

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

Vol. 74 No. 2

APRIL, 2007

"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"

Editorial **The curse of denominationalism (cont'd)**

In last month's article, in our consideration of denominationalism, we looked at Jesus' injunction to his disciples, what is often called the Great Commission, to 'make disciples' of others and then considered the events subsequently surrounding the 'Day of Pentecost' and in particular Peter's response to the question from the Jews: "What shall we do to be saved?".

WHAT IS THE 'EKKLESIA'

This month I want to consider 'the Church'. It is commonly stated that 'the Church' was established at Pentecost. However to make that statement, and use the term 'established', strongly implies that some kind of 'organisation' or establishment was set in place at Pentecost. We will come to a detailed look at the word 'ekklesia', which is translated church, a little later, but suffice to say for now that the only grouping that emerged from the Pentecost events was that number of repentant believers who responded to the apostle's preaching and subsequently formed a community of believers who 'continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, breaking of bread and prayers'. They in fact became the Church (ekklesia) in Jerusalem, at that time having no official 'title' as a group and indeed no designation other than that they were all, in common, believers in Jesus based on the apostle's teaching. (Note that the word Christian was only coined some years later and probably, according to the vast majority of commentators, as a derogatory term initially.)

The Greek word ekklesia is not in any sense a 'religious' word; rather it was a common enough expression to describe an assembly or congregation of people gathered together for a specific purpose. So the word was used in Acts 19:39 to describe the body of citizens gathered together to discuss the affairs of State. In Acts 19:32 it is used to describe a riotous mob. In Acts 7:38 it is used of Israel,

Contents: 1 - Editorial; **4** - Question Box; **6** - Genesis; **8** - Explain God; **9** - The Early Church; **12** - Understanding the Seasons of Life; **16** - News & Info.

as it is in the Septuagint where it is used 'to describe the gathering of Israel, summoned for any definite purpose, or a gathering regarded as representative of the whole nation' (W E Vine). An ekklesia was a meeting, or assembly or congregation of people (and again it is important to think of the words assembly and congregation in their general usage rather than as 'religious' terms). Quite naturally meetings of Christians began to use the common expression for their gatherings. "*Whether the Christian use of ekklesia was first adopted from Jewish or Gentile usage – the point is disputed – it certainly implied 'meeting' rather 'organisation' or 'society'. Locality was essential to its character. The local ekklesia was not thought of as part of some worldwide ekklesia, which would have been a contradiction in terms*" (The New Bible Dictionary). We often use terms such as 'the New Testament Church' or 'the early Church' to express a single entity though the use of the term ekklesia to define a single entity is foreign to the New Testament. Indeed the only sense in which ekklesia is used for the whole universal company of Christians is as 'the body of Christ' and not as any amalgamation of local assemblies.

In the terms that we are interested in, in the immediate aftermath of Pentecost and beyond, the ekklesia was, in any place where believers gathered, the **local assembly** (gathering) of those repentant believers who had heard, acknowledged and acted upon the apostle's teaching and, of course, those who subsequently responded to the gospel as it spread. There might have been as many churches as there were towns or cities or even households (the house church was a reality). Those early believers were not given, neither did they take for themselves, any denominational tag – and they did not collectively call themselves the 'church of Christ' or 'the churches of Christ'. "*The reference in the best texts of Acts 9:31 to the Church 'throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria' is not an exception. Since this concludes the pericope (passage of scripture - editor) describing the scattering of the Jerusalem church (Acts 8:1) it seems right to take ekklesia here to be the Jerusalem church so spread as to occupy the territory of 'the ancient Ecclesia which had its home in the whole land of Israel' (Hort, The Christian Ecclesia)*" (The New Bible Dictionary). Commenting on Romans 16:23, Vine states: "That Gaius was the host of 'the whole Church' simply suggests that the assembly in Corinth had been accustomed to meet in his house, where also Paul was entertained." It is of course quite likely that there was more than one assembly in Corinth and Paul's reference to the greetings from the 'churches of Christ' in 16:16 is most likely to refer to each of the local assemblies in Corinth. Most certainly he was not using the phrase as a 'denominational tag'.

ADDED TO THE 'BODY OF CHRIST'

I suspect that for most readers much of the above will be no great surprise. It is on the basis of the 'no central organisation, no earthly headquarters' tenet that the autonomy of the local assembly (ekklisia), even today in the 21st century, is founded. In that sense gatherings of Christians are no different today than they were 2000 years ago (I am talking about the local, autonomous meeting here, not the forms of worship that are employed). However we know that 'denominationalism' today is rife and it backs people into the corner of having to define themselves as much by what they are not as by what they are. It also creates real problems, as I hinted at in last month's article, when we try to establish our Christian identity. Let me explain what I mean by that. I have heard people say, 'I joined the Church of Christ because (for example) I believed it was the true Church'. Two aspects of this appear wrong to me. Firstly to speak of 'joining the Church of Christ' indicates a denominational mindset because it does imply (though I accept that it is not necessarily the intention of those that say it to do so) some sort of organisation.

Secondly, of course, in this context we do not 'join' anything; it is simply not in our gift to do so. On the basis of our belief, repentance and baptism we are added, by God, to His Church i.e. to that universal ekklesia of believers who are the 'body of Christ'. That being the glorious result, we will want to meet with the local ekklesia of Christians who themselves have been added to the body of Christ. That's how it worked in the first century and how it should work today.

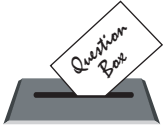
Defining the theory is relatively straightforward; dealing with the practical implications in a 'denominational' religious world is much more difficult. Let me give you a little personal background. I was brought up in a Christian family and will be eternally grateful for the godly teaching and example of my parents and others. In another respect it could be said that I was brought up 'in the Church of Christ' and was added to the Lord's Church at the age of 15 since when I've worshipped with the local ekklesia in Wigan. Not that many years ago the church in Wigan was known to, and knew of, most of the other churches in the UK who might call themselves (and I have to be careful not to fall into the denominational trap here) 'churches of Christ'. Many of the Christians in other local churches were familiar and it was known 'what was going on' in other communities. However the world has changed and a recent experience has influenced me. Last year I attended a 'Men's Day' hosted by the Nottingham assembly and, walking into the assembly hall, I suddenly realised that I did not know the majority of people in the room either by name or by sight. In fact, far from it. Many of the men were from ethnic backgrounds – how wonderfully culturally diverse is the body of Christ! I didn't know the names of many of the people there, the congregations they attended or the detailed practices of those congregations. Yet we sang, ate, prayed, studied and worshipped together. We didn't seek each other's congregational background to check that it was 'one of ours'. We didn't ask for a detailed run-down of congregational practices before we started. The only way we could legitimately do what we did was under the banner of our common status as repentant, baptised, faithful believers – Christians - added to His Church by God (or at least people who were wanting to learn more about how to become Christians). So, by implication, it was our common relationship with God that was important, not our uniformity of practice

NON-DENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANITY

The real implication of all of this, and the really tough one to explain, is that I do not regard myself as a member of a denominational group called 'the churches of Christ'. If 'the churches of Christ' is a denomination, then it offends the principles of the New Testament. If 'the churches of Christ' is not a denomination then it doesn't exist as an organisation – quite correctly in my view. If we are an organisation, or even a loose 'federation' then the principle of local autonomy disappears and our foundation becomes something other than Christ. What I have been added to, by God's grace, I believe, is the universal group of repentant, baptised, faithful believers who together constitute the body of Christ – that is the universal, worldwide Church (ekklesia), past, present and future who belong (or will belong) to Christ; and as a result of that, a local group of Christians who are part of that universal Church meet together regularly to continue as best we can to follow the apostle's doctrine. It is not having 'joined' a church of Christ that gives me that privilege to worship in that community; it is God's grace in having added me to his body that gives me, and every other repentant, baptised, faithful believer that wonderful blessing and privilege.

Next month I hope to look at what it means to 'be of the same mind'.

(To be continued)



QUESTION: Who was responsible for the bruising of the Saviour?



Recently my attention was drawn to two verses in two Old Testament books in which statements appear that seem to conflict. The first statement is found in Gen.3:15, a verse which, as you no doubt know, contains God's first promise of a Coming Saviour, whom He describes as '*the seed of the woman*'.

The second statement, equally well known and certainly just as frequently quoted, is found in Isaiah 53:10. This also relates to the Coming One, whom God describes, at verse 13 of the previous chapter, as '*My Servant*'.

Here we have two verses which have a great deal in common since they each contain a Messianic prophecy which foretells the coming of the One who will bring about the defeat of '*that old Serpent, the Devil*' (Rev.12:9), and make salvation possible for mankind. Furthermore, they both reveal that, in achieving this victory, '*the seed of the woman*', who is the '*Servant of God*', would Himself be '*bruised*'.

Gen. 3:15 tells us that, in crushing the head of the Serpent, the heel of '*the seed of the woman*' would be '*bruised*' or '*hurt*'. At least, this is what we believe the verse to teach –and I certainly believe that it is the truth! However, when Jerome produced the Latin Vulgate version of the Old Testament, about 405 AD, for some strange reason he translated the statement as: '*she shall bruise thy head*'. The fact is that the pronoun is masculine - '*he*'- and the verb '*bruise*' is also masculine and this plainly means that, in gaining his victory, the '*seed of the woman*' would himself be bruised by the serpent.

But then, we are reminded that Isa.53:10 states, "**Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him: He hath put him to grief.**" Hence, our questioner wants to know, "*Who was responsible for the bruising of the Messiah? God? Or the Devil?*"

First, may I suggest that these two passages are worth looking into a little more closely, because there are features in both which are extremely interesting.

Genesis 3:15.

For instance, in Gen.3, when God spoke about the '*seed of the woman*', you and I understand that He was speaking about a birth; about an event with which we are quite familiar and which we usually do not find remarkable, but which, at this stage in mankind's history, was quite unknown.

There had *never before* been a birth. Therefore, when, as Gen. 4 records, Eve gave birth to Cain, it was both a unique and a strange experience, and she must have believed that it had somehow to do with God's promise.

In fact, she probably believed that the birth of this child was the *actual fulfillment* of God's promise. This is why she named the baby '*Kain*', which means '*obtained*'. The KJV tells us that Eve said, "**I have gotten (obtained) a man from the LORD**" (Gen.4:1). Other versions say, "*I have obtained a man by the help of the Lord.*"

But the word that has been translated '*by*', or '*from*', is, in Hebrew, '*eth*', which means '*even*'. Eve said, "*I have obtained a man, even the help of the Lord.*" She saw Cain as being 'the help of the Lord, and she appears to have believed that it was this son who was to crush the head of the serpent, and bring about a speedy return to the comfort of the Garden Home which she and Adam had lost.

She was, of course, mistaken. More than that, she was also bitterly disappointed, because, although we are given no information about the early character or behaviour of Cain, it is significant that when her second child was born, Eve named him '*Abel*', which means '*Vanity*'.

Now, that name, given at Abel's birth, could not be regarded as a comment on the character of the child. It could only be an expression of the disappointment that Eve had experienced,

when she realised that Cain was not the one who would crush the Serpent's head. Eve never knew what you and I now know. She never knew that God's promise, recorded in Gen. 3:15, was the seed-promise of His plan of salvation which, at the right time, would reach completion when '**God sent forth His Son**' (Gal.4:4).

Isaiah 53

The second passage mentioned in the question, Isaiah 53, also contains more than is usually seen in it.

Although we usually begin with the words, "**Who has believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed...?**", the passage really begins at verse 13 of the previous chapter, when God says, "*Behold my Servant...*"

The interesting fact is that Jewish scholars accept that the One who is mentioned is indeed the Messiah, but they find it difficult to explain the verses in chapter 53 which describe Him being '*brought as a lamb to the slaughter*', '*cut off out of the land of the living*', and, '*making His grave with the wicked*'.

This is because Jewish theology claimed that, when the Messiah came, he would live for ever (John 12:34). He could not die. Consequently, these statements in Isaiah 53 constituted a problem for which the rabbis had to find a solution. They attempted to do this by claiming that there would be two '*Servants of YHVH*', one of whom would die, and the other who would never die!

But, of course, this solution is utterly without biblical support, and, in fact, as must surely be obvious, it creates as great a dilemma as the problem it was designed to solve.

Our Responsibility

But, is there not another statement in Isaiah 53 that should be considered? It is not referred to in the question we are considering, but it should not be overlooked.

We must recognize that, whatever the role of God, or of Satan, in the bruising of the Son of Man, we surely bear some responsibility, because: "**He was wounded for our transgressions bruised for our iniquities**". This means '*because of*' our transgressions and iniquities. "**Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows**".

The New Testament emphasizes this truth, in words that seem to echo Isaiah 53. "**Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live to righteousness; by whose stripes we are healed**" (1st Pet.2:24).

Conclusion

It seems to me that the conflict between Gen.3:15 and Isaiah 53:10 is more apparent than real.

1. The old Serpent was responsible for the 'bruising' of the Saviour, because the Devil persuaded our first parents to sin by exercising their will in opposition to the will of God, thus introducing the principle of sin into human life and making Salvation necessary. Sin made the suffering of the Saviour necessary.
2. We must all accept a personal responsibility for the 'bruising' of Jesus, because the guilt of our personal sin could not be removed except by God's Own Lamb, and it is through His wounds that we are healed.
3. Whilst the wickedness of Satan made salvation necessary, the Grace of God made salvation possible, and the sufferings of Jesus demonstrate the great lengths to which God was prepared to go to make it possible for us to be reconciled to Himself.

The 'bruising' of the Suffering Servant of God, displays two mighty facts:

- ❑ The fact of '*the exceeding sinfulness of sin*' And;
- ❑ The fact that '*where sin abounded Grace did much more abound*'.

**Questions to: Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP
Email: Frank@fworgan0.talktalk.co.uk**

STUDIES IN GENESIS 2

(Ian S Davidson, Motherwell)



I have followed the Creation/Evolution debate since I was sixteen years of age. I recall reading material from the *Evolution Protest Movement* in the mid-sixties, which got me excited. A lot of the articles were written by one A.G. Tilney, who kept things going on the anti-evolution front in the U.K. for many years. I tried to understand some of the terms he and others used: geology, cenezoic, mesozoic, paleozoic, carboniferous, tertiary, cretaceous, pleistocene, cosmology, entropy, thermodynamics, radiocarbon, catastrophism, uniformitarianism, natural selection, sedimentation, tectonics, homo neanderthalensis, australopithecus, pre-Cambrian, amoeba, vestigial organ, chromosomes, mutation, and scores more.

I recall my uncle Leslie Purcell telling me about a debate that was once held in Motherwell between brother Walter Crosthwaite and a Mr Wilson entitled: *Is Evolution True?* He provided me with a booklet on the full report of the debate, which I read avidly. In it, brother Crosthwaite mentioned three scientists, who rejected the theory of evolution: Sir Ambrose Fleming, Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis Merson Davis and Douglas Dewar. I later learned that in the 1930s Sir Ambrose joined Bernard Acworth and Douglas Dewar to form the *Evolution Protest Movement*. This movement is now called the *Creation Science Movement*, which I personally have always supported. Today there are literally hundreds of scientists in the world, who are either critical of the Darwin's theory of evolution or reject it entirely. I have met some of them and read the writings of many of them.

NATURALISM

The whole thrust of the Bible is creation. Genesis chapter one is endorsed again and again throughout the scriptures. The Bible reveals to us that all things began miraculously. Nature did not bring all things into existence, God did. Nature could never have done it because it does not have the power. Nature itself is not a cause, but an effect. Naturalism, the view that reality is explicable without reference to anything outside the natural world, is false, totally false. C.S. Lewis once wrote: "If naturalism were true then all thoughts whatever would be wholly the result of irrational causes. Therefore all thoughts would be equally worthless. Therefore, naturalism is worthless. If it is true, then we can know no truths. It cuts its own throat."

THE BIG BANG THEORY

Secularists do not like the book of Genesis. They often ridicule it. So they have come up with their own ideas as to how everything has come into existence. A recent and popular theory of theirs is the "Big Bang" theory. Donald De Young has written: "The process supposedly began with the explosion of a nugget, or 'kernel', of mass energy, about fifteen billion years ago. As the energetic radiation spread outward, temperatures slowly cooled enough for hydrogen and helium atoms to form. About ten billion years ago, the first stars began to form from the cooling gas in the young universe. This star-forming process eventually gave rise to the Milky Way and other galaxies. When these initial stars had sufficiently aged, some of them became supernovae explosions. The resulting star fragments later combined into new stars to repeat the formation-disintegration process. Our sun is said to be a third-generation star, a relatively recent addition to the family of stars, and to have formed around five billion years ago. Other star fragments are thought to provide the material for planets and life forms, including people." Such is the story of chance. Frankly, I find it unbelievable. Compare it with the Genesis record and there is really no comparison! Genesis is a simple, straight forward, matter-of-fact, to the point account of what really happened. And what really happened is that God spoke, and bang! There everything was.

HOW MANY CREATURES?

We read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1-3). These words, of course, refer to Jesus. The amazing thing for me is that, when Jesus walked on this earth, He looked upon His handiwork - the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the valleys, the rivers, the seas, the grass, the trees, the birds, the bees, etc. All were created by Him and for His pleasure. For example, He created around 3500 mammals, 8600 birds, 5500 reptiles and amphibians, 18000 types of fish, 815,000 arthropods (lobsters, shrimps, crabs, water fleas, barnacles, etc.), 88000 molluscs (mussels, clams, oysters, etc.), 25000 worms, 4700 echinoderms (marine creatures like starfishes and sea urchins), 5000 sponges, 1700 tunicates (sea squirts, etc.), 10000 coelenterates (corals, sea anemones, jelly fishes, hydroids), and 15000 protozoan (microscopic, single-celled creatures, mostly marine). That is a total of 1,000,000 animals. Jesus did not encounter most of them during His short life on earth, but knew about them all and, perhaps, a lot more besides, which man has still to discover. And speaking of man, I would point out that Jesus made Him too, as well as woman. Man and woman are the only creatures made in God's image (1:26).

ORIGIN OF LIFE

Scientists today are spending fortunes in trying to find extra-terrestrial life. The truth be told, I think they are wasting their money. I believe that life is unique to the earth. Life is not the result of spontaneous generation, which is impossible, but creation by a Supreme Being. The Supreme Being is the begetter of life. Life begets life; and do not let anyone tell you otherwise! I recently read John Blanchard's book: *Does God Believe in Atheists?* (It was a privilege to meet him at the end of last year). In this tremendous work he points out the impossibility of spontaneous generation. For example, he quotes the scientist Wickramasinghe: "One chance in 10 to the power 40000 (the odds against the spark of life igniting accidentally) is such an imponderable that I am 100 per cent certain that life could not have started spontaneously on earth." Wickramasinghe's great colleague, Sir Fred Hoyle, was of the same view. Although not a creationist, Sir Fred's book *The Intelligent Universe* is a major challenge to neo-Darwinism. He wrote: "Personally, I have little doubt that scientific historians of the future will find it mysterious that a theory which could be seen to be unworkable came to be so widely believed." (Sir Fred has his own theory as to how life originated on earth, but that is another story.)

GENESIS: A TRUE RECORD

Genesis is true. It is true historically and scientifically. Henry M. Morris has written: "...we must oppose any effort from any source to mythologize or allegorise the Genesis record. It was written as sober history, the divinely inspired account of the origin of all things. No one, therefore, can hope to attain a true and full understanding of anything, without a basic acceptance and comprehension of the origin of everything, as recorded in Genesis." Satan too knows that it is true. Is it any wonder, therefore, he is out continuously to discredit the great book. He has many allies in this work, including the atheistic scientists Richard Dawkins and Peter Atkins. Satan knows that the book of Genesis is the foundational book of the Bible. Destroy the foundation and the whole thing falls. He is working hard it to achieve this goal. But I rejoice in and take great comfort from the fact that he will never succeed.

HEBREWS 1

We read: "God who at sundry times and in various manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things (*universal power*), by whom also He made the worlds (*creative power*); who being the brightness of His glory (*Majestic power*), and the express image of His person (*Divine power*), and upholding all things by the word of His power (*sustaining power*), when He had Himself purged our sins (*saving power*), sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (*ruling power*)..." (Hebrews 1:1-3). So we clearly see from this passage that God created all things by the power of His word and maintains all things by the word of His power. Dear reader, please reflect on these words in the light of Genesis 1.

Explain God

-- By Danny Dutton, 8 years old, Chula Vista, CA

When given a third-grade homework assignment to "EXPLAIN GOD," this is what 8-year-old, Danny Dutton of Chula Vista, CA, had to say. How many readers here could honestly do as well?

One of God's main jobs is making people. He makes them to replace the ones that die, so there will be enough people to take care of things on earth. He doesn't make grown-ups, just babies. I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way He doesn't have to take up His valuable time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leave that to mothers and fathers.

God's second most important job is listening to prayers. An awful lot of this goes on, since some people, like preachers and things, pray at times besides bedtime. God doesn't have time to listen to the radio or TV because of this.

God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere, which keeps Him pretty busy. So you shouldn't go wasting His time by going over your Mom and Dad's head asking for something they said you couldn't have.

Atheists are people who don't believe in God. I don't think there are any in Chula Vista. At least there aren't any who come to our church.

Jesus is God's Son. He used to do all the hard work like walking on water and performing miracles and people finally got tired of Him preaching to them and they crucified Him. But He was good and kind, like His Father, and He told His Father that they didn't know what they were doing and to forgive them and God said "O.K." His Dad (God) appreciated everything that He had done and all His hard work on earth so He told Him He didn't have to go out on the road anymore. He could stay in heaven. So He did. And now He helps His Dad out by listening to prayers and seeing things which are important for God to take care of and which ones He can take care of Himself without having to bother God. Like a secretary, only more important. You can pray anytime you want and, they are sure to help you because they got it worked out so one of them is on duty all the time.

You should always go to church on Sunday because it makes God happy, and if there's anybody you want to make happy, it's God. Don't skip church to do something you think will be more fun like going to the beach. This is wrong. And besides the sun doesn't come out at the beach until noon anyway.

If you don't believe in God, besides being an atheist, you will be very lonely, because your parents can't go everywhere with you, like to camp, but God can. It is good to know He's around you when you're scared in the dark or when you can't swim and you get thrown into real deep water by big kids.

But... you shouldn't just always think of what God can do for you. I figure God put me here and He can take me back anytime He pleases.

And... that's why I believe in God.

(Reproduced by permission of www.Inspire21.com)

INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE FIRST CENTURY.

(John H Diggle (Nottingham))

A few months ago I enquired whether anyone would be willing to take on the challenge of writing a number of articles outlining the development of early Christianity from the time of the death of Christ, through the 1st century. I am delighted that John agreed to undertake the project and this is the first in a series of articles. Editor

STUDY 1 – THE INFLUENCE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

SETTING THE SCENE

God, it goes without saying, knew what He was doing in causing His own entry into this material world, in Christ, to coincide with the glory days of Roman rule.

Jesus Himself was keenly conscious of a sense of timing to His earthly ministry, indicating as much to His mother, Mary, on the occasion of the first miracle at Cana in Galilee – John 2:4.

Standing back to take a wider perspective, it is clear that the geopolitical conditions attending the establishment of the Church were both foreseen and foretold by the Old Testament prophets. Peter's application of Joel's prophecy, on the day of Pentecost, is very familiar; but more specifically concerned with questions of imperial power politics is Daniel's God-given interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of an awesome statue recorded in Daniel 2. More significant still is Daniel's statement in 4:25, again to Nebuchadnezzar, that: **"...the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."**

Precisely in line with the interpretations that God gave to Daniel, three significant influences remained in effect as the backdrop to Jesus' birth, ministry, death, burial and resurrection and the subsequent developments of His Church. Rome was, in many respects, the most potent of these not least because it had also incorporated some of the more admired philosophies, culture and administrative principles and governmental precepts of its predecessor regime, Greece. Although it was in what turned out to be its last days as any great political force, Judaism continued to be a predominant religious force to be taken account of.

For purposes of clarity it will be necessary to look separately at the extent and character of each of these influences on the progress of the early Church, but it should not be forgotten that, as is always the case, none of them existed in isolation from the others. They were what they were in interplay between the as much as in their own right, and the Church itself, though emergent, was far from being a quiescent bystander at the mercy of powers beyond its own influence.

This first article will concentrate on the Roman Empire's influence on those conditions in which our first century brethren became Christians and strove to serve the King of kings.

ROME



The Roman overlords generally possessed both the power and the will to impose their rule on any part of the then known world that they chose. Gaul and some of the almost wild Britannic tribes gave them considerable pause, but ultimately proved incapable of very prolonged resistance.

Though achieved by predominantly military means, Rome's expansion and imperialist ambitions consisted in far more than simple occupation by force. As was the case with the British Empire, Rome's expansionist motives were sometimes mixed and on occasion even confused or contradictory. There was certainly a strong

desire to spread 'Roman-ness' in its cultural, political, administrative, economic and even, to some extent, religious dimensions out of a belief that it was superior, civilising and 'for the best'.

Expansion at such a rate and across what were then considerable distances represented an enormous challenge logistically, economically and strategically and the development of the wherewithal to achieve its ambitions on such a grand scale frequently proved to be necessity's mother of invention.

There can be a tendency amongst Christians to completely demonise Judaism, Hellenism and the influence of Rome, as if their effects were entirely, or almost entirely, to the detriment of the gospel's progress. At later points in this series many of these pains, pressures and persecutions will be considered, but here I want concentrate on those aspects of Rome's influence, which I believe were ultimately prepared for by God, as advantageous to the expansion and development of His embryonic Church.

THE SMOOTHING OF THE WAY

No doubt you will recall that God had promised the elevation of valleys and the making low of hills in prophecies like that of Isaiah. In part these were advance references to the role of John the Baptist as forerunner to the Messiah, but, taken together with Daniel 4:25 we are probably meant to observe the preparation of circumstances conducive to the progress of the Church, delivered by the more direct involvement of God Himself, in the affairs of significant nations. Rome's own rise to the top of the pile in succession to Alexander's Greek kingdom, the Medo-Persians before that and Babylon at the time of Daniel's prophecy, is itself eloquent testimony to such steering.

It should probably be mentioned that there could be drawbacks in being too rigid in categorising Rome's influences into those that are positive and beneficial, and those that are negative or detrimental. Appearances can be deceptive; persecution at the hands of some of the later Roman Emperors is tempting to deposit straight into the negative category, but since God is well able to 'intend for good' what others have 'intended to harm' we had better not be over hasty in our making of such distinctions. Equally, easy progress is not necessarily the best way to come to those things that will prove eternally substantial and enduring.

Without implying that all was set fair by virtue of them, the influences of the Roman Empire, which proved largely beneficial to the Church's early progress, are those to which we can now turn.

1. Pax Romana

Remaining with the outline provided by Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, it comes as no surprise to learn that the years prior to Rome's rise and especially the accession of Augustus as her first Caesar were marked by constant chaos and conflict. These were the times of Esther and Artaxerxes, Alexander the Great, Philip of Macedon, Anthony and Cleopatra, the battles of Issus, Salamis, Platea, Actium and Philippi.

Apart from those perennial 'thorns in the flesh, Gaul (France) and Britain, outbreaks of dissent had largely been quelled by the time of Augustus and the pace of imperial expansion slowed to a point at which greater attention could be given to the administration of the peace.

The internal struggles for power surrounding the assassination of Julius Caesar were over, if not forgotten, and Rome was able to enjoy the fruits of comparative peace across her empire.

Claudius would prove something of a clumsy ruler, during whose reign widespread famine led him to expel Jews, including Priscilla and Aquilla from the capital city. Caligula was clinically insane but instigated programmes of intolerance against the Jews who refused to acknowledge his self-proclaimed deity, especially those of the DIASPORA at Alexandria; and under Nero hot persecution of Christians began in earnest.

The whole Roman Empire, therefore, enjoyed something of a peace dividend in the early years of the first century AD, and that included the Church. It was certainly sufficiently significant to be recorded by history as the Pax Romana – the Roman Peace.

2. Administration

Both so far as intentions and practical outcomes were concerned the civil, political and economic

structures, learned from the Greeks and subsequently refined, became necessary tools in the administration of the largest empire the world had known, up to this point.

It is commonly supposed that the major requirement, which led to the construction of Rome's impressive network of roads, was that of troop movements – and so it was, but not exclusively so. The maintenance of law and order, the distribution of goods in pursuit of commercial profit, and communication with provincial governors were also significant factors in the expansion and preservation of this durable facility.

3. Language

At least so far as the Roman Empire was concerned, and that is what matters for present purposes, it had a common language that was a tremendous asset to efficient communication. That language was not Latin, as is commonly supposed, but Greek, and a particularly useful form of Greek at that. Latin was mainly confined to use as that language of official documents and the conduct of business in the senate. Apart from that it was rarely heard in spoken form.

Greek existed in two forms; classical Greek was that used by poets, authors and academics. It was more for written communication than verbal, although less so than is true of Latin. The other variety is known as KOINE Greek, which is that of the vast majority of the New Testament. KOINE is the root of the word KOINONIA, which our New Testament's regularly translate as either 'fellowship' or 'having in common'. Yes, that is the word in Acts 2:44. This was the conversational language of the marketplace and the person in the street, readily intelligible to just about everyone of all ethnic backgrounds across the empire, with few exceptions. Furthermore, KOINE Greek is colourful and expressive, accommodating in its vocabulary the sort of nuances and shades of meaning that Paul, for one, loved to use to full effect.

4. Coherent Government

Rule of law, respect for properly constituted authority and a structured judicial; system were all beneficial principles, again developed by the Greeks, but refined and incorporated by the Romans, which compared favourably with the kind of anarchy and tribalism that prevailed in much of the world before their ascendancy.

Judaism of course had little difficulty in identifying with these principles, by virtue of its previous history of relationship with God, but, generally speaking, that was not a factor that held any great weight outside of Israel's borders until Greco-roman law came along.

SUMMARY

Especially if you are more of a classical scholar than I am, which would not be very difficult, you will have noticed gaps, not to say enormous holes, in this brief account. Some, but by no means all of them, will be filled in as we continue. In any event it is not my intention, nor I'm sure the editor's, that this should be any kind of purely academic work, so much as one that illuminates something of those conditions, which, in being the backdrop to the development of the early Church, affected, either beneficially or adversely, its progress. In the meantime here is what I hope you will find a convenient summary of the main points.

1. God alone rules in and controls the kingdoms of men. Daniel 4:25.
2. He brought Rome to power and toppled it according to the principles that were for the benefit of His eternal purposes.
3. The imposition of widespread peace compared with earlier times, necessitated and motivated Rome's development of structures that enabled her to profit from it and maintain it.
4. A common rule of law, language and administrative structure, together with vastly improved communication links, were of advantage to the spread of the gospel also.

In the next article we will look, God willing, at the influence of Judaism on early Christianity.

Understanding the Seasons of Life

Lesson 6 - The Season of Temptation

(David Yasko, USA)

We continue our series on the seasons of life and this month look at temptation. Temptation is man's oldest problem. It's been around since Adam and Eve. The fact is, we all struggle with temptation. So today we are going to see the six keys from God's word on:

HOW TO HANDLE TEMPTATION.

KEY #1: ANTICIPATE IT.

Don't be surprised, intimidated or shocked by it. Be prepared for it. When temptation comes we usually have three common reactions.

- ❑ First is **shock**. "Where in the world did that thought come from?"
- ❑ Second is **frustration**. "Why do I keep having this thought?"
- ❑ Third is **discouragement**. "I'll never change or grow past this."

It's not a sin to be tempted. Giving in to the temptation, that's where the sin is. Jesus was tempted in every way we are, but he never gave in. Giving in is our choice. We will all face temptation, not because we're evil, but because we're human. It's what we do with that temptation that determines where we'll spend our eternity. The moment you put on your Lord in baptism, Satan put a contract out on you. In fact, Satan thinks about our downfall a lot more than we do. And he wants nothing more than to see us slip. And the amazing thing is if he can't get us to sin, he'll intimidate us with thoughts that we might sin and we get paranoid and lose sleep because of it. He just uses the power of suggestion on us. So what's the antidote? Matthew 26:41: **"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."** Be prepared for him. Know it's the devil. When God puts a thought in our minds it's inspiration. When the devil puts a thought into our minds it's temptation. We are free to choose which thought we dwell on.

Now, how can temptation be a season when we have to deal with it all the time? There are times in our life when we are more vulnerable to temptation than others. Some of us get tempted when we're bored, or lonely, or tired, or on the Internet, or under stress. Some face temptation after a big success. Did you know Satan tempted Jesus just after he was baptized and God had sent his Spirit to him? That was a tremendous spiritual high. Look at this verse. 1 Corinthians 10:12: **"So, if you think you are standing firm be careful that you don't fall!"** I heard about a guy named Bobby Leach who was a daredevil who went over Niagara Falls in an orange crate and made it without any injuries. A couple of hours later he was walking down the street and slipped on an orange peeling and broke his neck. It's the little things that kill us, isn't it.

KEY #2: ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY.

Accept responsibility for the temptations that happen in your life. Don't blame God

and don't blame other people. James 1:14-15: **"But each one is tempted by his own evil desire."** If we have no inner desire, we don't get tempted. I have never been tempted to sniff glue. Not once. The thought of sticking a tube of glue up my nose does not tempt me. Plenty of other things do and in all of them I have an inner desire. When I fall for temptation, it's my own fault. And the same is true for all readers. This is very important because we live in an era of irresponsibility. Nobody wants to admit that their problems are their own fault. It has become acceptable to blame the government, the media, our parents, our schools, our churches, our environment, even our DNA. So let me address that. Most of my problems, I bring on myself. And it's the same for you. Accept it, and stop trying to blame everybody else. Every time we pass the blame, we aren't admitting where the real problem is. If you are facing a temptation right now, you will never be free from it until you stop fixing the blame and start fixing the problem.

This is true even when other people hurt us. How we react causes the problem in us. And resentment, guilt, anger, bitterness, fear, will cause our pain to be prolonged. Do you know there are people who blame God for the messes in their own lives because **they** gave into temptation? I've had people tell me, "You know, God told me to leave my wife and marry this beautiful young woman." I'm going: "now where is that in the Bible? What verse is that?" God's will never contradicts God's word. And if God tells you no in his word, he will never tell you yes in the world. I don't care how right it feels. When God says no and we go with our feelings, we are walking right into a trap. Do you know the most common phrase I hear to justify sin? "Well, God wants me to be happy and this is going to make me happy." God wants his children happy. But God wants us to be holy a lot more than he wants us to be happy. Holy comes from doing what God says and we will never be totally happy as long as we ignore God's will. The happiest people in the world are the ones that hang on to what God's word says regardless of what their feelings say. Just as temptation is as old as Adam so is making excuses. So we have to go further.

KEY #3: ASK GOD FOR HELP.

When we confess him our temptations he's not going to say, "You're kidding me!" He's not surprised; he already saw it coming. Why do we have a problem asking God for help when we're tempted. I suggest for a couple of reasons.

- ❑ *First, sometimes we don't ask God for help because we really don't want it. We want to give in. We know it's wrong. We know the damage it will do. But we want to do it anyway and we're not about to ask God to help us out.*
- ❑ *The second reason is because it's not the first time we've fallen in this area and we're kind of embarrassed about it. We don't want to go, "God, it's me again." Don't ever be embarrassed to ask God for help. God's patience with his children is limitless.*

Why does God want us to come to him? Because he sent his son Jesus Christ to earth and Jesus went through everything we went through and that means he understands. **Hebrews 4:15-16: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are— yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."** We can go to God with confidence because Jesus went through what we are going through. Some of us can't imagine that. It's

a new insight. Does that mean Jesus was tempted to lie? Yes. Does that mean Jesus was tempted to get mad? Yes. To have an ego? Yes. Tempted sexually? The Bible says he was tempted in "every way" as we are. So that has to be yes. He was a man. But, he didn't give in. That's good news. Because if he's been there he can sympathise and if he didn't give in he can give us the way of escape.

Sometimes we don't call on God because we want to handle the problem with willpower. And willpower works for a while, but it's not a permanent solution. Any time we're using willpower to try and change we are under stress. Inside of us is an automatic pilot. It's our natural tendency to have sins, temptations and weaknesses. Willpower works for a while. Calling on God lasts for an eternity. Psalm 50:15: **"Call upon me in your day of trouble; I will deliver you."** That's God's 999. There's where we pray those microwave prayers. You can tell when people aren't stressed. They pray these long theologically flowery prayers with words like "bountiful" and "joyous celebrations of praise and thanksgiving." Let me tell you what a microwave prayer sounds like: "Code Blue! Code Blue." It's not real theological but it works.

KEY #4: ADMIT MY STRUGGLE TO A FRIEND.

We aren't required to admit it to everybody. Just somebody close who is a Christian that you trust so they can pray for, love, and accept you. This is important. When we admit our struggles, make sure the person we are talking to is not only a Christian but also the same gender you are. Temptations bring out vulnerabilities and we all know people who "had no intention" of having an affair or ruining lives who did just that because they were vulnerable. The chances are that some people think, "I don't need to talk to anybody. I don't struggle with anything." The fact that we're afraid to admit our weaknesses shows a struggle with insecurity. Insecurity comes out in the form of arrogance and pride.

Any time you meet somebody who has to constantly tell you how good they are at what they do, behind that mask is an insecure person. Which means we need to be talking to each other. 1 Corinthians 10:13: **"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man."** You know those little secret sins we'd just as soon not dwell on because we don't want anybody knowing about them? They're not anything new. We're all in the same boat. And that's why God, as a condition of healing, said talk to each other. James 5:16: **"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."** Admit your sins to whom? Each other. Why? For the purpose of healing. You don't have to go to a priest, a counsellor, a minister or an elder. We can go to each other and find healing. Don't repress it; confess it. Don't conceal it; reveal it. Hiding a hurt always intensifies it. One of the biggest myths is "time heals all wounds." No it doesn't. Time doesn't heal cancer. Surgery, chemotherapy and radiation treatments heal cancer. Time doesn't heal hurts. Sharing hurts with a friend, who will pray with you and hold your hands up, heals you. Let me give you three benefits of sharing our temptations with somebody who'll pray for us:

- ❑ *First, it will help us gain control.* Talking through a problem helps us get control over it. In fact, if we have a secret sin that we can't talk about, it's out of control.
- ❑ *Second, revealing our hurts, habits and hang-ups relieves inner stress.* We're going to find there are plenty of people who are in the same boat we are.

Believers and unbelievers have the same hang ups. Believers have a greater power than themselves in which to deal with the hang-ups.

- ❑ *Third, it provides support and accountability.* Both are necessary if we are going to find healing. Here's what God says: "You're not going to get well by yourself. You haven't up to now and you're not going to." We need other people to get through it. I can hear you thinking: "But that would be so humbling." You bet it will; that's why God gives his grace to the humble. As long as our pride won't allow us to be honest, we won't get well. We need somebody to help us walk through it.

KEY #5: AVOID TEMPTING SITUATIONS.

It is common sense that if you hang around the barber shop long enough, you're eventually going to get a haircut. Our goal isn't to see how close to the temptation we can get. Our goal is to see how far away we can keep from it. Proverbs 14:16: **"A wise man turns away from evil, but a fool is arrogant and careless."** Arrogant and careless is another way of saying, "I can handle this." You don't go to a bar just to eat pretzels. So we need to do a little frank assessment and analyze when and where are we the most tempted and vulnerable and then stay away from those places. Psalm 119:59: **"I thought about the wrong direction which I was headed, and turned around and came running back to you."** Great verse. The Bible tells us to run away from temptations. Joseph was tempted by Potiphars wife, who was trying to seduce him. He was wearing his favorite coat and she grabbed him by the coat, and he just left the coat and split. And sometimes we might have to leave our coat. Just to get away from there. Don't stay around. Let me give you some practical advice. Don't try to debate or argue with the devil, you'll lose. He's had thousands of years to figure you out.

KEY #6: AFFIRM GOD'S WORD.

Claim his promises. 1 Corinthians 10:13: **"God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."** Has anybody ever told you, "I just couldn't help myself? I had no choice but to give in?" They just called God a liar. God always gives us a way out. It may be tough, painful, embarrassing, or difficult, but there will always be a way out. We can either give into the temptation, or we can replace the temptation with truth. And the truth is found in God's Word. We are told to resist the devil and we do that by preparing for temptation. Ephesians 6:17: **"Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."** We have to get ready for battle. When you get ready for battle you need the right weapon and the right armour. Sometimes, when we go to war with temptation we are spiritual streakers. We go out on the battlefield with nothing to protect us. There are two steps to gaining the upper hand.

- ❑ Step one: Be saved. Become a child of Christ. Be born again. Be baptized. It's the difference in operating from a position of defeat and operating from a position of victory. Before we can say no to Satan we have to say yes to Jesus.
- ❑ The second step is to know God's word well enough to know when Satan is lying to us. We can be Christians but not know enough of God's word to fight Satan. We can know God's word from cover to cover but never have accepted Jesus Christ. If that is us, we lose! We need both.

Coming Events

Saturday Evening Meetings at Stretford.

To be held in the Green Hut,
538 Kings Road, Stretford, Manchester.
Each meeting will start at 7.00 pm and
will consist of:

A Gospel Topic, followed by
Light refreshments, concluding with
Open Discussion.

Dates and speakers:

21st April 2007
John Morgan, Hindley
22nd September 2007
Mark Hill, Loughborough
20th October 2007
Ernest Makin, Wigan.

EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WORKSHOP

**Thursday 30th August to Saturday
1st September 2007**

We are pleased to announce that we
will be holding our Second European
Christian Workshop at Lancaster
University.

The Theme will be:
*Growing Strong Hearts
And
Strong Churches*

Last year we had 53 people from 11
countries and they enjoyed the
experience.

DON'T MISS OUT!!

The speakers that have been
confirmed so far are:

*John Mooney (UK),
Vince O'Donovan (UK),
Jason Sneathen (UK),
Alexander Malirrytos (Greece),
Randy Lowery (USA),
Terry Briley (USA).*

We are also planning to hold
Ladies' Classes as well.

**Early Bird Offer: The fee will be
£95 if you book before 30th April.**
After this the fee will be £105.

If you want further information then
please contact:
Stephen Woodcock – (01942) 211479
Or E-mail:
stephen.woodcock@hotmail.co.uk

**LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING
YOU THERE**

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD

(10 issues per year)

PRICE PER COPY – POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM £7.50

OVERSEAS RATES ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE TREASURER

DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY.

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

Tel: 01875 853212 to whom change of address should be sent.

EDITOR: ROBERT MARSDEN, 4 The Copse, Orrell Road, Orrell, Wigan,
England, WN5 8HL. Tel: 01942 212320 E-mail: bobmarsden@bulldoghome.com