategy we see that they started in Jerusalem, went out into Judea, then Samaria, and finally to the "ends of the earth." They were involved "daily" (Acts 2:46; 5:42) and had a strong emphasis on "personal involvement" (Acts 8:4). There was emphasis placed in "prayer" and "the ministry of their word" (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1, 4:24, 31-33; 6:4; 12:5).

The people we read about in the Book of Acts were a "community" of believers. They were a "fellowship"! They started out as a small group of 120 (Acts 1:15), but quickly expanded to 3,000 (Acts 2:41), and then 5,000 (Acts 4:4) and then there were "multitudes" added to their number (Acts 5:14), and then they "multiplied" (Acts 6:7). Those who were being saved knew they were "passing from darkness to light" (Col. 1:13). Having received salvation themselves they could not stand by idly while their friends and relatives walked blindly into eternity unprepared to meet God. They had truly "found it" and they engaged themselves in the business of helping others to "find it".

Acts 4:12-13 serve as a kind of commentary on the Book of Acts revival. Here Peter was before the most esteemed religious leaders of the city. They were down on him, being "grieved" that he preached Christ as the Messiah. Before this pompous assembly he shared the simple gospel of Jesus closing his remarks with the statement of verse 12, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Verse 13 describes the reaction of the Council, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

Peter and John did not display arrogance before their esteemed audience, but they did display a polite confidence. They knew the words they shared were true, so they had an unembarrassed freedom of speech. We stand today where Peter and John stood in the Book of Acts. As Peter says "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

J. WODELL.

REJOICE EVERMORE

The exhortation of first Thessalonians 5:16 is to "rejoice evermore." A common thread running throughout the scriptures is for God's people to be happy, thankful and glad. The Greek word used here is *chairo* and is used 74 times from Matthew to Revelation.

The word is found in Matthew 2:10 when the wise men saw the star over Bethlehem. It is said they *rejoiced* with exceeding great joy. When the prodigal son returned home the father told his elder son "it was meet that we should make merry, and be glad" (Luke 15:32). In Phillipians 2:17,18 the word is translated *joy*. When Gabriel came to Mary he said, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28). The word "hail" here is the same as rejoice. James sent *greeting* to the twelve tribes scattered abroad (James 1:1). The word is translated *God speed* in 2 John 10,11. At His resurrection, Jesus met His disciples, saying, "all hail and they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him" (Matt. 28:9). As Jesus talked with Zacchaeus, he came down out of the tree "and received him joyfully" (Luke 19:6). It is also translated *farewell* in 2 Corinthians 13:11.

CAUSES FOR REJOICING

Our rejoicing should be continual. Let us note some things about which we should rejoice. Just as many rejoice at the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:14), even so should we rejoice at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:10,20); for without it, he could have never walked this earth to give us a perfect example. We should rejoice at Christ's triumph over death and the grave, for it was not possible that he could be held by it (Acts 2:24). We should rejoice in the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28). We certainly rejoice in salvation as did the Ethiopian in Acts 8:39. We rejoice evermore because our names are written in heaven in God's book of life (Luke 10:20). We ought to be as the apostles who *rejoiced* "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41). "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). We are to rejoice in spite of meanness and persecution. "*Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*" (Matt. 5:10,12). We rejoice when fruit comes forth from our labours (John 4:36). We rejoice evermore because of the hope of eternal life (Rom. 12:12). We are happy and glad because of the obedience of people whether they be alien sinners or children of God (Rom. 16:19). We are glad when we enjoy the fellowship of brethren of like precious faith (1 Cor. 16:17; Phil. 2:18).

In the "Pulpit Commentary" we read: "Joy is that feeling of delight which arises from the possession of present good, or from the anticipation of future happiness; and in both respects the believer has abundant reason for constant joy. He possesses the blessedness of forgiveness and the sure prospect of eternal life, and he has the consciousness that all things work together for good to them that love God. (Rom. 8:28). God wishes his people to be happy, and does not suffer them to be indifferent to their own peace. He commands them to rejoice, yea, to rejoice evermore" (Vol. 21, page 105).

Christians are not remorseful. Christians have more over which to be happy than others in the world. The happiness of the world is only temporary and earthly. We seek that happiness to be found in Christ Jesus both in this life and the one to come hereafter. In believing of Christ's return to this earth to claim his own, "we rejoice with joy unspeakable" (1 Pet. 1:8). "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice." "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." (Phil. 4:4; 3:1).

G. ROBINSON.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

July 4	Genesis 25:1-11	Luke 16:19-31
July 11	2 Kings 5:1-18	Luke 17:1-19
July 18	Genesis 7	Luke 17:20-37
July 25	Ecclesiastes 2:1-11	Luke 18:1-27

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

I have never read this account as a parable, I am of the view that the rich man and Lazarus were real people in the real world. They were also real people in the next world with circumstances com-

pletely changed for both. The Authorised Version speaks of "hell" (16:23), which is not a particularly good translation. The Greek word is *Hades*, which is simply the region for departed spirits. Flavius Josephus, the great Jewish historian of the first century A.D., actually once wrote a discourse on Hades. It was addressed to the Greeks. It begins thus: "Now as to Hades, wherein the souls of the righteous and unrighteous are detained, it is necessary to speak of it". The home of the righteous he describes as "The Bosom of Abraham".

Hades is also mentioned in the following passages: Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; Acts 2:27,31; 1 Corinthians 15:55; Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13,14. There is a great gulf fixed in Hades between the unrighteous dead and the righteous dead (16:26). The former are in torments and the latter in a state of bliss in Abraham's bosom (16:23) or paradise (Luke 23:43). Hades translates the Hebrew term *Sheol*, the sixty six occurrences of which are distributed throughout every period of biblical Hebrew. ". . . it is a place of conscious existence after death, one side of which is occupied by the suffering unrighteous dead separated by a great chasm from the other side peopled by the righteous dead enjoying their reward" (Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament).

What is the main lesson in the account of the rich man and Lazarus? "Failure to practice the love and mercy taught in the OT will lead to loss in the next life" (I.H. Marshall).

TEN HEALED OF LEPROSY

Leprosy is a loathsome disease. "No other disease reduces a human being for so many years to so hideous a wreck" (E. Masterman) "Lepers . . . treated as if they were dead men" (Josephus). "The fearful malady, disfiguring the whole person, and making it horrible to the beholder, was called by the Jews 'The Stroke', and even by the Greeks, 'The Firstborn of Death'. In a case of 'true leprosy' the sufferer was pronounced utterly unclean, and forthwith assumed the awful badges of his sad condition. He rent his clothes, bared his head, put a covering on his upper lip, as though he was mourning for the dead, and wherever he went he cried out 'Unclean! Unclean!' an exile from his home, his family, his friends, he was bound to reside without the camp or city in a separate house by himself, or in the society of others similarly afflicted" (Maclear and Trench).

Leviticus chapter 14 is an important one on this subject as it deals with the rites and sacrifices in the cleansing of the leper under the Jewish Law. 2 Kings 5 is also an interesting chapter as it centres upon Naaman, "**captain of the host of the king of Syria, who was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper**" (5:1). Elisha had instructed him to wash in the Jordan seven times to be cleansed, but he was reluctant to do it. Eventually he did, following the wise counsel of his servants. The result was his "**flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child and he was clean**" (5:14). (Surely the God who can cleanse the flesh in water can also cleanse the soul in water. I, of course refer to baptism.)

In this meeting between Jesus and the ten lepers (17:11-19), only one of the ten healed returned to thank Him. The man was a Samaritan. He was rewarded by an act of spiritual healing on Jesus' part (17:19). Jesus is the greatest physician in the world. He can cure everyone of the greatest disease in the world - sin. Not even leprosy can compare with this. Faith in Jesus can make one whole. This is what salvation is all about.

THE SON OF MAN REVEALED

When Jesus returns to judge the world in righteousness, the day will be the last day. In fact, we are told that on the Master's return "**we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed**" (1 Corinthians 15:51,52). (Please note that Paul's words are addressed to fellow saints.) Jesus' words recorded by Luke (17:22-37) cannot refer to the last day. For example, verse 31 reads: "**In that day, he who shall be upon the housetop and his stuff in the**

house, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back". These words are a far cry from those of Paul: "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2); and Peter: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heaven shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

I see the verses in Luke 17 as pertaining to the destruction of Jerusalem. The "body" is Jerusalem and the "eagles" constitute the Roman armies, which destroyed the great city in 70 A.D. (17:37). Adam Clarke commented that the body or the carcass was the Jewish nation which was morally and judicially dead. It was doomed to be devoured. James Macknight wrote: "As eagles find out, and gather round a carcass, so wherever wicked men are, the judgement of God will pursue them; and particularly, in whatever part of the land any number of the unbelieving Jews are, there will be the Romans, the executioners of the divine vengeance upon this nation, be gathered together to destroy them".

TWO PARABLES

The purpose of the Parable of the Unjust Judge was to teach His hearers that "men ought always to pray and not to faint" (18:1). The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican was addressed to those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others" (18:9). In other words, we must be unwearied in prayer and we must humble ourselves in the sight of God. Jesus, as ever, is our example here. He constantly prayed to His heavenly Father for help, strength and guidance and He at all times manifested the spirit of humility in a world full of selfishness, haughtiness and pride. If Jesus was in need of prayer during His earthly minis-

try, how much more do we need to offer prayers and supplications during our pilgrimage on earth?

THE RICH RULER

Jesus did not deny that the young ruler had striven to keep God's commandments from his youth up. But he saw the weakness in his character. "Yet you lack one thing: sell all that you have and distribute unto the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (18:22). Sadly, he only responded in sorrow because he was very rich (18:23). The margin of my Bible reads: "The Peril of Wealth". How True! His possessions and his wealth got in the way so Jesus commanded him to give them away. Some might think that Jesus was asking of him too much of a sacrifice. But let us remember that eternal life is in the question and joy through eternity. As Paul wrote: "For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing let us be therewith content" (1 Timothy 6:7,8). I like what Martin Luther once said: "I have received from Taubenheim one hundred pieces of silver from Scharf; so that I begin to fear lest God be giving me my portion here below. But I solemnly declare that nothing can make me happy except God".

IAN S. DAVIDSON, Motherwell.

BE STEADFAST

1 Cor. 15:58.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord . . ."

BE YE STEADFAST

This means to be firm, settled, unmovable, and having the spirit to keep going on, in spite of the darts of the devil trying to defeat us in our work for the Lord. We are to purpose as never before in our hearts, to do God's will, We must align our plans to His divine

purpose. It should be God who orders our step, way, direction . . . It must be His way that we travel. In this we overcome the work of Satan and the enemy about. In this day and age we are surrounded by depressing circumstances and make no mistake about it, this is when we are susceptible to the powers of the Devil. Today is no time to give up or have a failing heart. We cannot afford to quit labouring for the Lord. We cannot become discouraged to the point of falling away from our first love. This is no time to flag in our efforts for the kingdom. The word of God exhorts us to be steadfast.

UNMOVABLE

Unmovable means "not to be shifty," we are to stand fast, keeping strong the faith that lies within us. In this, the bustle of unfavourable circumstances will not direct us away from the true path. We need to remember that the Lord has freed us from sin; the world and powers of the evil one. Brethren, we have provision over all this in the guise of the Holy Spirit. He is there to help, guide and overcome the works of the fallen angel. So depend upon Him.

ALWAYS ABOUNDING

The word means "in exceeding measure". In other words something above the ordinary. Now here is a promise of God. Think of it, any work done will never be unproductive. It's a promise of God. The work of the Lord WILL make progress, It may be we will never see the fruits of our labours, but nevertheless success will be the result somewhere. God's word makes it known that all will be seen in glory. We have to endure the task, the labour, the hardship and yes, the stress, regardless of how many darts the devil throws. We need to reassure ourselves that our labour will not be in vain. The word of God declares it; accept and believe it. Beloved DO TAKE TIME to be holy, take time to Labour for the Lord, keep the faith. We in this day and age, must be vigilant. It

is in the end times we live. Battles exist. One is against the Devil and his angels. The other is our own; i.e. we are fighting the good fight of faith. Brethren, make sure your hearts are stayed on the Lord. We must overcome. To the work brethren as never before . . .

ANDREW P. SHARP,
Newtongrange.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. How many sons did Jesse have?
2. How many Bible characters lived beyond 900 years?
3. Jacob's well was located near here.
4. How many men of Judah came to Samson in Etam?
5. For whom did Elkanah have a deep love?
6. Where was Elijah fed by the ravens?
7. How many legions could Jesus have called upon to save Him at the time of His arrest?
8. Where did Satan tempt Jesus for the second time?
9. The gates of the heavenly Jerusalem are made of what?
10. How many bowls of wrath did God pour out upon the earth?

WANTED - FULL TIME WORKER

The Church in Zoar Street, Morley is seeking a man to work in the full time ministry of the word in Morley.

We are looking for someone who is mature in age and has empathy with young and old and able to help the Church move forward into the new millennium (DV) in an area expanding rapidly as a sleeper town of Leeds.

We are able to offer substantial support to the right person.

Contact: Bill Jones, 2 Zoar Street,
Morley, Leeds, LS27 8JD.
Telephone: 0113 252 9165

COMING EVENTS

**ARGYLE STREET,
HINDLEY**

SATURDAY, 5th JUNE, 1999
7.30 p.m.

SUNDAY, 6th JUNE, 1999
10.30 a.m. and 6.00 p.m.

Speaker: Frank Worgan (Renfrew)

GHANA APPEAL

The Church continues to grow in Ghana. All the glasses, clothes, books and children's toys posted in January this year have now arrived.

This month I would like to remind readers of the work going on in Upper Volta in the area of Kete-Krachi, an area of Ghana where there are no roads to the villages. Courage Dela Sedoameda, a school teacher was sent to teach in this area about 5 years ago and he preached the Word with enthusiasm and by 1996 there were 4 congregations established. Added to this there is now Dambai, Akwebae and Kotokugyani. The seed has been sown also in Osamani, Tokorano and Yarigah. The leaders in these congregations have appealed to me to request in the Scripture Standard for some money for meeting places as these congregations are large. They intend to build a traditional meeting place with "Swiss walls" which I understand to be

bamboo cane framework with a mud brick infill. This they will do themselves but the appeal for money to put a tin roof on their meeting places and some bags of cement to render the mud brick to ensure that the building will last and not be washed away. This would not be an expensive project and I know that it would not only give great encouragement it would be very much appreciated. We have been greatly encouraged especially in the last month having received some new contributions and once again we thank everyone who is helping in this appeal. Please make cheques payable to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)" and send to Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife, KY12 0DU. Tel. (01383) 728624.

- 1. Eight (1 Samuel 16:10,11).
- 2. Seven.
- 3. Sychar (John 4:5-6).
- 4. Three thousand (Judges 15:11).
- 5. Hannah (1 Samuel 1:5).
- 6. Kerith (1 Kings 17:3).
- 7. Twelve plus (Matthew 26:53).
- 8. Temple (Matthew 4:5).
- 9. Pearl (Revelation 21:21).
- 10. Seven (Revelation 16:1-17).

ANSWERS

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