

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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TILL HE COME

Matthew's gospel is the subject of study at the mid-week Bible Study of the Church at Motherwell just now, and Chapter 10 has been reached. In verse 23 of that chapter, Jesus, on sending out His apostles on a preaching tour of all the cities of Israel; taking the message of the Kingdom, gives them a sense of urgency and says, ". . . for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come." There is much controversy over the meaning of this verse, as we can imagine, and opinions vary over a wide scale. For instance, at one end of the scale, Thomson's Chain-reference Bible says that Christ's "Second Coming" is referred to, whereas, at the other end of the scale Prof. Barclay suggests (rather disappointingly) that Matthew exaggerated these words of Jesus in order to bring cheer to those undergoing persecution. Clearly Jesus refers to a "coming" of His in the months to come, which was quite separate and apart from His "Second Coming" and I offer a few comments on the subject for what they are worth.

In the religious world a great deal of nonsense is spoken concerning the "Second Coming" and one must try not to add to the confusion; given that there are some difficult passages. Some things can be said with certainty while others can only be held as one's own personal perception of the matter. For instance, Christ's "Second Coming" is very certain and it is equally certain that it has not yet come to pass: i.e. is still future. It is also very certain that Christ came into the world about 2,000 years ago (His first "coming") and so, between His first coming and His final coming, any other "comings" (such as the one mentioned above, in Matt. 10:23) must be slotted in to their proper place. Herein lie some difficulties. As with any other Bible subject we must tread warily, always aware that we might be missing the point and that there are, as always, *elements of mystery* involved. For example, how many Jews could have been expected to guess that Malachi's prophecy that "Elijah must first come" would be fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist? The Jews looked for a literal "coming" of a literal Elijah and would not expect John to come "in the spirit and power" of Elijah. Thus a need to tread carefully.

TERMINOLOGY

Objections to the words "Second Coming" are sometimes expressed because the term never appears in the N. T. In view of the fact that Jesus had several "comings" between His birth and ascension, it would certainly seem more accurate to talk of His "Final Coming" or His "Second Appearance" than "Second Coming." Indeed, the writer to the Hebrews says, (9:28) " So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for Him shall He APPEAR THE SECOND TIME without

sin unto salvation." Christ's first APPEARANCE (*Parousia*) was, of course, at His incarnation or birth. He certainly *existed* before that time, but had not *appeared* in the world until that time. Paul says that we are saved by God's own purpose "**which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but it is now manifest BY THE APPEARING of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.**" (2 Tim. 1:10). In short, Jesus' "coming" into the world was in bodily form (see Vine on *Parousia*) i.e. He "appeared" in bodily form. His final coming will also be an "appearing;" He will come in bodily form: He will come personally. He had several "comings" but not all of His comings involved appearance. Readers may feel that hairs are being split but there is a difference, and whereas the N.T. talks of "comings" and "appearances" it never refers to a "Second Coming" but does mention a "Second Appearance."

AN EARLY RETURN?

It is sometimes averred that the early Christians were expecting Christ to return in their own lifetime. At His ascension from Mount Olivet the angels said, ". . . **this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven,**" and those listening probably presumed that since this statement was made personally to them, they would, personally see this (return) come to pass. There are also some passages of scripture, which, some think, are indicative of a general tendency to the 'early return' expectancy. For example, Paul says to the Philippians, "**Let your moderation be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand**" (4:5). The writer to the Hebrews says, "**For yet a little while and he that will come, will come, and will not tarry.**" (10:3). James says, "**Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh**" (5:8). John says, "**Behold, I come quickly, hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown**" (Rev. 3:11).

It may well be that many of the early disciples were looking for, and hoping for, an early return of Jesus, especially if they were undergoing great privations and persecution, and it also may well be that some of those verses applied to *one or other* of the "comings" to be mentioned in the next sub-heading.

Certainly the apostle Peter didn't encourage the idea of an early return (with reference to Christ's final return) and indeed remarks upon those who would scoff at the non-return of Christ. He says, ". . . **there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts. And saying, where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.**" Peter goes on to accuse such scoffers of being "wilfully ignorant" of the fact that whereas the "old world" was destroyed by a flood, "**the heavens and the earth WHICH ARE NOW are (by the same word of God) KEPT IN STORE, reserved UNTO FIRE (not a flood) against the day of Judgement and perdition of ungodly men.**"

"**BUT**" continues Peter, **BE NOT IGNORANT OF THIS ONE THING, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise (to return) as some men count slackness but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance**" (2 Peter 3:4-9). And so, for those who might be wondering about the validity of the "early return" theory we have the above comments on the matter by an apostle of Christ. Peter certainly did not seem to subscribe to the idea.

SOME OF HIS VARIOUS COMINGS

The writer to the Hebrews (9:28) says that Christ would "**appear a second time**" and this implies a first appearance. Thus Christ' *first coming* was at His birth: or incarnation. This is mentioned in the same chapter, a few verses previously (9:24)

where the same writer, referring to the animal sacrifices of the old economy, says, "For then must He (Christ) have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now, once in the end of the world hath HE APPEARED to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (See also 2 Tim. 1:10).

Time and space allows only a very brief mention of some of His various "comings".

(1) Probably the next coming was when He began His ministry. Paul, when speaking in the synagogue at Perga said, that of David's seed. "God, according to the promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour; Jesus; when John had preached BEFORE HIS COMING the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel" (Acts 13:24). Jesus had, by this time, been in the world for nearly 30 years when John was preaching (and indeed was only six months younger than John) and yet John is here described as having preached *before* "THE COMING" of Jesus, and so this "coming" would appear to refer to the beginning of Christ's ministry. And John, himself, said "There COMETH (future tense) One mightier than I AFTER ME, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose" (Mark 1:7). Jesus and John were contemporaries and yet John talks of Him "coming" *after* John's ministry is over, and clearly talks of Christ's ministry as a "coming".

(2) The next "coming" would seem to be involved in the verse quoted at the very commencement of this article: i.e. Matt 10:23 where, when Jesus was sending out the 12 on their preaching mission, He said ". . . verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man BE COME." We don't know how long it took the 12 (and later the 70) to cover all the ground but obviously it was to be sometime in the future (many months). This "coming" could refer either to the destruction of Jerusalem, or the "coming" of the Kingdom of Heaven, for Jesus had said, "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man COMING IN HIS KINGDOM" (Matt. 16:28) or as Mark renders it, ". . . till they have seen the Kingdom of God COME with power (9:1).

(3) Only six days after the statement just referred to, (Matt. 16:28) we have the transfiguration of Jesus, as He converses with Moses and Elijah on the holy mount, simultaneously with God's awesome voice from heaven declaring the Sonship of Christ. Christ, as Son of God, was thus made vastly pre-eminent over the O.T. lawgiver, Moses, and O.T. prophet Elijah. This momentous event was witnessed by three chosen witnesses, Peter, James and John, and Peter, later in life, made this comment on the profound transactions of that day. He said, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made it known unto you the POWER AND COMING of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. FOR He received from God the Father, honour and glory when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory. This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount." Bible students will find that most commentators link the "power and COMING" with the transfiguration.

(4) Another "coming" of the Lord was when Jesus made His formal entry into Jerusalem as King. Some 500 years previously Zechariah had prophesied, "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion; shout O Daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King COMETH unto thee; He is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (9:9). Matthew (21:11) describes beautifully the fulfilment of this prophecy, when Jesus (who owned nothing whatsoever) had to "borrow" an ass on which to enter the city as King. Multitudes, in a fervour of high religious excitement, strawed the streets with their garments and with palm leaves,

shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is He that COMETH in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." Mark adds that some also shouted, "Blessed be the Kingdom of our father David, that COMETH in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest" (10:10), and Luke tells us that the Pharisees called upon Jesus to rebuke those who were shouting, whereupon Jesus replied that if men held their peace the very stones would have to shout (19:40). Thus, near the end of His ministry, and after many previous visits to Jerusalem, Jesus "comes" to the city as King of Zion, in fulfilment of prophecy. He "came" in the name of the Lord.

(5) **Destruction of Jerusalem:** The destruction of Jerusalem (and obviously, the temple and Jewish religion) was predicted in the O.T. e.g. "Behold I will send Elijah before the "coming" of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." (Mal. 4:5; see also Zech. 14:5). Elijah's mission was to persuade Israel to set its house in order and to give them their very last chance of repentance. Elijah came, as we have seen, in the person of John the Baptist, and John, of course, came just prior to the destruction of the holy city. Matthew 24 (and parallel passages) describes and lists the signs which would presage the actual catastrophe. Interpretation of the chapter is complicated in that Jesus is answering two separate questions; i.e. "When shall these things be" and "What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world." The bulk of the chapter, and certainly up to verse 28, refers to the destruction of the city. In verse 6 Jesus alludes to "wars and rumours of wars" and says, "But the end is not yet"; meaning, of course, the end of the Jewish economy; not the end of the world. At verse 14 He says that "this gospel shall be preached in all the world, and then shall the end come," and again, He means the end of Jerusalem: not the end of the world. After listing a great many of the conditions and events which would, step by step, lead up to the eventual holocaust in the city, Jesus warns of the abundance of false Christs which would flourish at the time. He says, "Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, Behold He is in the desert, go not forth; Behold He is in the secret chambers, believe it not. FOR as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall THE COMING of the Son of man be." This particular "coming" is in the context of the sacking of Jerusalem for surely Jesus' 'mention of the false Christ' being overshadowed by His own coming (as easily seen as lightning is) had reference to the end of the Jewish age, and not to the end of the world. Jesus would "come" in Judgement on the city and "there would be great tribulation." Indeed Jesus said (v.21) "For there shall be great tribulation such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever shall be." And this was the fulfilment of Christ's sombre prophecy that "The blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world shall be required of this generation. From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple. Verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation." (Luke 11:50).

CHRIST'S FINAL COMING

We may often agonise on various passages of scripture as to which particular "coming" of Christ they refer; but there is one "coming" of which we can have no reservations or doubt, and that is Christ's final coming. Certain momentous events will occur simultaneously with Christ's final appearance which will make it impossible to ignore. Paul, (giving reassurance to those worried about dead relatives) says, "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the COMING OF THE LORD, shall not precede them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven WITH A SHOUT; with THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL; and with THE TRUMP OF GOD; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together

with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:16). The shout, the voice of the archangel and the trump of God will make His coming very audible: indeed it will be noisy enough to awaken the dead; viz. "All that are in the graves shall hear His voice and come forth." (John 5:28).

Not only will His coming be very audible, but very visible. "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." Nor will Jesus come alone. "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and ALL THE HOLY ANGELS WITH HIM, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory" (Matt. 25:31). And so we learn that Jesus will come on *Judgement Day*. The *general resurrection* will also accompany Christ's return: viz. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first." (1 Thess. 4:16).

All these things will happen, not over a long protracted period of months, but instantaneously: viz. "In A MOMENT, in the TWINKLING OF AN EYE, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible." (1 Cor. 15:52). (Some suggest that the trump of God is figurative, but this is not so: see Ex. 19:19). Simultaneously, we shall all be changed. Paul says, "Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep but we shall ALL BE CHANGED . . . In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible AND WE SHALL BE CHANGED. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:31). Jesus, Himself, said, "But when the Son of man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him. Then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, AND BEFORE HIM SHALL BE GATHERED ALL NATIONS and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats, and He shall set the sheep on the right hand but the goats on the left."

These are some of the awesome events which will occur at Christ's return and which will be consummated in the destruction of our planet, as described by Peter, who says, "But the 'day of the Lord' will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with a fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." From all the above we can see that it will be very difficult to confuse the Final coming of Christ with anything else.

CONCLUSION

There is not much space left for a summary, but, as we have seen, there are some very interesting "comings" of the Lord subsequent to His first appearance, and we can see that the verse we started off with (Matt. 10:23) had its fulfilment in one of these comings, probably the destruction of Jerusalem. In John 14:18 Jesus, when promising to send the Comforter, said, "I will not leave you comfortless, I WILL COME TO YOU" (John 14:18), and this is another "coming" I did not have time to comment upon. And there are also references in the Revelation, where Jesus, in writing to the church at Pergamus, warned, "Repent, or else I WILL COME TO THEE QUICKLY"; and to the church at Philadelphia said, "Behold I COME QUICKLY"; and to the church at Ephesus said ". . . repent, and do the first works, or else I WILL COME TO THEE and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except ye repent." (2:5).

It seems, however, that all this is water under bridge and the only coming we can safely expect is the final coming of the Lord, a coming which, as Peter assures us, is

delayed only because God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Such is the wonderful grace of God.

EDITOR.

GOD'S APOSTATE PEOPLE

The people of God are often ungrateful and forgetful; they fail to walk in the light (1 John 1:6-10); they cease to work in the high and holy vocation to which they have been called (Eph. 4:1-3); they do not honour and serve God as He saved them to do; they love the material things of this world more than the spiritual things of the world to come (2 Tim. 4:10). In short, they forsake God - they turn back to the world rather than press on to perfection (Heb. 6:1-6).

It was this kind of apostasy that brought the following stinging indictment from God (through Isaiah) to his ancient covenant people. **"Hear, O Heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider"** (Isa. 1:2, 3). Three vital components should be noted from these verses:

God had nourished and brought up children. They were his. He loved them as a father loves his children. He was concerned with their welfare. He provided for them. Their love should have been reciprocal. John stated a divine principle when he said, **"We love him, because he first loved us"** (1 John 4:19).

What was true then is still true today. God so loved the world that He sent his only Son to provide for its redemption. Christ in turn died for the sins of the world - died that all might be able to become the sons of God (Gal. 3:26, 27; 4:4-6). The salvation of the human soul from sin is no light matter. Each one should try to see, to the extent it is possible, the problem in God saving sinful men, what it cost God to redeem man from sin. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). And since all have sinned (Rom. 3:9; 23), all are doomed to eternal death. There was no means within man's reach whereby he could escape this sentence. But then Christ stepped in and died in man's stead. He paid the full penalty of sin - death. And so it is by the grace, mercy, and plan of God the means whereby all can be saved is provided. All who will accept the death of Christ as a substitute for their own death can be saved. God's love has purchased us (John 3:16), redeemed us (Eph. 1:7), and justified us (1 Cor. 6:11).

Just as it was in ancient times, God has today nourished and brought up children, brought them up at a terrible price, the cruel ignominious death of his only begotten Son upon the cross. Salvation did not come cheap.

God's children had rebelled against him. They had turned their back on the living God and had turned to dumb idols. The remainder of Isaiah 1 describes the condition of departed Israel. They had become a **"sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters"**; they had forsaken the Lord and had provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger; they had gone backward instead of forward.

THE SAME TODAY

With many of God's people, it is not different today. His own precious people, his purchased possession, turn from him. They forget that he saved them, purchased them, provides for them, and continues to desire their love and fellowship. They also forget that they devoted themselves to him, and all that they were, all that they had, and all that they might become. But forgetting their own vows and all that God has done for

them, they turn back to the world, back to sin, back to death. How can anyone be so thoughtless? How can they turn from the very God who made them, saved them, and gave them hope for all eternity? Is it because they are not grateful to God? Or have they forgotten His unspeakable gift?

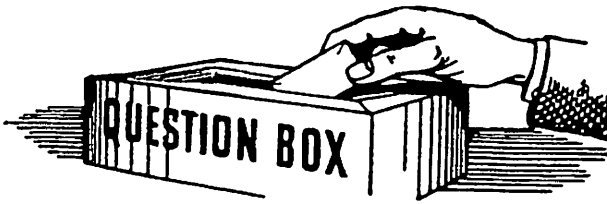
The people of God did not know, they did not consider. The ox knows his owner - he knows who feeds and cares for him. So does the ass. But Israel did not know and seemingly did not care about the providence of her God. They rebelled against Him and thus rejected the source of all their blessings.

The same is true today among those who depart from the living God, who turn back and walk with Him no more. **"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"** (Heb. 10:28, 29).

It is no wonder then that Peter could say of those who, in full knowledge of His will, depart from the Lord: **"For if after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb. The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire"** (2 Peter 2:20-22). This is just another way of saying that they have turned from all the glittering blessings of heaven back to the cesspools of iniquity. What is wrong with such people? The Lord says they do not know, they do not consider.

But God knows . . . and He cares. He longs for his departed children to return home, to come back to His love and care (cf. Luke 15:12-32).

H. Winters.



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"I am a little confused regarding prayer. Does God show partiality when answering prayer?"

The sister who asks this question is of an enquiring mind; she wants to learn. This is a commendable attitude of mind and should not be stifled. Whether or not we who are older can always supply satisfactory answers is a debatable point, but I believe we can point the thinking mind in the right direction, and if we can do that then we are accomplishing something.

There is one thing which is absolutely clear from the Bible; Christians must pray; it is enjoined on us. The poet has said, "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire". How, then, can we foster this 'earnest desire' and use it for our advantage?

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is the Christian's way of communicating with God, our Heavenly Father. It

can be carried out either audibly or silently; in either case it would seem to be - unless carried out perfunctorily - the result of some sort of inner pressure on the heart or the mind of the one praying. If we can accept that prayer, audible or inaudible, can be 'heard' by God, then audible prayer, such as in worship services, would seem to be designed solely for the benefit of those who can hear. The objective here would seem to be to focus the thoughts of others to things being prayed for, or to comfort those who are depressed over something, by their knowing that God's help is being invoked on their behalf.

When we pray we must have faith in the God to whom we pray. Faith is absolutely necessary because the finite mind cannot understand how God can deal with thousands of prayers ascending to Him at the same time, and yet give each one His individual attention. Unbelievers, who say that this is impossible, are giving a finite response to that which is Infinite; they are limiting, by their finite reasoning, the Omnipotence and the Omniscience of God. The believer must not make the same mistake by trying to limit the illimitable power of our heavenly Father. We carry on praying because we **must**; once we break our lines of communication with our Creator, we are nothing.

There are two main types of prayer; the petitioning prayer, and the prayer of thanksgiving. Petitioning and thanksgiving should complement each other. It is not sufficient to thank God when things seem to be going our way; He is due our thanks for strengthening us in times of adversity, and supplying us with the help to bear those things which may have to be borne. When we petition God, we must not imagine His realm as some vast 'casualty clearing centre' in the sky; there are other things to petition God for in addition to our well-being healthwise.

WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR?

The teaching of Paul is that we do not know. In Rom. 8:26 he says, "**Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered**" (A.V.) I like the rendering in the Jerusalem Bible which says, "**For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit Himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words**".

At this point we must bring into play our understanding of some points of metaphysics, i.e., our understanding of the nature of 'being'. The Bible speaks of the Godhead which is comprised of three Persons; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is reasonable to assume - nay, we are told - that the Son and the Spirit know the mind and will of God. When Christ was on earth He was, among other things, the Comforter to those who needed Him. His promise was that when He returned to Heaven He would send **another** Comforter, the Holy Spirit. With the seeming reversal of roles, we now have the Son who pleads on **our** behalf with the Father (1 John 2:1), and the Spirit who, in-dwelling us, pleads **God's** cause with us. There is, however, more. In the light of what we are studying, the Holy Spirit intercepts and interprets our prayers to God and "**makes intercession for us according to God's will**". He can do that because **He** knows God's will.

We must take our reasoning a stage further. In Rom. 8:28 Paul tells us that "**all things work together for good to them that love God**". Immediately we read that, we **naturally** conclude that it means our **good** while we are still here on earth; e.g., we pray for health, and we get it; we pray for peace, and we get it, and so on. What we forget, however, is that even though God always works for good, what He always has in mind is our **ultimate** good, and this takes in not only our **earthly** lives but embraces the whole cosmos. What I am saying is this: our **earthly** good may not always coincide with our **ultimate** good. Realising this, I think we can appreciate that our prayers may

not be answered in the way we want them to be. Every child understands that the parent will sometimes say 'no'; the child may not like the answer given, but it does not understand, because it is a child, the very valid reasons which make the parent say 'no'; to say 'yes' may not be for the child's ultimate good. Dare we say that God exercises the same sort of restraint on His children? Therefore we are left with the sometimes unpalatable fact that so far as our prayers are concerned, 'no' is as good an answer as 'yes'. God's will is paramount, and when the Spirit interprets to God the words that we speak in prayer, He presents them to God according to God's will. The Spirit knows our ultimate good; we don't. We must, however, always have faith in God. He is always working for our good.

IMPARTIALITY

To be 'partial' means to be 'biased' and unfair; I feel sure that no Christian would view God like that. It is quite easy for many to see partiality in answer to prayer, e.g., some prayers seem to get a 'yes' answer, while others get an unqualified 'no'. When we pray for some brother or sister to recover from some illness and that person **does** recover, we say that our prayer has been answered; if the person **doesn't** recover, I personally have not heard people say "Our prayers have been answered". We are, of course, presuming that God has directly intervened in one case, and not in the other. Is this true?

We believe in the Omniscience of God, and quite rightly so. What if God, knowing the end from the beginning (our lives included) has no need or reason to intervene? Now before you start reaching for pen and paper, I am not trying to **limit** the power of God; I am stating a general principle. God can always act in any way which is necessary, of course; otherwise He wouldn't be God. But **knowing** what will take place in any situation, He doesn't have to make 'yes' or 'no' by divine intervention; by the very nature of things it **will** be 'yes' or 'no'. The Holy Spirit will also know.

Of what value, then, is prayer? It avails much in many ways. The Holy Spirit, taking the anguished prayer of what the saint **wants**, and knowing the mind of God, petitions God for what the saint **needs** at the time when, perhaps, non-recovery of a loved one takes place; things such as patience, faith, hope, acceptance of unpleasant things, and also continued belief and trust. It may be much later when the praying saint actually appreciates what God has accomplished in his or her life; things which might never have been accomplished if the initial answer of 'yes' had been seen to come because of God's intervention. The patient endurance of chronic sickness, or the wrench of parting with a loved one, can be somewhat mitigated by the realisation that it is not God - in whom we have placed implicit trust - who has done this to us. Isn't it the same when we pray for peace in the world and the answer seems to be 'no'? Perhaps the Holy Spirit petitions God for courage in us to take out the Gospel of peace. Only **changed people** can bring about changed actions. Let's not blame God for the evil that exists in men's hearts.

Well, I've said some things which some might find difficult to 'swallow'; It's your prerogative to reject it out of hand. Prayer, however, is a very difficult concept to understand, particularly answers to prayer. We must, however, keep on praying constantly; perhaps our prayers will become more defining as to what we expect from God, and what blessings we, in fact, receive. Let us rely on our Comforter and Helper who is ever at hand. He will not **quit** us if we don't **quench** Him.

(in the meantime, all questions, please, to Ian Davidson, 21 Glen Lyon,
St. Leonards, East Kilbride, G74 2JJ.)

(I can't tell you how sorry I am to say that the above is the last "Question Box" from the ready pen of our highly esteemed brother Alf Marsden, who died on the 4th April, a few days after writing the above answer. There are brethren south of the border better qualified than I am to write a tribute to the life of Alf, but I would like, herewith, to record the indebtedness that readers of "The Scripture Standard" will feel towards the selfless service given by our brother in answering readers' questions over the last 23 years, and especially over the last year or two when his health made it more difficult. I would also like to record my own personal indebtedness to Alf for giving us such splendid and forthright answers to what were sometimes very difficult questions. Years ago a reader from abroad told me that "Question Box" was, on its very own, worth the entire price of the magazine. During his term of dealing with "Q.B." Alf must have answered about 280 different questions and must have done a lot of good. He was unable to produce "Q.B." only about two or three times during that 23 years and that was due to his being in hospital (his heart attack a year or two ago). Alf, being a gentleman, was extremely easy to work with and he shall be greatly missed. I am sure that readers, from home and abroad, would wish me, on behalf of all of us, to send to Edna and the family our deepest sympathy in their very sad loss, and to commend them to God, the source of all true comfort and consolation.)

EDITOR

REJOICE EVERMORE

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

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

Our rejoicing should be continual. Let us note some things about which we should rejoice. Just as many rejoiced at the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:14), even so should we rejoice at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:10,20); for without it, He could have never walked this earth to give us a perfect example. We should rejoice at Christ's triumph over death and the grave, for it was not possible that He could be held by it (Acts 2:24). We should rejoice in the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28). We certainly rejoice in salvation as did the Ethiopian in Acts 8:39. We rejoice evermore because our names are written in heaven in God's book of life (Luke 10:20). We ought to be as the apostles who *rejoiced* **"that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name"** (Acts 5:41). **"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"** (2 Tim. 3:12). We are to rejoice in spite of meanness and persecution.

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10,12). We rejoice when fruit comes forth from our labours (John 4:36). We rejoice evermore because of the hope of eternal life (Rom. 12:12). We are happy and glad because of the obedience of people whether they be alien sinners or children of God (Rom. 16:19). We are glad when we enjoy the fellowship of brethren of like precious faith (1 Cor. 16:17; Phil 2:18).

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

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

G. Robinson.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

June 1	Exodus 3:1-15	Mark 12:13-27
June 8	Psalms 110	Mark 12:28-44
June 15	Daniel 12	Mark 13:1-23
June 22	Isaiah 13:1-13	Mark 13:24-37
June 29	Deut. 15:1-11	Mark 14:1-11

PAYING TAXES TO CAESAR

I like to visit the Channel Islands. One reason is to study the German Occupation from June 1940 to June 1945. What would life have been like in Britain under the Nazis? The Channel Islanders' experience goes a long way to answering the question. We should remember that the Jews in Jesus' day knew what it was like to live in enemy-occupied territory. Their masters were not the Germans, but the Romans.

One of Jesus' apostles was Simon the Zealot (Mark 3:18). One of the features of the Jewish Zealot party was that they opposed the payment of tribute by Israel

to a pagan emperor on the ground that this was treason to God, Israel's true King. The Pharisees and the Herodians tried to corner Jesus on this "hot" subject of taxation, but, as ever, He was ready for them. His use of the coin (denarius) was a "Master-stroke". C.E. Graham Swift has written: ". . . 'it was not a question of giving what might lawfully be refused, but of paying what was lawfully claimed. The tribute was not a gift but a debt. Caesar gave them the inestimable benefit of stable government; were they to take it and decline to pay anything towards its maintenance?' (Plummer). Duty to God and duty to the state are not incompatible; we owe a debt to both. The Pharisees admitted their debt to Caesar by using his coinage; this was why Jesus asked for the coin. If they could produce it, they had the answer to their own question. This answer would be of particular interest to Mark's Roman readers, since it acquits Christianity from the charge of disloyalty to the state".

MARRIAGE AT THE RESURRECTION

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. The story of the woman with seven husbands was not an improbable case. **"In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife"** (12:23). Jesus' response is worthy of careful analysis (12:24-27). The bottom line is that the Sadducees were in error. They thought they were right, but all the time they were wrong! How many today fit into this category? I like the fact that Jesus confronted the Sadducees on their own territory - the Pentateuch or Torah, which they revered. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob may be dead to the world, but they are alive to God. **"He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living . . ."** (verse 27).

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Dear reader, have you ever heard of *the Shema*? It is Judaism's confession of faith and is recited at daily prayers. It is to be found in Deuteronomy 6:4 **"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord"**. (*Shema* is the imperative of the Hebrew verb to hear, and it is so called from the first word in the sentence.) Actually, the full *Shema* is to be found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41.

It is interesting to note that Jesus singled out a commandment as being the most important. (He did not say, like a lot of believers today, that all the commandments of God were equally important.) He said: **"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these"** (12:30-31). Religion to Jesus was loving God and loving men. I

like what a commentator once wrote: **"The world cannot be changed by love of force but by the force of love"**.

THE END OF THE JEWISH AGE

A lot of folk read Mark chapter 13 and think it has all to do with the end of the world. But the context of the following words of Jesus should be carefully noted: **"Verily I say unto you that this generation (with Him at that time) shall not pass till all these things (aforementioned) be done"** (13:30). Personally, I see the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 in most of the verses of this fascinating chapter.

Daniel is mentioned by Jesus (13:14). If Jesus regarded him as a true prophet, then I must do likewise. What was **"the abomination of desolation"** referred to? (13:14). Luke indicates that it had to do with an invading army (Luke 21:20). Adam Clarke has written: **"This abomination of desolation . . . refers to the Roman army; and this abomination standing in the holy place (Matthew 24:15) is the Roman army besieging Jerusalem; this, our Lord says, is what was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, in the ninth and eleventh chapters of his prophecy . . . The Roman army is called an abomination, for its ensigns and images, which were so to the Jews"**.

We read: **"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light. And the stars of heaven shall fall and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken"** (13:24-25). The language is vivid and Eastern and I see a picture here of great destruction - a picture that well sums up the fate of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70. We further read **"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall He send His angels and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the**

uttermost part of heaven" (13:26-27). These words, I believe, have to do with the rescue of the saints prior to the destruction of the city. Time was given for all believers to flee the scene. Albert Barnes has commented: ". . . there is not evidence that a single Christian perished in Jerusalem". It follows that the words ". . . **then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and authority"** (verse 26) have to do with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish state and not the end of the world. James Macknight has written: "This figurative expression, in several passages of Scripture, signifies God's interposing evidently and irresistibly, to execute vengeance on a wicked generation and to assert His own government over the world".

Verses 32 and 33 are taken by most believers to refer to the second coming of Jesus. A number of commentators disagree, including Alexander Campbell. He once wrote: "Jesus declared the preceding events - the means by which the city and the temple would be destroyed - gave directions to His disciples how they might escape the impending calamity, frequently called 'the wrath to come' or 'impending vengeance'. And, as to the precise day, He informed them that He was not authorised to communicate it, for the Father had reserved this in His own bosom and willed not men or angels to know it . . ." I know that brother Campbell studied James Macknight a great deal because he frequently referred to him in his writings. He appears to concur strongly with the great Macknight on Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. Macknight has commented; ". . . Jesus declared that He could not make them know the day and the hour of His coming to destroy Jerusalem, not because He was ignorant of the event, but because the Father, as governor of the world, had put the times and seasons in His own power (Acts 1:7), in order that, from the uncertainty of the thing,

the disciples might be always kept upon their guard . . . He only told them, that it would be very unexpected, and urged the necessity of watchfulness . . ."

THE TRAITOR

There was an article in a newspaper recently which attempted to portray Judas in a better light than that given in the Scriptures. How men love to oppose the Scriptures! Judas was a wicked man, who betrayed the Master for money. His name will always be associated with infamy until the end of time. What got into him? The answer is simple - the devil (Luke 22:3; John 13:27).

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. How many men of Gideon's army returned to their homes because they were afraid?
2. Where did Naomi and Ruth settle in Judah?
3. Name the Philistine's god.
4. Who succeeded king Hezekiah?
5. What nationality was Moses' second wife?
6. Who "dugged again" his father's wells?
7. What was the food of John the Baptist?
8. Name the city of Jason?
9. He "was translated that he should not see death".
10. Who was Eunice's son?

BROTHER JACK NISBET

Brother Jack Nisbet was one of God's great servants. He will always be associated with Haddington Church, although in latter years he also worshipped with the congregation at Peterhead and Ulverston. His work took him north and south from East Lothian. Jack was a tremendous student of God's word and it

was always a joy to be with him to hear his thoughts and insights into all sorts of Biblical subjects. He just loved to study and talk about the Good Book.

Brother Jack was an exceptionally gifted man with a powerful, analytical mind. His considerable talents were utilised not only in the Church, but also in secular employment. His working colleagues knew where he stood and many felt the influence of his Christian principles in action. He, of course, believed in keeping his word and striving always to do the right thing in the right way. As a result, he was respected by many.

I had known Jack even before I became a Christian in 1965 and he taught me a great deal. He was a man of sound teaching, which was rooted in a deep and abiding faith in his Saviour. I am sure his Christian parents also had a big influence in his life. It was wonderful to be a part of his home life from time to time and Jack and Alice's hospitality in various localities will never be forgotten by me.

I am going to miss him, as will many in the Slamannan District churches and elsewhere. Sister Alice is to be thanked for all the loving and tender care shown to Jack during his illness in the latter years. My sympathies go out to her and all the family at this time. Sympathies are also extended to the families of brothers John Wilson, George Sneddon and Alf Marsden, whom I am also going to miss greatly. Our loss is heaven's gain. I thank God for their faithfulness unto the end.

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

OBITUARY

Longshoot, Wigan: Many members of the Church in the British Isles, and even beyond, will be saddened to hear of the passing away of Brother Alf Marsden of the assembly in Longshoot, Wigan and

formerly of Albert Street, Wigan. Alf had suffered from a heart condition for a number of years and although his death, on Friday April 4th, was sudden, it was thankfully peaceful. Alf was 77 years old.

Although we mourn the loss of a dear and faithful Christian, we rejoice in the fact that Alf's life in the Church was a preparation for what he has now achieved and that he is now at home with the Lord he loved so much.

Alf was immersed in the Lord's body in 1947, at one of the Hindley Bible Schools. Since then he served faithfully and ably in both the Albert St. and Longshoot assemblies, as well as travelling to serve many other congregations, chiefly in England and Scotland, and was respected for his thoughtful, Bible based teaching. He remained active in the Longshoot assembly right up to his death, having previously served as an Elder in the Albert St. assembly.

Fortunately he was able to produce a book "*Journey into Faith*" shortly before his death, which recounts his life and experiences in the Church, along with those beliefs he held most dearly, and this book will stand as his testimony to his love of the Lord and His Church.

He will also be known as a regular contributor to "*Truth for Today*" and the "*Scripture Standard*", where he long dealt with the "Questions Answered" feature.

Alf leaves his wife Edna, who has herself not enjoyed good health in recent years, and prayers are requested for her along with the family and the rest of the Christian family at Longshoot. Fortunately Alf and Edna were able to celebrate their Golden Wedding in February 1997, which was a joyous occasion shared with family and Christians.

The funeral service took place on Thursday April 10th at Longshoot, following the burial. Brother Graham Gorton led the service which was one of

both remembrance and thanksgiving for Alf's life and service in the Lord.

Edna and the family would like to thank Christians from many assemblies for their cards, letters, phone calls and most of all prayers. The support has truly been a manifestation of the "everlasting arms".

ANDREW MARSDEN,
Secretary, Longshoot.

COMING EVENTS

HARDING STUDENTS CAMPAIGN at BUCKIE

from 3rd to 15th JUNE, 1997

BUCKIE ANNUAL SOCIAL SATURDAY, 7th JUNE, 1997

Speaker: John Renwick

CAMPAIGN MEETINGS

SUN. 8th, MON. 9th, TUES. 10th,
WED. 11th, THURS. 12th
and SUN. 15th.

Preacher: John Renwick

SUNDAY SCHOOL PICNIC SATURDAY, 14th JUNE, 1997 with Harding Students

EMERGENCY APPEAL FROM RUTH COLES

Due to great devastation caused by recent cyclones in Papua New Guinea, with thousands of trees blown down and whole villages destroyed by high winds and fires, many members of the church in the Waria Valley have lost everything and require urgent help. Ruth Coles and Tobey Huff are trying to get tarpaulins, nails, rope and rice to the people immediately, and hope to be able to buy blankets and other vital necessities as money becomes available.

Obviously time is of the essence and those who could help should send their gift by telegraphic transfer to:-

The ANZ BANK,
Lae, Morobe Province,
Papua New Guinea.

The money should be allocated to the "Church of Christ Relief Fund" and the Account Number is 1442004900.

When Ruth left here her forwarding address was PO Box 1827, Mount Hagen, Western Highlands Province, PNG. and presumably she can still be contacted there.

ED.

APPEAL FOR SIERRA LEONE

We have had an appeal from a brother in Sierra Leone. He says: "Because of the rebel crisis on us here in Sierra Leone, brothers and sisters have moved from their area to our place. The church has 10 families to take care of them, but this is a heavy task on the church. These families needs are food and old clothing etc. The church has planned a gardening project, which has started but we need your help with seeds. As the population of the church has now increased we also need hymn books, Bibles and tracts."

We have been corresponding with this brother for some years and have been sending Bibles and latterly seeds but the cost of postage is high and they are still in need. As it would be more cost-effective to send financial assistance we are appealing for funds to help them support the displaced families.

If you would like to help could you please make any cheques out to Church of Christ Bramhall Green and send to Mrs. M.I. Purcell, 3 Dale Avenue, Bramhall, Stockport, Cheshire, SK7 2JP.

GHANA REPORT FOR MAY 1997

Many good things are happening here, by the Grace of the Almighty God.

This year is barely a few months old, but many congregations country wide have plunged into various evangelistic activities. Results reaching us indicate more souls are being converted into the Kingdom of Christ daily.

Prominent among these efforts is the establishment of two new congregations in Ashanti and Greater Accra Regions. Surveys have been completed for a third to be established in the Volta Region soon. A lot more could be done if a few essentials logistics are acquired.

We have noted that people enjoy listening to public preaching of the gospel. This method pays off well. However, we are handicapped in doing this in communities without electricity to operate the Public Address Systems. Portable electric generating sets have proved useful in similar situations elsewhere, so we want to put across this request for possible assistance to get four portable generator sets. One cost four hundred and fifty pounds here.

The other good thing which has happened is the roofing of the Odumase

church building. The brethren are now enjoying peaceful worship. Much appreciation goes to all who assisted to get this project through.

We have moved the building projects programme to Koforidua. We want to roof this building started some few years back.

We prayerfully look forward to many to assist in these works. "The Lord God bountifully rewards you all." 2 Cor. 9:10 & 11.

Please send all donations to - Mr. Graeme Pearson, "Ghana Appeal", 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife, KY12 0DU, Scotland.

WISDOM KPEHOR.

-
10. Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5).
9. Enoch (Hebrews 11:5).
8. Thessalonica (Acts 17:1 & 5).
7. Locusts and wild honey (Mark 1:6).
6. Isaac (Genesis 26:18).
5. Ethiopian (Numbers 12:1).
4. His son Manasseh (2 Kings 20:21).
3. Dagon (1 Chronicles 10:10).
2. Bethlehem (Ruth 1:22).
1. 22,000 (Judges 7:3).
- ANSWERS

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