

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

BE INSPIRED...

By the value that was placed on your life.

It is an economic reality that the value of any item is the price that a buyer is willing to pay for it. We make decisions every day of our life about whether to purchase goods and services. At the prices at which they are offered to us and sometimes, particularly in the case of non-essential purchases, we will conclude that the exchange of our hard-earned money for the goods and services offered is 'not worth it'. Perhaps we see the 'value' principle most vividly when items of fine art are sold at auction, often for extraordinary prices. The intrinsic value of the materials used in the piece is probably very low, but what is perceived to have value is the uniqueness of the piece and its investment value, especially if it is the work of a famous artist. The 'value' rests in the belief that over time the value of the investment will increase – the 'value' judgment is an economic decision.

God's economy is somewhat different. "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" The Psalmist's reflection is that mankind is unworthy of, or too insignificant for, the attention of God. It is reminiscent of the instruction of some Jewish Rabbis that the sparrow was too insignificant a creature to be mentioned in the same breath as God. But God's 'value' economy says that even the humble sparrow (bought at the price of 'two-a-penny') is worthy of God's care and knowledge. And the message of encouragement to the disciples was simple enough: "Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

I believe that there is a very real paradox in our society that as economic well-being increases, our sense of self-esteem and self-worth diminishes. Maybe the real issue is that as economic well-being increases, any sense of spiritual values and spiritual well-being diminishes, and that the eternal worthlessness of economic well-being, however subliminal that perception is, gnaws at our sense of worth.

In his exhortation to 'love one another', Jesus told his disciples: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Peter, writing to dispersed Jews, reminds them that they were ransomed not with what the world values, "perishable things such as silver and gold", but with something of immeasurably greater value, "the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." How God values His people! What love the Father and the Son have for mankind! We have little intrinsic worth of our own, but what a joy and a comfort it is to know that God deemed us to be of such value to Himself, that even the giving of the life of His Son, the greatest expression of love imaginable, was not too great a price to secure our eternal salvation.

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Thinking Out Loud

Ian S. Davidson: Motherwell

John Bunyan once said of the Bible: "Sin will keep you from this book, or this book will keep you from sin". Sin, of course, is *the* problem in the world. Sin is that which has ruined mankind because it has marred the beauty and symmetry of man's character and has led man to rebellion against God. We see the consequences of sin everywhere. The world is full of hostility, hatred and war rather than joy, love and peace.

The Bible is against sin and for righteousness, but it reveals the origin of sin, the consequences of sin and the penalties of sin. The Bible loves truth, sin loves falsehood; the Bible loves goodness, sin loves evil; the Bible loves light, sin loves darkness; the Bible loves God, sin loves Satan; the Bible loves life, sin loves death.

Sin entered the world by one man and death by sin. Adam died the day he ate of the forbidden fruit. He became separated from God and lost the fellowship he had enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. Death is separation. There is spiritual death, physical death and eternal death. The last is described as "the second death" in the book of Revelation.

LIFE

God spells *life*. Plant life, animal life and human life are all down to Him. Where did the spark of life come from? The answer is very simple: it came from God. The Bible says quite clearly: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). So there is a Creator. Life did not originate by chance, but by design. The existence and complexity of life on earth surely reveals the greatness, the goodness and the power of a Supreme Being. Truly, we are all "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). Design demands a Designer! Yet, all can see that something has gone wrong with the world, and that something is sin.

THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM

Man can struggle away in such fields as sociology, anthropology, psychology and politics with his man-made systems and never really address the problem of sin. Sadly, many are well intentioned and think they have the answers, but they do not think and act in accordance with God's revelation. God's word reveals a remedial and perfect system for mankind often referred to as "The Christian System". I learnt a long time ago that a lot of people are quite ignorant of the plans, purposes, designs and details of the Christian system. Tragically, these include best-selling authors and renowned preachers.

Men throughout history have wanted to meddle in God's perfect system. A man-made religious system and a God-made religious system do not mix well. Indeed, such a mixed system is always incomplete, impaired and imperfect. True Christianity and, for example, Catholicism or Anglicanism or Presbyterianism (to name but three) do not go together like a horse and carriage. None of them is a marriage made in heaven. True Christianity is of God; the others are of men. Jesus saw the dangers here. He condemned in His day the "tradition of the elders". The coming together of such a tradition with the teaching of God proved disastrous in the end for many Jews. No wonder God's word condemns adding to or subtracting from His truth. We read, for example, towards the conclusion of the book of Revelation: "For I testify unto every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (22: 18-19). Dear reader, the warning could not be clearer!

THE GOOD BOOK

But let us return to Bunyan's statement: "Sin will keep you from this book, or this book will keep you from sin". The unadulterated word of God is the perfect antidote to sin. Brethren, our call to others should be: "Go *buy* the book and then go *by* the book!" Or, "If all else fails,

follow the Maker's instructions". Why do so many people have difficulties in this area? Could it be down to selfishness, stubbornness, laziness, and the like? Clearly, it is sin that gets in the way. What people have to do is to get sin out of the way and get in the Son's way.

PREVENTION

"Prevention is better than cure" is the old saying. How true! Prevention is very often cheaper too. Think, for example, of the costs of war when peace talks break down; the costs of imprisonment when a citizen breaks the law; the costs of industrial action when negotiations collapse; the costs of hospitalisation when health fails. God did everything to prevent the fall of man. Adam was well warned in the Garden. God did not force him to do what was right because Adam was a free agent. He had the choice of doing what was right or wrong. The restriction placed upon him was not a burdensome one and, yet, in the end, he ate of that forbidden fruit, as did his wife. No one can measure the costs of the Fall. One of the costs was the death of the Son of God on a cross. There is no bigger cost than that.

GOD'S AGENDA

What is the reality for you and me today? It is this: there is more to life than eating, drinking and being merry. There is more to life than shopping, watching television, going on holiday or making money. People say: "Life is for living!" Indeed it is, but, in truth, life is for living for God. To hold a meeting without an agenda can lead to chaos. To conduct your life without an agenda can produce the same result. Our agenda should be God's agenda. He looks for people who live lives well pleasing unto Him. He looks for people who walk in the footsteps of His Son. He looks for people who rejoice in salvation. Tragically, many are sleepwalking into eternal darkness. Of course, they are already in darkness because they are of Satan and his kingdom. The cry is "Wake up!" This is a cry that is heard throughout the Bible.

It is wonderful to enjoy the warmth of the Son each day. Jesus has healing properties, which reach into the innermost soul. No one can cloud Jesus' rays. They penetrate through anything. Personally, I feel His light morning, noon and night. It is with me every minute of the day, every step if the way.

REPENT!

What saves people? The answer is: obedience to the gospel of Christ. Socialism cannot save people; neither can capitalism, communism, humanism, conservatism, liberalism, evolutionism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, or any other "ism" you can think of. It is Jesus Christ that saves, if we will only let Him. Another cry is: "Repent!" Here was the cry of the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles. It is still the cry of the gospel. What did Peter say to that great gathering on the day of Pentecost when they asked what they should do to be saved? "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). When I responded to these words, many years ago now, I realised clearly that the road I was on was the wrong road and that hitherto my head was full of wrong thoughts; my heart was full of wrong feelings; my tongue was full of wrong words; and my life was full of wrong deeds. I had to do something about it and what I had to do was to: "About turn!" Turn from the broad way that leads to destruction and into the narrow way that leads unto life. That I did, and it is a decision I have never regretted.

IN CHRIST

We live in changing times and it is time for sinners to change, and change for the better. Jesus says: "Step inside!" Outside we have darkness, despair and death. Inside we have light, hope and life.

"Inside" is the kingdom of Christ. "Inside" means "in Christ", a phrase found again and again in the New Testament Scriptures. It is wonderful to reach the position that we are in Christ and Christ is in us. He is like the atmosphere we breathe. The atmosphere is out there, but it is also in our lungs. Without oxygen we are dead. Without Christ, we are dead also. Jesus spells *Life*.

Three Women in the Bible

Rose M. Payne

There are a number of instances of good women in the Bible, such as Naomi and Ruth, and Martha and Mary, which are usually quoted in lessons for the ladies. But we must admit there are one or two exceptionally bad women also, and it would be somewhat difficult in these days of political correctness for our brothers to refer to them in sermons. Two of the most notorious of these were mother and daughter or possibly stepdaughter, and the root cause of their wickedness seems to have been the worship of Baal.

Ahab, king of Israel, was described as more wicked than any of his predecessors, but his wife was even worse (1 Kings 16:29-33). She was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Zidon, and so infamous that her description has become commonplace in our language as "a painted Jezebel". Ahab allowed himself to be ruled by his wife and under her influence he worshipped Baal. Jezebel arranged for the prophets of the Lord to be killed (1 Kings 18:4) although Ahab's chief servant managed to save 100 of them. Jezebel then paid for 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the associated groves to be supported in Israel (1 Kings 18:19).

But then the prophet Elijah called on these priests of Baal to carry out a trial to see who would send fire from heaven and, when they failed, Elijah, with the help of the remainder of the people, had them slain. Ahab went home and told Jezebel about this, and she uttered a rash vow, sending a message to Elijah saying "**So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.**" Elijah escaped, so she was not able to fulfil this threat, and at the end of her life she did indeed fall victim to her own prediction.

Ahab had other wives or concubines besides Jezebel, for 2 Kings 10:1 mentions his seventy sons, but Jezebel was the dominant wife and the real ruler of the land. When Naboth of Jezreel was unwilling to sell or exchange his inherited vineyard, Ahab was reluctant to seize it by force, but Jezebel had no such scruples. Without his knowledge, she forged letters in Ahab's name, calling for false witnesses to be employed to accuse Naboth of blasphemy, and for him to be stoned. Then she simply informed her husband that Naboth was dead and he could have the vineyard. When Elijah found Ahab in the vineyard and prophesied his fate and that all of his family, Ahab repented of this sin and took to sackcloth and fasting (1 Kings 21:27-29) but Jezebel presumably showed no remorse. Elijah added "**And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.**" (1 Kings 21:23).

About three years later, Ahab was killed in battle as foretold and succeeded by his son Ahaziah. Jezebel was still in a commanding position as the queen mother and her son worshipped Baal as taught by his parents (1 Kings 22:51-53). But two years later he fell from a window and sent to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether he would survive his injuries (2 Kings 1:2). But Elijah intercepted his messengers and prophesied his death. He died leaving no son, so his brother Jehoram began to reign. Jezebel still had a son on the throne, but this one was not under her influence to quite the same degree, for he destroyed an image of Baal that his father had set up (2 Kings 3:1-3). He reigned for twelve years, during which time Jezebel was still able to influence events.

Eventually, Jehu was appointed to bring about the downfall of Ahab's house, and in reply to a question of king Jehoram's about his intentions he said **"What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?"** (2 Kings 9:22). So Jezebel's second son was killed and his body dumped in the former Naboth's vineyard (2 Kings 9:25).

When Jezebel heard that Jehu was coming, she did not dress in sackcloth and plead for mercy. She painted her face, had her hair done elaborately and stood at an upper window to defy Jehu by comparing him to a former usurper called Zimri (2 Kings 9:30-31). Zimri had only reigned for seven days (1 Kings 16:15) and then, finding himself surrounded, he committed suicide by setting the palace on fire (1 Kings 16:18). Jehu, however, had Jezebel thrown down and killed and, when he decided a little later to have her buried, the dogs had already eaten almost all of her body. So the prophecies were fulfilled and she had brought destruction on the whole family of Ahab in Israel.

Meanwhile, in the other country of Judah, the rulers were being led astray by alliances with the kings of Israel. A king of Judah, who was also called Jehoram, had married a daughter of Ahab called Athaliah (2 Chron. 21:6). Possibly her mother was Jezebel, as one would expect her to marry her own daughter to a king. Athaliah also was a bad influence on her husband who, in spite of having had a good father, began to introduce idolatry into Judah. He commenced his reign by killing all his brothers to remove any opposition and Elijah wrote prophesying swift retribution for his idolatry and slaying **"thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself."** (2 Chron. 21:12-15). His enemies came and carried off his wives and sons, a great humiliation. Somehow, they failed to carry off Athaliah together with Jehoram's youngest son, called Jehoahaz or Ahaziah. Jehoram of Judah died of disease after reigning eight years.

Athaliah was now queen mother in Judah and able to influence her son Ahaziah to follow the ways of Ahab (2 Kings 8:26, 27), (2 Chron. 22:3). But, after reigning for only one year, Ahaziah went to see his uncle, the other Jehoram, in Israel and became involved in Jehu's rebellion and was killed (2 Chron. 22:9) along with his uncle and all the house of Ahab.

Athaliah now found she could no longer rule through her son who was dead but she was determined not to give up power. She set herself to massacre the whole of the royal house of Judah, King David's line, to prevent any of them becoming the focus of rebellion (2 Chron. 22:10). Incredibly, this even included her own grandsons. Having done this, she ruled Judah herself for about six years, a very rare example of a female ruler in those days. One of her actions was to rob the temple of God to finance the worship of Baal (2 Chron. 24:7).

Now we come to an example of a good woman, called Jehosheba (2 Kings 11:2) or Jehoshabeath (2 Chron. 22:11, 12). She was the daughter of the former king Jehoram of Judah, and it is not certain whether her mother was Athaliah or not, but she was certainly brought up in their household to worship Baal. Then she was married to Jehoiada the priest of God, an elderly man (2 Chron. 24:15). This seems a rather odd match, but perhaps the intention was that she would persuade him to adopt the worship of Baal. If so, it did not work out that way, for she obviously learned to serve the true God.

At the time of Athaliah's extermination of the royal house, Jehosheba defied her mother (or perhaps step-mother), and rescued her nephew, the youngest son of her

brother Ahaziah, called Joash, who was a baby at the time. Had she been caught, Athaliah would certainly have shown her no mercy. Joash was hidden in the living quarters of the temple, out of the way of his murderous grandmother, where he could be taught to worship God.

When the boy was seven, Jehoiada decided that the time had come when the people would be willing to throw off Athaliah's reign of terror if they had another candidate for ruler, and he produced the boy Joash, who was the sole surviving heir of the house of David, in the temple (2 Chron. 23). Athaliah, hearing the sounds of rejoicing, stormed into the temple crying "treason" (2 Chron. 23:12, 13), but found no supporters there. She was dragged outside and killed. The people then destroyed the temple of Baal (2 Chron. 23:17).

Since the new king was only a boy, Judah was ruled for some years by the priest Jehoiada with the support of his wife Jehosheba.

If we sometimes wonder at the amount of space in the Old Testament devoted to denouncing idolatry, we have only to look at the effect upon the characters of these three women. Obviously the worship of Baal led to bloodshed without mercy, while the worship of the true God inspired a woman to risk her own life to rescue a baby. The princess Jehosheba could well be added to our list of good women to be held up as examples, for she not only managed to preserve the line of descendants of David from which the Messiah later came, but also to halt the worship of Baal for a short time in Judah.

Do you think I'll ever find God?

— By Father John Powell

A TRUE STORY about an Atheist Theology Student Who Was Found by God

[So far as I am able to check, this is indeed a true story. It may not satisfy all of the requirements that we believe are essential to 'finding God' and entering into a relationship with Him, but I felt there was enough general merit in the story about pre-judging people, patience and relationship building to make it worth printing. Editor]

Some twelve years ago, I stood watching my university students file into the classroom for our first session in the Theology of Faith. That was the first day I first saw Tommy. My eyes and my mind both blinked. He was combing his long flaxen hair, which hung six inches below his shoulders. It was the first time I had ever seen a boy with hair that long. I guess it was just coming into fashion then. I know in my mind that it isn't what's on your head but what's in it that counts; but on that day I was unprepared and my emotions flipped.

I immediately filed Tommy under "S" for strange... very strange. Tommy turned out to be the "atheist in residence" in my Theology of Faith course. He constantly objected to, smirked at, or whined about the possibility of an unconditionally loving Father-God. We lived with each other in relative peace for one semester, although I admit he was for me at times a serious pain in the back pew. When he came up at the end of the course to turn in his final exam, he asked in a slightly cynical tone:

"Do you think I'll ever find God?" I decided instantly on a little shock therapy. "No!" I said very emphatically. "Oh," he responded, "I thought that was the product you were pushing." I let him get five steps from the classroom door and then called out: "Tommy! I don't think you'll ever find him, but I am absolutely certain that He will find you!" He shrugged a little and left my class and my life.

I felt slightly disappointed at the thought that he had missed my clever line: "He will find you!" At least I thought it was clever. Later I heard that Tommy had graduated and I was duly grateful. Then a sad report, I heard that Tommy had terminal cancer. Before I could search him out, he came to see me. When he walked into my office, his body was very badly wasted, and the long hair had all fallen out as a result of chemotherapy. But his eyes were bright and his voice was firm, for the first time, I believe. "Tommy, I've thought about you so often. I hear you are sick!" I blurted out.

"Oh, yes, very sick. I have cancer in both lungs. It's a matter of weeks." "Can you talk about it, Tom?" "Sure, what would you like to know?"

"What's it like to be only twenty-four and dying?"

"Well, it could be worse."

"Like what?"

"Well, like being fifty and having no values or ideals, like being fifty and thinking that booze, seducing women, and making money are the real 'biggies' in life."

I began to look through my mental file cabinet under "S" where I had filed Tommy as strange. (It seems as though everybody I try to reject by classification God sends back into my life to educate me.)

But what I really came to see you about," Tom said, "is something you said to me on the last day of class." (He remembered!) He continued, "I asked you if you thought I would ever find God and you said, 'No!' which surprised me. Then you said, 'But he will find you.' I thought about that a lot, even though my search for God was hardly intense at that time. (My "clever" line. He thought about that a lot!) But when the doctors removed a lump from my groin and told me that it was malignant, then I got serious about locating God. And when the malignancy spread into my vital organs, I really began banging bloody fists against the bronze doors of heaven.

But God did not come out. In fact, nothing happened. Did you ever try anything for a long time with great effort and with no success? You get psychologically glutted, fed up with trying. And then you quit.

Well, one day I woke up, and instead of throwing a few more futile appeals over that high brick wall to a God who may be or may not be there, I just quit. I decided that I didn't really care... about God, about an afterlife, or anything like that. "I decided to spend what time I had left doing something more profitable. I thought about you and your class and I remembered something else you had said: 'The essential sadness is to go through life without loving. But it would be almost equally sad to go through life and leave this world without ever telling those you loved that you had loved them.' "So I began with the hardest one: my Dad. He was reading the newspaper when I approached him."

"Dad"...

"Yes, what?" he asked without lowering the newspaper.

"Dad, I would like to talk with you."

"Well, talk."

"I mean... It's really important."

The newspaper came down three slow inches. "What is it?"

"Dad, I love you. I just wanted you to know that." Tom smiled at me and said with obvious satisfaction, as though he felt a warm and secret joy flowing inside of him: "The newspaper fluttered to the floor. Then my father did two things I could never remember him ever doing before. He cried and he hugged me.

And we talked all night, even though he had to go to work the next morning. It felt so good to be close to my father, to see his tears, to feel his hug, to hear him say that he loved me. "It was easier with my mother and little brother. They cried with me, too, and we hugged each other, and started saying real nice things to each other. We shared the things we had been keeping secret for so many years. I was only sorry about one thing: that I had waited so long. Here I was just beginning to open up to all the people I had actually been close to.

"Then, one day I turned around and God was there. He didn't come to me when I pleaded with him. I guess I was like an animal trainer holding out a hoop, 'C'mon, jump through.' 'C'mon, I'll give you three days... three weeks.' Apparently God does things in his own way and at his own hour. "But the important thing is that he was there. He found me. You were right. He found me even after I stopped looking for him."

"Tommy," I practically gasped, "I think you are saying something very important and much more universal than you realize. To me, at least, you are saying that the surest way to find God is not to make him a private possession, a problem solver, or an instant consolation in time of need, but rather by opening to love. You know, the Apostle John said that. He said God is love, and anyone who lives in love is living with God and God is living in him.' Tom, could I ask you a favour? You know, when I had you in class you were a real pain. But (laughingly) you can make it all up to me now. Would you come into my present Theology of Faith course and tell them what you have just told me? If I told them the same thing it wouldn't be half as effective as if you were to tell them."

"Oooh... I was ready for you, but I don't know if I'm ready for your class."

"Tom, think about it. If and when you are ready, give me a call." In a few days Tommy called, said he was ready for the class, that he wanted to do that for God and for me. So we scheduled a date. However, he never made it.

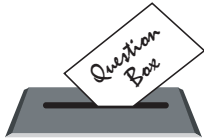
He had another appointment, far more important than the one with me and my class. Of course, his life was not really ended by his death, only changed. He made the great step from faith into vision. He found a life far more beautiful than the eye of man has ever seen or the ear of man has ever heard or the mind of man has ever imagined. Before he died, we talked one last time. "I'm not going to make it to your class," he said.

"I know, Tom."

"Will you tell them for me? Will you... tell the whole world for me?"

"I will, Tom. I'll tell them. I'll do my best."

So, to all of you who have been kind enough to hear this simple statement about love, thank you for listening. And to you, Tommy, somewhere in the sunlit, verdant hills of heaven: "I told them, Tommy... as best I could."



QUESTION:
“Why did God require the shedding of
the blood of innocent animals



This is the question asked by someone for whom the Old Testament laws commanding animal sacrifices constitutes a serious obstacle to faith in the Bible and, ultimately, to the Christian Gospel. I suggest that we might also acknowledge that it is a question that many Christians would struggle to answer convincingly.

The letter I received describes them as ‘*innocent animals*’, but the use of the word ‘innocent’ in this context is emotive, inappropriate and therefore unhelpful. I say this because such words as ‘innocence’ and ‘guilt’ have to do with morality; with ‘good’ and ‘evil’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. But animals do not possess this moral awareness.

In “*The Diary of a Country Parson 1758-1802*”, James Woodforde, an Anglican vicar, records that one of his greyhounds stole and ate a neighbour’s joint of meat and, therefore, that evening he *hanged the dog*. That was over 250 years ago, and I am sure that we would not react in that manner today, because we realise that the dog was not aware of acting wrongly and, therefore could not be accused a moral fault and did not deserve such a punishment. For this reason I have left the word ‘innocent’ out of the discussion.

Let me now ask this question. *Is it ever permissible to shed animal blood?* And, if it is, under what circumstances?

I think you will agree that the answer must be, ‘*Yes it is permissible.*’ After all, we shed the blood of animals because most people eat meat! Consequently, for the vast majority the shedding of the blood of animals does not constitute a problem. We think that the *act* is justified by the *purpose* it serves.

Of course shedding the blood of animals for so-called ‘sport’ is a different matter, and I would agree that the wanton, needless and unnecessary killing of animals is wrong.

But, let us take this to a higher level.

Our culture also apparently considers it even right to shed *human blood*, because at this very moment young men have been sent by the government to places like Iraq, for the express purpose of shedding the blood of *fellow human beings*; and the blood of many of these young men themselves, has already been shed as the result of this war. It is true that, at the present time, there is a strong swell of public opinion against continuing the war, but the objection is not to the shedding of human blood, but to a war that seems to be unending, and which many now regard as difficult to justify

Generally speaking, when it comes to waging war, the majority of the population think the *act* is justified by the *purpose* it serves, so that, if a conflict is represented by the politicians as a ‘*just*’ war – (as it invariably is!) - they are ready to accept the shedding of human blood, believing it to be justified by the end in view.

In the same way, the shedding of animal blood in Old Testament times has to be considered *in the light of the purpose it served*. (This also applies to the death of Jesus Christ; but that is a question for another time).

To understand WHY God commanded animal sacrifices we need to understand why we have the Bible.

- We know that the ‘Bible’, from the Greek ‘-*ho byblos*’, ‘the Book’, is really a collection of 66 books, written during a period of at least 1500 years, by about 40 different writers.

And yet this 'Divine Library', as Jerome called it, has only one theme. From beginning to end, it is the story of God and Man. It describes how the harmony and fellowship that existed between God and Man, at the beginning, was lost, and how God planned to make possible mankind's redemption and restoration.

- ❑ In the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis – ('Genesis' = 'Beginning') – we have an account of 'Creation', which tells how, out of 'chaos', God brought order, bringing every living thing into existence and finally creating Man.
- ❑ Now, whether we accept these chapters as a literal account, or as a 'stylised' or 'symbolic' story, is unimportant at the moment. What *is* important is that we understand that the order of Creation, as described in the Book of Genesis, is absolutely and completely in harmony with Science, from 'the 'First Day' through the 'Seventh Day', and the description of the creation of every living thing, from simple plant life-forms, through to the many forms of animal life, is scientifically accurate.
- ❑ We next read of what has been called 'The Fall' – how the first human beings, Adam, - (his name means 'Man') - and the 'Woman'- (whose name, Eve, means 'Life' or 'Life-giving') – lost their fellowship with God, because they disobeyed Him.
- ❑ The story of 'Adam and Eve and the eating of an apple' has been ridiculed by people who have probably never actually read that chapter for themselves. If they had read it, they might have been able to understand it, and they would have learned that no 'apple' is mentioned!
- ❑ Genesis ch.3, simply tells us that, although God had placed the first human couple in an ideal environment – a real 'paradise' – no conditions of occupancy had been laid down, and they needed to realize that they were dependent on God for their existence and for everything they possessed, and were therefore, also, answerable to Him for the way they behaved.
- ❑ The Bible tells us that, when God created Man, He gave him free will; that is, the ability to make decisions for himself. God could have created a 'Man' who did and thought what is right because he was 'programmed', like a robot, to behave in the way his creator intended. Such a creature would always obey God's will. But this would not have pleased God, because God desires obedience out of love, not because of compulsion.
- ❑ But! – and this is an important point – when you give a person the freedom to choose, you must be prepared to accept that he may not choose what you want him to choose! So it was in the garden in Eden. (Notice, also, that the Bible speaks of a garden *IN* Eden, not the Garden *OF* Eden).
- ❑ God gave the first human beings the right to eat the fruit of every tree in the Garden, but He placed a prohibition on just *one* tree in 'Eden'. They may not eat the fruit of that one tree on pain of death, if they disobeyed Him, and the manner in which they responded to this prohibition would reveal whether they would submit to His will, or deliberately assert their own will and disobey Him.
- ❑ Well, we know what happened. They disobeyed God and were banished from 'Eden'. Their sin of disobedience broke their relationship with Him. The word 'death' always means 'separation' and indicates separation in one form or another. They immediately 'died' spiritually, in that they lost their fellowship with God, and the process of physical death began in their bodies.
- ❑ But the story does not end there. Read Gen. 3:15 and you will see that, besides imposing punishments on all those involved in this first human sin, God promised redemption

when He declared that the time would come when 'the Seed of the Woman' would defeat 'the Serpent', and make possible forgiveness and restoration to God. The Bible is the record of the plan that God worked through the ages, to bring His promised 'Scheme of Salvation' to fulfilment. Read Galatians 4:4-5, where this is summed up in two verses.

Perhaps, at this juncture, I should say something about 'the shedding of blood', so that we may see its place in God's plan.

First, we should understand that, from the very beginning, God has regarded ALL blood, both human and animal, as sacred. The Bible makes this very plain. In Gen. chapter 9: 3-6, we learn that the first human beings were 'vegetarians' – *not* meat-eaters! However, there came a time when God gave human beings the right to eat '*whatever lives*', but with one prohibition. Read the passage!

Now notice, two further facts revealed in those verses.

- 1st The use of blood *for food* was forbidden; '*For the life is in the blood*'. Blood is the symbol of life, so that even the blood of animals is sacred and must be treated reverently.
- 2nd God imposed the death sentence for wilful murder. Later He declared that the Hebrews, (whom He had chosen to help to bring His plan of salvation for man, to fulfilment), must never accept any 'satisfaction', that is, any payment, for the life of a murderer.

A murderer could not be 'redeemed' – 'bought back'. He could not buy his pardon for the sin of murder (**Numbers 35; 31-32**) '*He shall surely be put to death*'. Why was that? See the next verse, v.33. "*Blood defiles the land...*"

There are many more passages of scripture which make it clear that God did not/does not regard the shedding of *any* kind of blood lightly, and which means that when He required animal sacrifices He had a serious purpose in mind.

Let me prove this.

We know that in the religion of the Old Testament, God commanded both offerings and sacrifices.

Offerings were the expressions of gratitude and thanks to God, for blessings received, and they were usually – (with a few special exceptions) – bloodless offerings.

Sacrifices were the animal sacrifices already mentioned, and these were offered as a sign of repentance for sin committed by the sacrificer, and these sacrifices necessarily involved the shedding of blood.

But, here are points we should notice, because they reveal the seriousness and importance of these animal sacrifices.

1. When a 'sinner' was required to bring an animal sacrifice in 'atonement' for his sin, the sacrificial victim had to be an animal *that he himself had nurtured and reared*, and not some animal bought from a dealer in the market place. It must often have been the case that the animal he brought for sacrifice was one for which he had developed an affection and which he valued highly, and this, naturally made its sacrifice all the more painful.
2. When he brought the animal for sacrifice, he understood that the animal was to become his *substitute*, bearing the penalty, which his sin deserved.
3. Furthermore, he was not allowed merely to hand over his sacrificial victim for the priest to kill and prepare for sacrifice. The Law of God required that the offender *himself* slay

the animal in the prescribed manner, and only after it had been killed did the priest take over and proceed with the ritual of atonement.

You can appreciate, I am sure, how distressing it must have been for the guilty person to have to kill his own sacrifice. But these requirements of the Law made him realize, as perhaps he had never realized before, the seriousness of sin and the high cost of atonement.

And here is another interesting point.

When the carcass of the sacrificial victim had been handed over to the priest it was dealt with in a solemn and regular fashion. It was not treated lightly, or carelessly cast aside as though it were worthless. First, special parts of the carcass were taken to be burned on the Altar of Sacrifice, as a Sin Offering, or a Guilt Offering to God. Then, the priests themselves accepted a designated part of the animal, as their 'right', according to the Law. And, finally, the rest of the flesh was returned to the worshipper, so that he could share the joy of his reconciliation to God in a celebratory meal with his family and friends.

It goes without saying that, although in the course of time, the blood of many thousands of animals must have been shed at the Tabernacle and at the Temple that replaced the Tabernacle, it would be quite wrong to suppose that the sacrifices were wanton, purposeless or meaningless.

Every time a guilty person offered an animal in sacrifice, he was saying, in effect, "*I confess that I am guilty and deserve to die, I repent of my sin, and I offer this animal as my substitute.*"

Now coming over to the New Testament.

The Old Testament religion, with its sacrificial system, was preparatory, instituted to serve until, *'in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those who were under law, that we might receive the adoption of sons'* (Gal. 4:4-5)

We learn from Hebrews 10:4 that animal blood could never take away the guilty of Man's sin, so that, in Old Testament times, there was no true forgiveness for sin, because an animal in the place of a man just will not suffice! The lesser can never effectively take the place of the higher. This means that the sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses did not provide forgiveness; they only provided a 'covering' until the time should come when God's own Lamb – Jesus Christ – would 'take away the sin of the world' (John 1:2).

Notice what this statement means.

Jesus Christ, God's own Lamb took away 'sin' – not 'sins'. He dealt with the *principle* of sin, which, from Eden, had affected both Mankind and the natural world, or the 'creation', as Paul calls it in Rom. 8:22. He took away the sin 'of the world' – not merely the sin of the Jewish race, but of *all* mankind in *all* ages.

In preparation for the sacrifice of Jesus, God's Lamb, the sacrifices were important because they taught the Jews how serious sin is, in the eyes of God; and how costly is our redemption.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews sums this up in one definitive sentence in Heb.9: 22, "*..Without the shedding of blood there is no remission (of sins).*"

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INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE FIRST CENTURY

(John H Diggle (Nottingham))

STUDY 9 – THE JEWISH/ROMAN CONFLICTS AND THE EFFECTS OF THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

In 63 BC the Roman general, Pompey, was 'called upon' to intervene in the sectarian squabbles that threatened to destabilise the region of Judea. Many historians write of this intervention in such terms as to suggest that they regard it as based on a somewhat flimsy pretext. Be that as it may, it gave the Romans a foothold in Judean territory that had been fought over for centuries and which they retained for well over another two hundred years.

The area in which Jesus conducted his earthly ministry, and in which the Church had its physical beginnings, was ruled by a succession of kings in the Herodian dynasty, who were themselves subject to control by appointed Roman governors like Pilate, Felix and Gallio and the Sanhedrin, which jealously guarded control over religious matters.

Significantly it was Pilate whose lack of diplomatic skill, clumsy inefficiency and insensitivity to both cultural and religious feelings, provoked considerable ill feeling from the moment of his arrival in Jerusalem. Marching into the city by night, accompanied by a legion bearing Roman standards emblazoned with pagan symbols and designs, was hardly calculated to win either respect or sympathy from those who now, increasingly, saw themselves as occupied by a deeply objectionable power. Whether through bumbling carelessness or more malevolent motives, he further damaged his reputation by commandeering temple treasury funds (Corban), for the building of an aqueduct, which he passed off as a benevolent service to those over whom he ruled. There are some historians who attribute his spineless handling of the examination of Jesus before him to a threat of recall to Rome, as being unsuitable to a posting in such a diplomatically delicate province as Judea. Although his governorship was terminated in AD 37, he had managed to ignite such fires of ill feeling that they continued to smoulder for many a year after that, and occasionally erupted into bursts of insurrectionist flame.

Markers of this tension between the Jews and Rome are strewn across the New Testament, although not always picked up on as being of more than passing interest. The vehement determination to see Jesus crucified, is all the more disgraceful on the part of the religious leaders for their willingness to collude with such an otherwise despised governor, and to prefer the release of a condemned insurrectionist, Barabbas, to that of Jesus (see John 18:40, NIV). References to the 'Zealots', of whom Simon, one of the twelve, was one, Theudas and Judas the Galilean in Acts 5:36, 37 are all in connection, to varying degrees, with groups of freedom fighters who looked to throw off the oppressive shackles of Roman rule.

It should be noted that it was not only those considerations, which we would naturally expect from the occupied, which fuelled the repugnance with which Jews viewed their Roman overlords. They believed their holy land to have been polluted by the presence within its borders of an ungodly, immoral and pagan power.

We are told that the return of Pilate to Rome coincided to the day with the death of Tiberius, but he was replaced by a succession of governors who generally proved far worse than he. Over the next thirty years, Jews and Romans became more and more exasperated with each other, although that did not prevent either party from entering into a succession of corrupt deals, for what was usually purely personal sectarian advantage, not least amongst the High Priests, with Annas being one of the main culprits.

Under the governorship of Gessius Florus a thoroughgoing horror of a man, a vicious campaign of pillage, plunder and murder was instigated, not least as a means of deliberately provoking open warfare with the Jews. For this and other reasons the Zealots acquired both greater power and popularity and Roman troops led by an ill-prepared Cestius Gallus were whipped at Beth Horon. The slaughter of six thousand crack Roman troops worked wonders for their self esteem and confidence; unfortunately for them though, much too prematurely.

At the beginning of AD67, Nero, now the emperor, sent his general, Vespasian, to put an end to all this Jewish nonsense, although Nero's own death in 68 meant a return to Rome for Vespasian and an interruption to the campaign. Vespasian's son, Titus, who like his father, would later become an emperor himself, was now put in charge of what amounted to a 'mopping-up operation' of the remaining obstacle to Judea's total subjugation – Jerusalem. After a dreadful and brutal siege, which saw its inhabitants reduced to having to eat their own shoes, and even children, Jerusalem finally succumbed and was destroyed, as Jesus had foretold in Matthew 24, in early AD 70.

Many of the Zealots who survived retreated to the stronghold at Masada on the shores of the Dead Sea, and managed to hold out until AD 73 before finally committing mass suicide.

A further uprising occurred under Hadrian, he of the wall fame, largely as a result of his strict ban on circumcision which he regarded as mutilation of the flesh – I think that we have heard that phrase somewhere before – and the building of a shrine to Jupiter amongst the ruins of Jerusalem, which he also renamed Aelia Capitolina. This followed a further razing of the city in response to an uprising led by Bar Kochba in AD 134, significant because the Rabbi who gave him that name, meaning 'son of the star' hailed him as the promised Messiah.

Fascinating, or not as the case may be, it is the effects of all this upon the early Church to which our attention should properly be drawn.

The views of the brethren on the extent to which a significant number of passages in the New Testament should be associated with the destruction of Jerusalem have tended to be somewhat polarised, with those well respected amongst us taking divergent views. The late Bro Len Channing was well known for his position, that this event has left a much bigger footprint on the text of the New Testament than is generally acknowledged, and that it would be surprising, given its significance, if it had been otherwise. It would take a considerably longer treatment than this one can be to do justice to this aspect of the topic, so, refraining from that, (though I was tempted), it is mainly in the book of Hebrews that my emphasis will lie.

As a means of achieving reconciliation with God, Mosaic Judaism, let alone the distorted Pharisaic version of it, was obsolete. Yes, the scriptures really do use that word – Hebrews 8:13. Its purpose had been served and Jesus had put an end to it at Calvary. By the time that Hebrews was being written, most probably between ADS 67 and 69, and therefore at the height of the tensions that preceded Jerusalem's

siege and destruction, animal sacrifices were still being offered with enthusiasm, the high priesthood, albeit abysmally corrupt, was still much in evidence and strong efforts were being made to tempt Christians who had come out of it to return to Judaism.

Remember that the premise throughout these articles has been that history is no succession of chance happenings, but completely under the control of God's direction. We might ask then, how and why God was prepared to allow the destruction, devastation and decimation of His chosen people in the brutal way that Rome carried it out, and all the more so if we consider what it must have seemed to say about His choosing of them in the first place.

Hebrews has a great deal to say to us in answer to these very questions. Those who remained entrenched in Judaism, their leaders and those who attempted to reconvert Christians simply had not 'got' the message of the cross – Hebrews 9:26(b). They insisted on chasing the shadows, when he who was the substance of them, had arrived. They preferred imperfect preliminaries to the reality. They had greater faith in the volume of their offerings of roast lamb and beef than in the blood of the Lamb of God. It is one of the immensely sad measures of sin's seriousness that God is occasionally pushed, out of the intensity of his true love for us, into more and more extreme measures of chastisement, before they are sufficient to penetrate the calluses with which it has scarred our hearts (Isaiah 1: 5-20).

Hebrews 9:26 says nothing more than the Church and the world had been taught by a generation, by Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles; yet every bloodied and burned sacrifice offered under the supposition that it was necessary, or even better, than his blood, at bringing reconciliation with God, was a vote for wilful ignorance of the reality, a slight and slur on the all-sufficiency of Jesus' blood for the atonement of the sins of the world.

It was necessary then for those who stubbornly refused to read the message of the cross, to be confronted with it in the more direct and personally painful terms of the destruction of their city and temple. Their ways and style of religious thought being what they were, God could scarcely have chosen a more vividly graphic means of demonstrating the withdrawal of his favour. If you think that I am being a little excessive in this view take a look sometime at the way in which the prophets foretold the earlier destruction of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day and the reasons given for the apparent brutality of it.

Did this achieve the desired effect then? The future course of Judaism is unclear as to the entire obliteration of animal sacrifice, though it definitely diminished to almost nothing. The same is true of the high priesthood. Hellenistic Judaism became the accepted form, although the tide was now beginning to turn more decisively in favour of Christianity as the dominant religion. There were its own persecutions yet to be endured for the Church though, as we shall see in a future study, and there still remained a lack of distinction between it and Judaism in a large number of influential Roman minds, which brought both help and hindrances to its progress.

Where confusion and debate exists over passages that may, or may not, be in reference to AD 70, the alternative understanding is usually that they should be applied to the final coming of the Lord. Often there is a failure to distinguish between the original intent and its suitability for application as illustrating eternally relevant principles. With that proviso though, it is entirely legitimate that we should take instruction from them as to the firmness of God's determination that His will must be done in His ways, and that if we resist that principle there may well be a heavy price to be paid. God will not be ignored.

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Lancaster University

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to Saturday 30th August 2008

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TRANENT SOCIAL

Tranent social will be held on
Saturday, 15 March, 2008.

Speakers will be:

Bro. James Grant from Falkirk.

Bro. Douglas Melling from Wigan.

Times not advised, please contact
Tranent for details.

John Colgan

*I looked for my soul but my soul I could
not see.*

*I looked for my God but my God eluded
me.*

*I looked for a friend and then I found all
three.*

William Blake

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