

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL READERS

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THE MERCIES OF GOD RECALLED AND TRUST EXPRESSED

"But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in Him'." (Lamentations 3:21-24)

GOD BLESS THY YEAR:

THY COMING IN, THY GOING OUT,

THY REST, THY TRAVELLING ABOUT,

THE ROUGH, THE SMOOTH,

THE BRIGHT, THE DREAR:

GOD BLESS THY YEAR.

THE B. OF M. TRUE OR FALSE

I HAVE been a little apprehensive (in publishing these articles on the book of Mormon) that brethren might not have the interest in the subject that I had imagined they would have. However one or two brethren have expressed the opinion that these articles have been helpful and so, fortified by even this slender indication of interest, I propose to print two short further articles on the theme (this month and next month) and then change the subject. Let me also say that I derive no pleasure whatever from censuring the basis of any other person's religious affiliations. When however one considers the thousands upon thousands of good people who are, and have been, duped by the writings in the Book of Mormon and the claims made for it, then the least that one can do is to point out to anyone prepared to listen that the Book of Mormon is a man-made fraud upon the world.

Remembering that Joseph Smith, the alleged author of the book, claimed absolute infallibility for the Book of Mormon (God having directly dictated every single word of it) I draw attention to one or two of the absurdities of the Book of Mormon, historical, prophetic and otherwise. Take, for instance the making of the barges to transport the 'Jaredites' to the new

world (Ether 2:16-18). These barges were not seaworthy and thus unlike Noah's Ark. The barges were in the shape of two dishes, one superimposed upon the other, and were "the length of a tree" in length. We note that they were allegedly built exactly "according to the instructions of the Lord". But what a forgetful Lord. God is presented to us in the Book of Mormon as having forgotten the matter of the ventilation of these barges and the lighting. So Jared's brother had to inform God of His omission, "And behold, O Lord in them there is no light, whither shall we steer? And also shall we perish, for in them we cannot breathe, save it is the air which is in them, therefore we shall perish". So God is informed of the serious deficiencies of His design of the barges. This is quite surprising when we consider that God made the worlds, the earth, man, and the animal kingdoms. However how does God surmount the problem? The Book of Mormon goes on to say. "And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared, behold thou shalt make a hole in the top thereof, and also in the bottom thereof: and when thou shalt suffer for air, thou shalt unstop the hole thereof and receive air. And if it be so that the water come in upon thee, behold thou shalt stop the hole thereof, that ye may not perish in the flood. And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did so, according as the Lord had commanded". If the holes were made to provide ventilation in the barge why we might ask was a hole put in the bottom of the barge. If the cover was removed from the hole in the bottom of the boat would not water come into the vessel? What ventilation would a hole in the bottom of the boat provide? Thus the B. of M. presents God as a rather foolish bungler, which is strange when we remember the good job God made of Noah's Ark.

Not only had God forgotten to put into the barges a means of ventilation but also a means of illumination. It was only after the eight barges had been built 'according to the instructions of the Lord' that the deficiencies were noticed by Jared's brother. When the first glaring mistake in design was noticed, i.e. the lack of a means of ventilation, God had to do a quick re-think and came up with the idea of making a hole in the top and one in the bottom of the boat. No doubt Jared's brother could go along with the decision to make a hole in the top but must have been puzzled by the instruction to make a hole in the bottom (as indeed I am and as many Mormons are if asked to explain it). A hole in the bottom of a boat is usually the classical reason for it sinking without trace. However, according to the Book of Mormon, Jared's brother went along with the idea and made the two holes as recommended. It was then that he noticed that there was no provision for being able to see inside these barges (and when one considers that he had made eight of them one is left wondering why it took him so long to notice that there was no means of lighting inside them). Thus Jared's brother says to God "O Lord I have done even as thou hast commanded me; and I have prepared the vessels for my people, and behold there is no light in them, Behold, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that we should cross this great water in darkness?" It seems as if, at this stage, God is really stumped and has to ask advice from Jared's brother. "And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared; "What will ye that I should do that ye might have light in your vessels?" God doesn't want to put into the barges a window in case it is dashed to pieces and He does not want them to have fires in the barges. So what else could be used? Is God stumped? The brother of Jared is a resourceful fellow, fortunately, and he solves the problem. He goes up into Mount Shelem(?) and "did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones, and they were white, and clear, even as transparent glass" and he then tells God to touch them and make them shine forth in the darkness. God does so and Jared's brother places two in each barge. And so the solution was easy, really, and it is only a pity that God could not have thought of it earlier. Quite a fantastic story is it not and one which, I suggest, doesn't ring true of the God who made the entire universe. One could go farther and describe it as a blasphemous absurdity.

The Mormon genealogy of Joseph Smith himself, in contrast with the known facts concerning his ancestry present an insurmountable difficulty to those who believe God was the author of the Book of Mormon. In 2 Nephi 3:6-8, 12, 14, 15 & 18 the old man Lehi relates to his youngest son Joseph that another Joseph (even Joseph Smith of Book of Mormon fame) was to be born of their seed, according to a purported prophecy made by their supposed ancestor Joseph in Egypt (the famous Old Testament Character). Here is the prophecy, - "For

Joseph truly testified saying: A seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer... Yea Joseph truly said, Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins... And I will make him great in mine eyes; for he shall do my work... Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins (Joseph Smith) shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah (Writers of the bible) shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines... And thus prophesied Joseph, saying: Behold, that seer will the Lord bless: and they that seek to destroy him, shall be confounded; for this promise which I have obtained of the Lord of the fruit of my loins, shall be fulfilled. And his name shall be called after me: and it shall be after the name of his father (Joseph Smith senior)...

And the Lord said unto me also, I will raise up unto the fruit of thy loins: and will make him for a spokesman".

This prophecy plainly relates that Joseph Smith was to be a descendant in the direct line of Joseph of Egypt, through Lehi and his son Joseph. But, according to Morm. 6:5-11; 8:1-4 in A.D. 385 all the Nephites were slain, excepting Moroni, and only the Lamanites remained on the continent of America, the Mormon allegations being that their descendants are the various Indian races. Hence, since Joseph Smith's ancestry cannot be connected with the Nephites, who were supposed to have been destroyed centuries before, it would have to be through the Lamanites - which would make him an Indian, or this prophecy is a failure. We know however, that Joseph Smith was of English ancestry. His mother's biography of him gives the names of his ancestors for six generations back to Robert Smith, who flourished about three hundred years ago in England. How was it possible for Joseph Smith to be a descendent of the Nephites? It must be remembered that this was a literal prophecy with a literal fulfilment in view - Joseph Smith was to be of 'the fruit of the loins of Joseph' which is a very literal concept. The truth is that Joseph in Egypt never ever made any prophecy concerning Joseph Smith of America. Why did this prophecy not reach fulfilment? Mormons must explain why.

The Book of Mormon is alleged to have been compiled and engraved upon golden plates about 1600 years ago, by a man named Mormon with his son Moroni giving to it some finishing touches and in A.D. 20 hiding the plates under a stone on the hill Cumorah, near the site of Palmyra, New York, where these plates were received, under the guidance of the angel Moroni, by Joseph Smith in 1827. This book alleges to be an abridgement of the Nephite records for a period of 1000 years before its compilation by Mormon. Indeed it is claimed that this book is unabridged, and we have it just as it was written by the elder Nephi, his brother Jacob and others after him. If these claims are true it is a very old book, belonging entirely to the ancient past, the first part was written about 2,600 years ago and the remainder written about 1,600 years ago. If therefore there are any words, phrases or forms of expression known to be modern, having no counterparts in any ancient language, or has references to discoveries, facts or concepts unknown to that period in history, then we can be sure that the writer of the Book of Mormon has 'slipped up' and given himself away. In Alma 37:38 we read "And now my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director: for our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass: and the Lord prepared it". Absolutely no record or other evidence exists of any people of antiquity ever having such a navigating instrument as 'a compass'.

As I said in last month's article, the Book of Mormon, unlike the Bible, does not bear close examination and I would hate to have to prove that God wrote it. EDITOR.

ASK

"O for a faith that will not shrink
Though pressed by many a foe,
That will not tremble on the brink
Of poverty or woe."

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" Ephesians 3:20.

ASK WHAT DO I ASK? "THAT THY FAITH FAIL NOT".

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you; that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" Luke 22:31,32. What a lovely thought we have here: 'I have prayed for thee'. The Lord Jesus did not underestimate the power of the Devil, He referred to him as "the prince of this world" John 12:31 "for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me". John 14:30 Now the Lord Jesus survey's the scene, and sees the arch-enemy of human souls seeking the downfall of one of His beloved disciples, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not". The Lord not only prayed for Peter, but later He prayed for His disciples: - "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine" John 17:9. Then His love and compassion was enlarged to include other children of God: - "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" John 17:20. So we can be assured of our Lord's concern for our welfare, and rejoice that "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" Hebrews 7:25. Shall we take these words of Jesus, for our mediation and learning, so that we may profit thereby.

"I HAVE PRAYED FOR THEE, THAT THY FAITH FAIL NOT".

Of course in praying that prayer, we are not thinking of the Apostle Peter, but rather of brethren beloved in the Lord, who have not suffered intensely, having walked through the valley of the shadow of death. Brothers and sisters who have borne with fortitude hours of pain and in some senses shared the "fellowship of His sufferings". Time and again, during our visits we have noticed the glow of the love of Christ, on the faces of those who are going "through much tribulation". How often they have experienced the blessing of the precious promises of their heavenly Father: - "As thy days, so shall thy strength be". Deuteronomy 33:25. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" Deuteronomy 33:27. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" Isaiah 43:2.

"I HAVE PRAYED FOR THEE, THAT THY FAITH FAIL NOT".

C. H. Spurgeon said: "Why should I dread to descent the shaft of affliction if it leads me to the gold mine of spiritual experience? Why should I cry out if the sun of my prosperity goes down, if in the darkness of my adversity I shall be better able to count the starry promises with which my faithful God has been pleased to gem the sky? Go, thou sun, for in the dark we shall see ten thousand suns which were hidden from us by your light. Many a promise is written in sympathetic ink, which you cannot read till the fire of trouble brings out the characters".

"Standing on the promises that cannot fail,

When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,

By the living Word of God I shall prevail,

Standing on the promises of God".

It would be well for us to realize that the child of God, can claim the precious promises, how often is our experience like that of J. H. Jowett, he said: - "I have been thinking of some of the petitions that have entered into my supplications innumerable times. What have I asked for? I have asked for a cupful, and the ocean remains! I have asked for a sunbeam, and the sun abides! My best asking falls immeasurable short of my Father's giving. It is beyond all that we ask or think.

ASK WHAT DO I ASK? THINK? "THAT THY FAITH FAIL NOT".

Why is it important that we should pray for one another, "that thy faith fail not". Surely the writer to the Hebrews gives us the answer: - "But without faith it is impossible to please him:

for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" Hebrews 11:6. It is well for the children of God to realize that they cannot live without faith; "The just shall live by faith" Hebrews 10:38.

Campbell Morgan said:- "The letter to the Hebrews is pre-eminently the document of faith, and reveals the principle of triumph over all sorts of conditions as revealed in the eleventh chapter. But in every case it is the Gospel for the world. Faith is the principle of life. It is the emancipation from all tyranny. Faith is the principle of liberty. It is the secret of victory in all circumstances".

Let us ask ourselves the question : "What is Faith?" and then go to the Word of God, for the answer. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen" Hebrews 11:1 (R.V.).

T. H. Milner dealing with the question what is faith? deals with the subject under eight headings:-

- 1 FAITH IS BELIEVING
- 2 FAITH IS TAKING GOD AT HIS WORD
- 3 FAITH IS RECEIVING, TAKING, OR LAYING HOLD OF JESUS
- 4 FAITH IS LOOKING TO JESUS
- 5 FAITH IS COMING TO CHRIST
- 6 FAITH IS TRUSTING IN, CONFIDING IN, DEPENDING ON, OR RELYING ON THE SAVIOUR
- 7 FAITH IS BUILDING ON CHRIST, AS AN EDIFICE IS REARED ON A FOUNDATION
- 8 FAITH IS FEEDING ON JESUS

ASK WHAT SHALL I ASK? "THAT THY FAITH FAIL NOT".

Lancelot Oliver said: "What is faith? We need not waste words. Faith in Christ is just the same as faith in anything or any one else. I suppose we all know what it is to have faith in any one. We trust him. A father one day was asked by his little girl what faith was. He placed her on the sill of a window, and, standing below with his arms open, bade her leap into his arms. She did so at once. She trusted him to catch her in safety. He told her that faith in Christ was just to trust in Christ as she trusted in her Father".

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: Jesus then came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing, and Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" John 20:24-29.

"I HAVE PRAYED FOR THEE, THAT THY FAITH FAIL NOT".

Now let us ask the question do I pray for this faith? D. L. Moody prayed for faith, and realized his mistake, let me quote his words: "I prayed for faith and thought that some day it would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, "Then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God". I had closed my Bible and had prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since". "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen". What does the writer of the Hebrews say of Moses, that man of God "He endured, as seeing him who is invisible" Chapter 11:27. My brother, my sister, see Him who is invisible, walk with Him, through the valley, cast your doubts on one side, and "Above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" Ephesians 6:16 and remember what the Apostle John wrote in his first Epistle Chapter 5:4 "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the

world, even our faith". We would also do well to remember the faith of Abraham:- "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" Romans 4:20,21.

"I HAVE PRAYED FOR THEE, THAT THY FAITH FAIL NOT".

May the Lord's richest blessing be your portion.

LEONARD MORGAN.

THE GREATEST SHORT STORY EVER TOLD (1)

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: Some readers will know that the writer of the article which follows is blind. For those who do not I wish to explain that the lack of scripture quotations and references is due to this disability: I know you will understand and forgive. I hope that I know enough about the subject dealt with to be able to open up some of its teaching and its beauty for the mutual blessing of reader and writer).

When I was a boy there was in most of the Public Libraries of the country a many volumned collection of books called "The Masterpiece Library of Short Stories". This was quite popular, so that new editions were published for several years. Short stories by some of the world's greatest writers were to be found in its pages, as well as by some authors not so famous. Yet you would look in vain in the collection for the story which forms the subject of this article.

Some readers are fond of short stories, and publishers are eager to supply the demand for them, also we have the collected short stories of individual authors such as H. G. Wells, or upon particular topics or themes. The Radio caters for this taste for instance, e.g. "Morning Story".

The "Greatest Story Ever Told" is, in my view, what we term "The Parable of the Prodigal Son" and I should like us to give a further look at this story, but from a different angle from the usual viewpoint. Almost always the story is expounded as illustrating the unchanging love and forgiveness of our heavenly Father towards the one who is completely underserving and HIS complete restoration to being a son of God. It certainly means all that, but even that does not exhaust the wondrous glory of the story.

Let us try to find out what Jesus is telling us, for it is there, clear for us all to see. Here I ask that everyone who reads this article will read Luke's gospel, chapter 15, not simply the story itself but the whole chapter. Thus we get the story in its setting, for there we find two other stories are taught by Jesus immediately before this one. To some extent all three have the same lesson: in the first story ONE sheep is saved out of a hundred; in the second, ONE coin is found out of ten, and in the third, ONE son is saved out of two. The third story, however, is considerably longer than the previous two: no doubt Jesus had additional lessons to teach by it. The lesson of the forgiveness and restoration of the lost has already been taught before Jesus goes on to the third story. Jesus does not unnecessarily repeat himself. But to these demonstrations of the Father's forgiveness; in this third and fullest story many details are added which obviously have vital importance and meaning. These matters raise several questions; for example Is it a parable? Why is the elder brother included at all? and to whom was the story told?

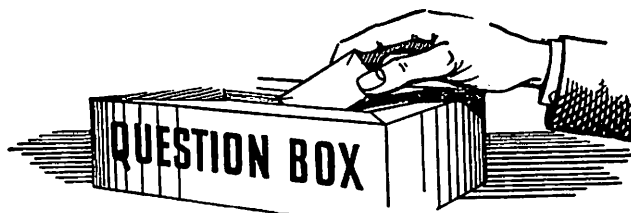
We are setting ourselves to try to find out some great truths in the story of the "Prodigal son" that may not be apparent on a casual reading of the story as found in Luke 15. These truths we shall bring to your notice in the form of questions designed to draw out the answers by searching deeper into the "parable", as we term the story. The first question we ask therefore is 'IS THE STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON A PARABLE?'

It is almost taken for granted that "The Prodigal Son" is a parable and with reason. Going back to the opening verses of the 15th chapter of Luke we read that Jesus spoke to his listeners "a parable" - "The Lost Sheep" Jesus does not introduce his second story, however, as "a parable", but with words something like "In the same way", that is with the same, or having the same lesson. Thus in the words of Jesus, those two stories are linked together as parables. But the third story - "The Prodigal Son" - Jesus begins by saying "Again, There was once a man who had two sons" (R.S.V.) In the KJV the distinction is clearer still, for Jesus says quite abruptly, as it were, "A certain man had two sons..." There is no reference to its being a parable.

What am I seeking to demonstrate in this reasoning? I am not concerned to show that "The Prodigal Son" is not a parable, but that it is more than a parable. Remember, a parable is not a fable. A fable is a story which, however interesting or illustrative, cannot be true or fulfilled. In the fable we have animals thinking, acting and speaking like humans. In a parable, while it may be imaginary, there is nothing that is impossible. Aesop, the slave, used to amuse the wealthy ladies of ancient Greece with his wonderful skill in recounting his "fables", but they were only for amusement, impossible of accomplishment. Jesus indulged in no such pastime. Everything He spoke was the truth, to reach the hearts of men. Every parable He spoke is drawn from life and can be seen in operation every day. "The Prodigal Son" is a parable of things which have happened, are happening and will yet happen while time shall last. Jesus was uttering words which were true in the experiences of many of his hearers. HE was teaching a parable and at the same time telling of actual events. And every detail in the story is exact.

In a following article I hope to look more closely at some of those details.

CARLTON MELLING



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"Deuteronomy 19 prescribes ways of dealing with wrongdoers. Would such a system be valid and even essential today, or does the method of dealing with criminals and wrongdoers change with time?"

The twin problems of guilt and punishment have exercised the minds of men throughout the ages, Laws are made for the regulation of society. What the christian needs to understand is that he belongs to a christian society - in which the problems of guilt and punishment are inseparable from considerations of good and evil - and at the same time finds himself a part of a greater society in which the laws are not theocratic but criminal, and in which the initiators of those laws could find themselves guilty and punishable through contravention of the very laws which they themselves have initiated. To put it another way, the distinction between wrongdoing (unrighteousness) in the theocratic sense, and criminality in the secular and statutory sense, needs to be defined clearly if the christian is to understand the variations of offence and punishment in each case.

Regulatory or corrective?

Laws may be regulatory or corrective, or an admixture of both. Regulation is a method of control, a setting of standards, a system of moderating between good and evil. Correction is an attempt to ensure that standards which have been previously set are properly met. I believe

that all secular laws, both of so-called civilised and uncivilised communities, are modelled on theocratic laws. I hold that all theocratic laws – those initiated by the true and living God, and those attributed to some false and inanimate god through a priestly class – are in the main regulatory by nature with some correction inherent in them. Conversely, most secular laws I see as corrective by nature. Their development has been historic, and their main objective is to contain an already worsened situation. It is against this background that we must attempt to say something useful relevant to the question.

The Old Covenant Laws.

Deuteronomy chapter 19 must be read in conjunction with Exodus chapters 21-23; Numbers chapter 35; and Joshua chapter 20. Perhaps we ought to examine the situation as portrayed there.

The laws are given to regulate the behaviour of the children of Israel in the Promised Land. When the Lord God gave them the land they were to set up Cities of Refuge so that every slayer might flee to one of the cities. The innocent slayer was to find permanent refuge, but the one who killed with hate in his heart should be turned out of the city of Refuge and delivered to 'the avenger of blood' to be killed. The last verse in Deuteronomy 19 reads, "And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot".

The foregoing provides a classic example of a theocratic law relating to killing for the situation in which it was given. The children of Israel were about to go over Jordan into Canaan to possess the land. It was a new start for them, and one can understand why God would want them to start in a way befitting of His children. God's main concern was that evil should be put away from among the people, and His aim seems to have been to dissuade people from committing sin. It was, if you will, a divine deterrent, but like so many other deterrents it was not wholly effective because the later history of the nation of Israel indicates that the people sinned over and over and over again and constantly incurred the displeasure of God. Nevertheless, we still find that people in the twentieth century vociferously proclaim the principle of 'a life for a life', even though, as the questioner suggests, the methods of dealing with criminals and wrongdoers have changed with time.

The New Covenant alternative

It was Jesus, in his so-called Sermon on the Mount, who presented the world with a startling alternative to the 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' teaching, and added a revolutionary dimension to social behaviour. He taught that punitive measures, externally applied, would not produce the right result, and that only discipline engendered from within would produce the correct christian and social behaviour. God had prophesied through Jeremiah that He would make a new covenant with the houses of Israel and Judah. God's law "would be in their inward parts, and written in their hearts" (Read Jer. 31:31-34) The teaching of Jesus seems to be the culmination of this new inner perception between good and evil.

There is no doubt at all in my mind that some of our more enlightened laws stem from this New Covenant initiative, but it is sad to relate that people have shunned the gospel which can produce the changed inner condition that Jesus spoke about; but even more catastrophic has been the spectacle of those who have ostensibly undergone a changed inner condition seeking revenge for wrongs done to them, both imagined and real. However, the basic problem as Jesus sees it is still the same as that posed by God; the struggle between good and evil. A new dimension, though, is given to evil; if a man thinks it, he has done it. The law of intent is invoked but even this law was demonstrated by God when he gave instructions to Moses to set up Cities of Refuge.

The new covenant pattern, then, illustrates a difference in method of dealing with wrongdoers. Judgement will be in the future, both for the christian and the non-christian. Punishment or reward will be eternal. The pure, both in practice and intent, will go to heaven; the impure (sinners) will go to hell. I am not unmindful that God dealt summarily with Ananias and Sapphira, but this again was surely for a special reason. All peoples, christian and non-

christian, would also be subject to the laws of the lands in which they lived and would have to endure the punishment meted out by the civil authorities for contravention of those laws. It is worthwhile to note that a non-christian may never fall foul of the civil laws but still be guilty before God for neglecting those righteous laws which have been manifested in Christ.

The impact of social evolution on laws

It is evident, then, that methods of dealing with crime and wrongdoing have changed with time, both on the part of God and man. The law regarding murder is so enlightened at the moment that the introduction of Cities of Refuge in the modern age are really unnecessary. The State used to be 'the avenger of blood' in the sense that it would slay the convicted murderer, but now it no longer carries out that method of punishment. If any other person took it upon himself to be 'the avenger of blood' then he himself would fall foul of the same law which would eventually convict the one whom he slew. The law of 'a life for a life' is still seen by some as the ultimate deterrent, but what if innocent blood is shed in the process? This is the burden that society, through its legal and judicial system, has had to carry in the past, and the majority of people have come to the conclusion that the shedding of innocent blood through mistakes is too heavy a burden to bear.

What worries many people, including myself, is the way in which social evolution (or should we call it social revolution) is determining the laws the society should live under. You will recall that we mentioned regulatory and corrective laws at the strat. I am of the opinion that during the last two or three decades, parliament has not, by its laws, regulated the society in which we live, but rather responding to some sections of society who seem intent in diluting the standards, both moral and social, which would ensure a wholesome social structure. We only need to look around us to see that this is so. Sexually obscene photographs and periodicals are on public display; betting shops are around each corner; wife and husband swopping parties take place; divorce laws are so relaxed that marriage is becoming meaningless; violence is rampant; strikes occur at the drop of a hat; mental and visual excrement is allowed by the media. What people want, and not what they may need, seems to be dominating the making of our laws. Or is it that we are in danger of becoming a law unto ourselves? Anarchy may be just around the corner.

Many people are now crying, "What can we do?" Some say, 'give treatment to a psychologically sick society'; others say, 'bring back hanging and the birch'. Many have opted out completely, "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die". The danger with correction is that it can come too late and too ineffectively. I am convinced that what society needs is clear and courageous leadership from the top; perhaps we shall then begin to see some improvement.

Yes, dear questioner, methods have changed and will continue to do so. But I am glad that I belong to a christian society whose leader has given me clear and precise instructions as to how I ought to live. I am glad to follow Him whose laws are benign and benevolent, who loved me so much that He came down to earth so that He might demonstrate His values to me. I'm glad that I don't have to find my own way. Aren't you? In the meantime, I shall have to abide by those secular laws which are for my good, and oppose those that contravene the theocratic laws that have become my guide and mentor.

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

FEBRUARY 1978

5—Hosea 8
12—Psalm 45

Galatians 6
Hebrews 1

19—Psalm 8;
26—Num. 14:26-45

Hebrews 2
Hebrews 3

FINAL APPEALS

THE letter to the Galatian Christians has a deeply emotional background. Paul had been among them in distress of body but it providentially proved a help rather than hindrance to his gospel message. His bodily distress

appealed to their impulsive nature. They were moved to sympathy and love (4:13-15). The same characteristic made them as readily open to persuasive and ostentatious talk (3:1). Thus Paul combines vigorous denunciation and emotional appeal. Here in the last chapter he emphasises his use of large letters (6:11 R.V.) for his own writing which may have completed what a scribe had written for him. The "branding" (6:17 R.V.) of his body is contrasted surely with the Abrahamic institution which was being put forward as a necessity for salvation. Had some of them even been persuaded to submit to it? What a contrast! Here was a "mark in the flesh" to avoid persecution and make being a christian easier, set against the marking which proclaimed Paul a slave of his Master, and was in line with the Christ Who submitted to crucifixion for the sake of sinful humanity. We cannot leave this letter without a reference to the suggestion that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7) was an affliction of the eyes. We recall the brightness of the light on the Damascus road, his temporary blindness, his enforced stay among the Galatians (4:13 & Acts 16:6), the reference to the Galatians' consideration for him (4:15), his failure to recognise the high priest (Acts 23:2-5), the "large letters" and the use of scribes like Tertius (Rom. 16:22 and 2 Thess. 3:17). We cannot be certain as to the nature of his handicap. That it was an affliction, a hindrance we do know, and that the Lord permitted it for Paul's final good lest he should be "exalted overmuch" (2 Cor. 12:7). Much we humans need to be humble and there is emphasis on this very point in the instructions for restoring the stumblers (6:1), and for keeping a guard upon our conceits (6:3) being conscious that while we do good ourselves in helping others each person has personal individual responsibility - "to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27) - one burden we cannot share!

The Letter to the Hebrews

We share the view held by so many that Paul did not write this letter. It appears that the early manuscripts did not bear his name and that in comparatively early times Christian writers recognised doubt as to authorship. Nevertheless reputable scholars have held it to be his work and we can realise that he would have made an entirely different approach to

his Hebrew Christian brethren than to the brethren in general. Certainly the Writer has a most tactful way of dealing with the law. There is only one reference to persons of New Testament story by name, "our brother Timothy hath been set at liberty" (13:23), "They of Italy" (13:24) provides no clue. The Writer was a well-known preacher and wrote with authority. We of course have a translation not the original words but there seems to be a specially "eloquent" characteristic in the letter, distinguishing it from the other New Testament writings - or is it just my impression? We can certainly distinguish changes in style in spite or because of translation between the different writings of the most wonderful book in the world. Mark does not write like Luke or Peter like Paul or John. The Holy Spirit Himself speaks to us all through this medium of language, and has the same influence in whatever language He is read or heard. Those in the Polynesian Islands have turned to God from idols like those Thessalonians so long ago. The same message has the same results.

The Supreme Messenger

The descendants of Abraham, the nation of Israel have been most highly privileged of all races. They were chosen to be the instruments of redeeming love, and throughout their history God sent them messengers to guide them in the right way. Their messages varied according to the circumstances of each time and ended with Malachi. We still have their messages and they were written for our learning. However how much more direct was God's approach to man in Himself in the Person of His Son taking upon Himself our nature and living human life with us. This is to all logical thought impossible. How could the Almighty Creator limit Himself to a human form and life? It is utterly vital that we accept the fact of the incarnation if we are to know and love God. This is the theme of John's first letter, and is an essential part of his gospel. Here in Hebrews the fact of supremacy above all powers, spiritual and natural, and identity with God are stated in the first and second chapters; The scriptures of the prophets of old are

mustered for proof so that the people of God, the Jews themselves, cannot quibble or contradict. The Writer is not arguing for Jesus since his readers have accepted Him as Christ

but is showing how He outshines and outdates all that has gone before, completely overshadows the old covenant. They would rightly have great respect for Moses but Moses is shown to be a servant in the house over which Jesus rules. The Old Testament required obedience, instituted punishment for disobedience, and promised reward for the faithful. How much more important it must be to obey the Son instead of the servant. The heavenly messengers (angels) are servants being used for man's benefit. The Jews regarded them as the mediators of the Old Covenant. Moses appointed Aaron as High Priest to stand before God on behalf of His people but Jesus ascended into heaven having shed His own blood making atonement. The High Priest took the blood of animals into the Holiest but Jesus gave His own. So the Highest of all took our nature, suffered death on our behalf having taken our nature and rendered complete obedience to His Father, having never sinned. Yet this Son was made like us in order to suffer death. His identity with His father, and His identity with us enables Him to be our Mediator, having shared our temptations.

Dangers for Christians

We are reminded, and this is a feature of this letter, as the facts concerning the Christ are brought forward, of the danger of drifting from a position of trust and obedience into a condition of indifference. The wonderful truths of the gospel are shown to be sure beyond doubt but those to whom he was writing were in danger of being drawn back to Judaism by their deeply ingrained reverence for the law, continuing at that time in all its ritualistic splendour and wealth. They had pulled out of their national rejection of Christ at considerable cost (10:32-39), and may be growing weary of the self-denial and steadfast adherence to a faith which involved a measure of persecution and withdrawal from many of their own people. In the chapters we are reading this month we have "how shall we escape if..." (2:3) and "if we hold fast" (3:6) and "take heed" (3:12), and the warning example of those who were brought out of Egypt but failed to reach the promised land through unbelief (3:16-19). While we do not have the same temptation as they, there is always danger of apostasy - "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed" (1 Cor. 10:12).

R. B. SCOTT.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Cape Town, S. Africa: Here is the news up to date, (and which I hoped to continue to send on to you, as time goes on as to the results of my present travelling Evangelistic persuasion) "Having mentioned in letter on the 22nd Sept. 1977 that I was invited to possibly conduct a gospel campaign at one of the congregations, I can now tell you that this did materialise having taken place from 17th to 20th Oct. 1977 at the Grassy Park Church of Christ, about 12 miles from my apartment. And the attendances each evening were 88, 67, 90, 100, with the final evening resulting in 5 precious souls being baptized into Christ. The theme at this meeting was "Think On These Things" topics such as "Our Supreme Authority" ... "What makes a N.T. Christian?" ... "Christ - THE Divine Challenge" ... "Think, Listen And See? (which involved the account of Philip and the Eunuch)".

Then I was invited to conduct another campaign, at another congregation, who meet in a private home, area of Steenberg about 12 miles from my apartment, the Theme, "What Think Ye of Christ?" (topics, "Christ Our Heritage... Christ, What Think Ye of Christ ... Christ The Person of the Gospel ... Christ The One Lord ... Christ, and the Essentiality of the Church and Baptism?" the attendances were also encouraging 25, 45, 56, 80, 72 which also resulted in 'great rejoicing' in that 5 youths were baptized into Christ; indeed the gospel still holds its unique power and ability to save the lost. This campaign was from the 6th to the 10th November 1977. Then, on request, I was asked to preach there on the Sunday morning of the 13th November, to receive these young people into fellowship.

Knowing that these young people needed further encouragement, on the Saturday of the 12th Nov. in the evening I showed them plus another 29 youths a portion (3 series) of "Now That I am a Christian" they all enjoyed it along with some of the older Christians and some visitors, the evening was augmented by choruses sung to the Glory of God. And ask you to share in your prayers to the intent that the outcome of other visitors who attended

these two campaigns, and were not bold enough to come forward shall decide soon. To me it seems like, Bro. Hartle is experiencing the "Macedonian call" of the 1st Century in the 20th Century "by the invitations coming forward in the famous words "Come over and help us!" end of news report.

THOS. W. HARTLE.

OBITUARY

Dalmellington, Ayrshire: The church here was saddened by the death of our sister Millar on Nov. 17th, 1977. Wife of brother Wm. Millar, sister Millar was much loved by the brethren - her quiet but determined zeal for the Lord of long standing made her so. She formerly had membership in other parts of Scotland. May the Lord of all comfort bless our brother and us in this our sad time. The funeral to Prestwick was conducted both in the house and at the cemetery by brother Black and brother Chalmers. H. MCGINN.

Treharres, South Wales: Brother A. L. Blackmore passed away on Nov. 22nd. He was a faithful servant of God, standing at all times for the truth. He was elder for many years and the small group will miss him. The meeting place was full when brother Adam conducted the service. T. H. BLACKMORE.

CORRESPONDENCE CLASS

The Early History of the Church of Christ
or The Acts of The Apostles

ACTS 15:36-43, 16.

- 1 Did Paul and Mark remain apart for all time?
- 2 Reconcile Paul's action in circumcising Timothy with his determined stand against circumcision at Jerusalem.
- 3 Write what you know concerning Timothy.
- 4 Follow Paul's journey as described in chapter 16:6-8 paying particular attention to the places mentioned.
- 5 Who are 'we' of verse ten?
- 6 Where is Macedonia?
- 7 Describe the conversion of Lydia.
- 8 Give briefly in your own words the experiences outlined in chapter 16:16-23.
- 9 Describe the conversion of the jailor.
- 10 Describe the plight of the magistrates.

Answers, written on one side of the paper only, should be returned to Edward Jess, 34 Charles Street, Penicuik, Midlothian, Scotland.

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