

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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THY KINGDOM COME

Can we possibly imagine the excitement and euphoria brought about by the presence and preaching of John the Baptist, as his cry went up "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand?" God, we must remember had been completely mute for nearly four centuries, and His people were demoralised and suffering greatly under the Roman yoke. God's long silence is now broken and great news is on the lips of this latter-day prophet, John. Can we, then, possibly imagine the connection, the running to and fro, the animated discussions and surmisings, the frantic searches being made in the O.T. scriptures, rediscovering what the ancient prophets had said, the enthusiasts and the doubters. "The time is fulfilled!" What time was fulfilled? The time specified by the prophets when great blessings would come to the world. In Abraham's seed would all the nations of the earth be blessed. To take but one prophet: Daniel said (re Nebuchadnezzar's dream) "And in the days of these kings, shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed . . ." (Dan. 2:44). In the days of what kings? History tells us that Daniel's prophecy culminated in the time of the Roman kings. This was confirmed, of course, both by John the Baptist and Jesus Himself, for both preached that the time had come, and the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. Our Premillennial friends insist that the Kingdom has not yet come but Jesus and John said that it was 'at hand' and Jesus said that some who listened to His preaching would not die before they had actually seen it come with power (Mark 9:1).

It is very important to note that it was only "at hand" and was not formally brought into reality until after Jesus had died and risen. The prayer taught to the disciples had, as its first request, "Thy Kingdom come". During Christ's ministry, and indeed John's ministry, the people were being urged to prepare themselves for the coming kingdom, and to set their house in order. When Jesus sent out the twelve, and later the seventy, they carried this same message, exclusively to the Jews at that time, that the kingdom of God was 'at hand'. Thus the emphasis during these years was upon repentance: "Repent": why? for the Kingdom of God is at hand. During the personal ministry of Jesus the kingdom existed only in a subjective sense, as an emerging code of principles and moral rectitudes. A ship has gradually to be built before it can be launched. Likewise, the kingdom underwent a period of 'construction' prior to its 'launch' on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Thus it was not an objective, tangible, kingdom until Christ was risen from the dead, ascended to heaven and seated at God's right hand: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Nor, I suppose, could it be operational until Jesus' death: for the Will, or last Testament, does not become effective until the death of the testator. It was only upon, and after, the evidence of Christ's voluntary

humiliation (being obedient to death) that God exalted Him and gave Him a name above every other, and declared that all men everywhere should confess Him as Lord (Phil. 2 5-11). And so the whole personal ministry of Jesus - His birth, life teaching, miracles, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and coronation were all necessary and preparatory to the eventual establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven.

AND WHAT SHALL I DO

So effective was the message of John (and later, of Jesus) that there was a mass exodus from the city of Jerusalem and indeed from the whole region of Judea (and all the region round about Jordan) "and they were all baptised of him in Jordan confessing their sins." (This baptism of John, for the remission of sins, was superseded by Christ's baptism at Pentecost, and those having had John's baptism were required, later, to receive Christ's baptism) (Acts 19:3-5).

During the three years or so of Christ's ministry, and John's, we can see that the kingdom of Heaven was the predominant theme of the preaching, and the subject of nearly all the parables. Christ's parables were essentially mental pictures of what the kingdom of God was like; indeed Jesus prefaced most of them with "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto . . .". Not only in the parables but in nearly all the private and public utterances of Jesus, the kingdom had a prominent place.

Naturally, as one would expect, the question which eventually dominated the conversations was one which sought to discover **WHO could enter this kingdom, and HOW** (upon what terms)? That was why the disciples were so amazed to learn that the rich would find it extremely difficult to gain entry. We can imagine that this consternation would reverberate throughout the whole of Judea and bring about gasps of astonishment and incredulity. Who, then, can be saved? Does it take great quantities of learning (years of study); does it call for family pedigree (distinguished parentage); does it require bravery and distinguished service on the battlefield; does it call for wisdom in the council; does it require a high I.Q.; does it require a good business brain and acumen in the market place; does it call for good looks and personal charisma: or good moral standing? These, and questions of like nature, doubtless exercised the minds of the populace, and one can imagine the fanciful and outlandish notions of some. Fortunately there are a great many recorded instances of Jesus having been asked what a person must do for entry and we can study His replies. Men and women from all walks of life sought entry: some came stealthily and sidled up to Him with the question: and some even came by night. It seems that when Jesus was thus approached He looked the questioner up and down, asked a few penetrating questions and then prescribed the requirements for that particular individual. This tested the resolve and faith of the questioner, as in the case of the rich young ruler. Jesus did not tell everyone to "Go and sell what thou hast and give to the poor", but thought it necessary for the young man, to put the quality of his desire for entry, to the test. In the event, the test was justified, for the young man turned and walked away sad: the price of entry was much too high.

SURPRISE FOR NICODEMUS

What then are some of the prerequisites to entry into Christ's kingdom? It should be noticed that the phrase used to describe the kingdom divorces it from all the normal concepts associated with earthly kingdoms. Christ's kingdom is the 'kingdom of heaven'; i.e. it originated there, derives its sustaining life from there, received its values from there: will eventually return to heaven, and so stands in marked contrast to the kingdoms of this world. It is certainly in the world, but not of the world. Like Christ Himself, the heavenly kingdom enters the hearts and minds of men: just as they enter into it: real but imperceptible "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), c. among you.

Having come to terms with the assertion that the rich would find it difficult to enter: the people doubtless assumed that the religious elite would certainly qualify: the Jews, who worshipped the one, true and living God. They could say "We have Abraham to our father," and were the chosen of God. Once again Jesus disabused us from all such thoughts. When the secret disciple Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to discuss entry to the Kingdom, he probably harboured the idea that the religious aristocracy would be welcomed with open arms. Nicodemus himself was a Pharisee and a man of authority among the Jews (John 3:1): a member of the Sanhedrin, a man of some wealth (John 19:39) and Jesus referred to him as "A Master in Israel" Nicodemus also imagined, in common with all his fellow Jews, that the everlasting Kingdom predicted by Daniel would be of great worldly splendour and might, whose armies would restore Israel and put to flight the Roman usurpers. He did not then know that Jesus came not to remove the Roman yoke but the yoke of sin: had not come to restore Israel but to save the world: had not come to promote the righteous but to save sinners. We can imagine, therefore, that Nicodemus would be staggered by the response of Jesus: **"Ye must be born again."** **"Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven."** Jesus explained that just as we are born into this natural world so we must be born into the spiritual, or heavenly, world. This new birth is not from physical parents but from God (for we are also His offspring) and something we must choose ourselves.

"Born of water," means of course, baptism (immersion) in water, and all Bible scholars of any note agree with this. Dean Alford (to mention just one) says, **"There can be no doubt, on any honest interpretation of the words, that 'born of water' refers to the token or outward sign of baptism - to be 'born of the Spirit' refers to the thing signified, or inward grace of the Holy Spirit. All attempts to get rid of these two plain facts have sprung from doctrinal prejudices."** And on Pentecost, when the kingdom came with power, the apostle Peter called upon all his hearers to **"Repent and be baptised"** so that they might receive remission of sins and this gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). 3,000 souls availed themselves of that wonderful opportunity that day, and the promise and process has continued since, Paul later describing it as **"the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit."** (Titus 3:3).

And so ancestry, history, and the genealogies so proudly gloried in by the Jews counted for nothing: family descent from Israel was worthless: all men had to be born anew.

HARLOTS, PUBLICANS, PHARISEES AND CHILDREN

So far we have seen that the rich would find it difficult to enter the kingdom and that nobility of birth carries no favours. If time and space permitted we could go through many other false concepts which were rectified at the time, by Jesus (and John). Imagine how the Chief Priests and Elders of the Jews must have reeled back in horror when Jesus said **"the Publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you"** (Matt. 21:31). And how was it possible that the dregs of Jewish society (prostitutes and tax-gatherers) could be preferred by God to the religious creme-de-la-creme of God's chosen race (the Chief priests and elders)? - because the harlots and Publicans really believed John. And so, sanctimonious claims to piety are no substitute for simple faith and when we hear the assertions in the churches today that "we are the people of God" perhaps we should think back to similar claims from the elite Jewish clergy.

In any self-analysis of our lives we would fight shy of ever trying to quantify our righteousness (such as it is) but Jesus said, **"Except your righteousness shall exceed**

the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). Here, entry into the kingdom depends upon our level of righteousness: upon its quantity, and quality: and it **must exceed** that of the Scribes. This word 'exceed' occurs only in one other place (2 Cor. 3:9) where Paul says that the 'ministration of righteousness' (the Kingdom, or Church) 'exceeds in glory' the 'ministration of condemnation' (the Mosaic law). And so the righteousness of those in the former must exceed that of the latter, if we would be fit for the kingdom of God. The Scribes and Pharisees were extremely fastidious in religious observances, and went to very unusual lengths to be minutely correct in their outward forms of piety such as ablutions, fastings, prayers, alms-givings and they were also very proud of their good works. Some of it was to earn the plaudits and compliments of men: and we must be careful not to copy them in this. To enter the Kingdom our righteousness must exceed theirs.

Space is dwindling but I would like to mention one other requisite mentioned by Jesus, occasioned as it was by the disciples squabbling over promotion in the kingdom, and who would be the greatest. It seems a sad failing of man that ere long he seeks pre-eminence over his fellows. We see it early on in school playgrounds amongst the infants and indeed it soon surfaces when any group or association of humans get together. They say that if you give a man a uniform he becomes a little Hitler: and very often that is true. Thus anyone with thoughts on personal glory, or power from high office, may find it in Freemasonry or whatever, but they will not find it in the Kingdom of God. Jesus set a small child in the midst of the disciples and said, "**Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.**" I know well that some of the little street-wise urchins in Palestine were thieves and pickpockets (and had to be to survive) but Jesus used a very small infant which He later took in His arms: and referred, of course, to the innocence, humility, simplicity of such a child and its readiness to learn, and obey. We are to be child-like. More often than not, we are like those wrangling disciples - childish.

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly the rules and values which operate in the world of men do not necessarily have any utility in the Kingdom of God. The things which count in our eyes do not necessarily rate in God's. Every one seeks to be rich whereas riches are the greatest impediment to entering the kingdom. Men also aspire to positions of power, and to high office, and stand on necks to get there, yet all men must humiliate themselves and repent: then seek to be reborn - born of water and the Spirit. Men are proud of nobility of birth, titles, insignia, worldly sophistication and deference from fellow-men, whereas we must all become as little children with a childlike trust in God: and the greatest in the kingdom are those quick to do the most menial task and be the servants of all. The kingdom was taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles (Matt. 21:43) because "**they would bring forth the fruits thereof.**" The Jews disdained to receive it: how fit are we for this kingdom of heaven?

EDITOR.

LIFE OF POWER - "HE IS ABLE"

How bold and courageous he was, this apostle Paul! What strength he possessed, and how often he urged fellow Christians to "**be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.**" Can we know the source of that dynamic apostle's power?

Can we claim it as our own?

There were so many keys to his strength, but a primary one was stated to your g Timothy in Paul's effort to stimulate his preacher friend to greater zeal of service. Using himself as a challenging example, he openly declared, "For which cause I suffer also these things: yet I am not ashamed; for I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). That's it: "I know Him . . . He is able." Did Timothy grab that key and use it all the remaining days of his life? We'd like to think so. But of greater personal concern to you and me is the question, "Will we take and use that key for our strength and endurance, joy and security"?

"I KNOW HIM"

"I know Him whom I have believed" is not simply a declaration of faith in the existence of God, or only that he believes in God. His has been a close fellowship with Jehovah, a knowledge based on his living in the grace of his Lord through faith. The will of God has been working in his ministry through the years, and the certainties of assurance are very real. He hasn't always been able to do what he had planned to do, or to go where he had planned to go, but he has always known that God was providing the direction and strength necessary to the fruitfulness of his ministry.

Jehovah God has manifested Himself to mankind throughout the generations, which for a discerning people could let them know something about the living God. Of this the apostle had written to the Romans, "That which is known of God is manifest to them; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity" (Rom. 1:19,20). But, oh, how much more meaningful is the "I know Him" of a daily living fellowship in which His love and faithfulness, strength and comfort, are ever present.

"HE IS ABLE"

"I can do all things." It was the same apostle Paul who firmly insisted, "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). "I can do all things" would be very brash and presumptuous without "in Him that strengtheneth me." He isn't going it alone; he knows that of himself he could not calmly meet the ups and downs of life, His strength isn't the result of "positive thinking" or of a "good self image." He had learned the secret "both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want" (Phil. 4:12). What was that secret? You know it was, "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." You and I need to learn that very same secret. We insist that we believe "he is able" - with Paul we'll know he is able.

"He shall be made to stand." What an encouragement it is for every new disciple of Christ, for those young and weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1) to have loving brethren who deal with them patiently as they grow in their faith. How thrilling it is to read, "For God hath received him" (Rom. 14:3). And then how comforting to learn, "To his own Lord he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be made to stand; for the Lord hath power to make him stand" (v. 4).

We try to think of the many means employed by the Lord to keep His people from falling away, even as we remember, "There hath no temptation over taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13). How thankful we are that it is so. And how humbled we are to know that our Lord uses us within the scheme of "He shall be made to stand." Indeed, "It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor to do anything whereby the brother stumbleth" (Rom. 14:21; read also 1 Cor. 8). Earnestly

we pray, "Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13). We even pray, "Help us to want to see the way of escape and help us to see it; help us to want to take the way of escape and help us to take it." We are never in this alone.

Our God is alive. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1) was David's declaration of his praising his Lord. Today we know so much more about the heavens and the firmament that the same exclamation should have multiplied greater meaning for us. There is every reason for our God to be so much greater than man's God has ever been - and, thus, that our faith be so much greater faith than has ever been. He is Creator and Sustainer (Gen. 1; Isa. 40; Job 38-41), but how much greater and more powerful He is when we know so much more about what He created and sustains. He is all-knowing - knowing everything about everything - but how that magnifies as we come to know more and more about what He designed and brought into being. He is all-powerful - absolute in His power - but how our awareness of that power expands our faith as we consider the diminutives and magnitudes, the simplicities and the complexities, of what He made and upholds. Even our knowledge of the tremendous energy and power involved in an atom brings us to a new dimension we declare our faith in the all-powerful God. Next, when we link His omniscience and omnipotence to His omnipresence, we sense a continuing expansion of our faith.

Take hold of some of this - if you can. According to Kenneth N. Taylor in his booklet *Creation and the High School Student* the sun is more than one hundred times as wide in diameter as the earth - which means, if the sun were hollow, one million earths would fit inside. But another star, Antares, is 150 million miles across (into it would fit our entire solar system out to the orbit of Mars). Our own universe is 100,000 light years across (light travels at a rate of about six trillion miles a year) and contains an estimated 100 billion stars. Yet ours is only one of a billion universes, the closest being 200,000 light years away.

Our planet earth is revolving at approximately 1,000 m.p.h. circling the Sun at 33,000 m.p.h., our solar system is out toward the edge of the pinwheel of a huge galaxy of 100 billion stars, revolving through space at 486,000 m.p.h. (which will require 200 million years for the pinwheel to make one complete rotation).

Let's say it again, "I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

C. ROGERS.

MIRACLES TODAY?

Certainly, we must confess that that is a relevant question today. It seems that every city has its "faith healer" claiming miracles. And the number who have been deceived into believing in their practice is not few by any means. Many have claimed to have been miraculously healed or have personally seen miracles performed.

It is this writer's contention that miracles, as defined in the Bible, do not occur today. This does not say that God does not work in a providential manner. He works behind the veil of natural law to accomplish His purposes. But God does not work through miracles today as He did in Bible times.

The very nature of true miracles is evidence that there are no such happenings today.

Recognizable character of true miracles as proof. The miracles of the Bible could be clearly recognized as such. Peter healed a lame beggar and there was no question in

the minds of the observers that he had been healed (Acts 3: 4:14, 16). None of the wonderful works of Jesus were performed without observers (Acts 26:26). And none denied His marvellous works. Faith healers today have observers, but these observers are different from those of the first century. None of those in the first century, even the unbelievers, ever denied the actual happening of a true miracle. They knew that a miracle had been performed (Acts 4:14-16). How different is this picture from the situation today. The audiences of modern-day healers are always full of those who are not convinced by the flimsy evidence of supposed miracles performed by the faith-healer. Those in the audience of Jesus never denied His works!

Presence of supernatural in true miracles as proof: The presence of the supernatural was clearly seen in the miracles of the Bible. Those who performed the miracles proclaimed the work of God in an uncontradictory manner (Jer. 28:9,15; Deut. 18:20; Gal. 1:6-9; Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3,4), and the miracles confirmed their word. The presence of the supernatural was shown in Jesus and was recognized by those who observed his works (John 4:19, 39-42; Luke 7:11-17).

Obviously, the presence of the supernatural is not evident in the so-called miracles of modern-day faith-healers. We must never confuse emotion and trickery with a miracle. A man may be convinced that he does not have a broken leg by the power of suggestion, but the moment he tries to walk on it he will be convinced that he really does. The fake miracles of modern-day healers do not compare with the miracles of the Bible.

The miracle's relationship to natural laws as proof: Miracles in the Bible were recognized as not being in accordance with the ordinary occurrence of natural laws. Jesus calmed a storm at sea (Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41). He brought sight to known blind persons (Matt. 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52). He walked on water (Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-31). He changed water to wine (John 2:1-11). He multiplied loaves and fishes (John 6:4-14). Let those who claim to perform miracles today match the miracles of the Bible. Let them convince their audiences as thoroughly as those in the first century were convinced when they witnessed an actual miracle of God (Matt. 21:18-20).

CHARACTERISTICS AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF MIRACLES

The characteristics of the miracles of Jesus and how He performed them is evidence that modern-day healers do not perform such deeds. Jesus healed what would be to modern-day healers the unhealable (John 9; Luke 7:11,12). He healed completely and not partially as is so characteristic of the so-called healings of modern-day healers (Matt. 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37). Jesus did not make a point of publicising His healings as do modern-day healers (Matt. 8:1-4; 9:27-31). And Jesus never failed to heal anyone He intended to heal. Such is not the case with modern-day healers. Multitudes go from their meetings unhealed. Also, Jesus did not require faith of all those He healed (Luke 7:11,12; John 5:2-13). Many modern-day healers do require that their subjects have faith. If they do not have enough faith, they cannot be healed.

There are no denials of Jesus' miracles found in the gospel records. None of those who were cured ever said that they really had not been cured. Such is not the case after the meetings of modern-day healings (cf. John 9:20-25). Many are on record stating that they were never really cured during a faith healing meeting even though they claimed to be at the time.

PURPOSE OF MIRACLES HAS PASSED AWAY

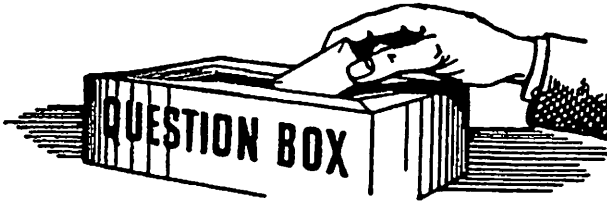
The purpose for the open manifestation of miracles in the Bible was to confirm the work of God. In the first century, the purpose of miracles was to prove that the message preached by Christ and the first Christians was sent from God (Mark 16:17-20; Heb.

2:3,4; cf. 1 Cor. 4:19,20; 12:8-11; Eph. 4:11-16; Acts 20:23; 1 Thess. 1:5). And the word of God was firmly confirmed in the first century by the open manifestation of miracles (Heb. 2:3,4). Many of the miracles that confirmed the word were recorded to continually confirm the Word during all ages of history (John 20:30,31 Mark 16:20). We must conclude, therefore, that there is no need for an open manifestation of miracles today.

The purpose for an open manifestation of miracles has been accomplished. The word of God has been confirmed. Some miracles were recorded to confirm the Bible for all ages. Why would we need more miracles today to confirm the word of God when the Bible says that those miracles which are recorded are sufficient to produce faith and life (John 20:20,31)?

The revelation of the gospel was to be confirmed by an open manifestation of miracles in the first century (Mark 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:22; Heb. 2:3,4; Acts 14:3), but when the revelation ceased (and it did, Jude 3; 2 Peter 1:3), there would be no more need for the confirming miracles. We are receiving no more new revelations from God today. Therefore, we need no confirming miracles. The age of miracles has passed away.

R. DICKSON



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

"Why did God choose Israel out of all the other nations? It seemed a bad choice."

This the brief, but thought-provoking question, which has been supplied for us to consider.

And, yes! Perhaps it *does* seem to have been a bad choice; at least, from where we are now standing. After all, we are able to read the inspired record of the Nation of Israel's repeated disobedience and persistent stubbornness; to say nothing of her appalling ingratitude in the light of the innumerable blessings which God showered upon her, and the many deliverances He effected for her. Indeed, the Psalmist admitted that God had treated them in a unique fashion. Psalm 147:19 states, "*He has not dealt thus with any other nation.*"

The question, therefore, is a pertinent one. It was put in a different way by William Norman Ewer, who wrote:

"How odd
Of God
To choose
The Jews."

This, amusingly, provoked a pointed response from Cecil Brown, who replied:

"But not so odd
As those who choose
A Jewish God
But spurn the Jews."

So, why *did* God 'choose the Jews?'

1. Was it because they were racially superior to other nations?

May I ask you to open your Bible at **Ezekiel 16** and read the first 5 verses - (although, you will notice that the entire chapter is a startling revelation of how God felt about the people whom He chose for Himself). In those verses you will see that there was nothing about the nation itself which made it compellingly attractive to God. On the contrary, He declared that it had been abandoned and 'exposed' - left to die, in the way in which some ancient races disposed of unwanted babies.

Whilst, even today, many Jews undoubtedly regard themselves as ethnically superior to other people, it must surely have been painful for them, almost 600 BC, to hear this assessment of them from God, delivered by the prophet Ezekiel; especially when he dismissed their illusion of racial purity and supremacy with the words in verse 3: God says Your behaviour is so bad you could have been descended from idolaters

"Your origin, and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites;

Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite."

And consider how it must have pained them to be told in **Ez. 16:46**:

"Your eldest sister is SAMARIA . . . to the north of you; and your younger sister . . . to the south of you . . . is SODOM with her daughters."

We all know how they felt about those northerly neighbours - Samaritans! In fact, a statement like this would do very little for the ego of any *modern Jew*, were it to be pointed out to him! After all, the Amorites were *not* descendants of Shem, Noah's eldest son - and bear in mind that it is Shem whom the Jews regard as their ancient ancestor. The Amorites were descendants of Canaan's, the son of Ham, **Gen. 10:16**.

And **Gen. 9:20-27** records the shameful manner in which Canaan himself behaved towards his father Noah, and tells of the prophecy which God issued concerning his future.

The Hittites, also, were Canaanites through Canaan, second son, Heth, as we see from **Gen. 10:15** and **1st Chron. 1:13**.

Put all of this together and this is the picture of Israel which the Old Testament presents:- originating in Mesopotamia; father and mother, an Amorite and a Hittite; and for sisters, Samaria and Sodom. Not a very distinguished pedigree, to be sure! Certainly, nothing to be proud of there!

This being the case, any special treatment Israel received from God was not bestowed on the basis of *birth*. *Racial superiority* was definitely not in the mind of God when He chose Israel.

2. Then, was it because the Jews had distinguished themselves by their accomplishments, or their numerical, material, political or military powers?

That is, were they chosen because they were able to advance the purposes of God through their national greatness? Was it because they were such a great nation?

We are all aware, I am sure, that the world's history is full of accounts, which record how great and powerful nations have imposed themselves on others. Empires were built that way! But, the nation of Israel never really achieved such stature, even taking into consideration the greatness of David's kingdom, or the wealth of the kingdom of Solomon.

The kings of Israel and Judah always remained rulers over very small territories. Place both kingdoms together and, in extent, they were no larger than Wales.

Nor did they ever establish empires, like nations which arose both before and after them. So, Israel was not chosen on the basis of *merit*, or a distinguished history.

3. Were they chosen, then, because they were morally and spiritually superior to other nations? Well! Moses apparently did not think so! He warned them that when they entered the Promised Land and occupied the cities of 'nations greater and mightier than yourselves,' they must not say, "It is because of my righteousness that

the Lord has brought me to possess this land" (Deut. 9:4). Even a casual reading of Israel's history and the outspoken denunciations of their wickedness, delivered by the prophets, dispel any notion that they were in any way *better* than the nations around them.

After being made the leader of the nation, upon the death of Moses, Joshua also made a statement which must have had a devastating effect on any religious pride the people may have felt. Joshua 24; states: *"Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods"*.

4. So WHY was the Jew chosen out of all the other nations?

The simple answer is: **BECAUSE GOD ALWAYS KEEPS HIS PROMISE!**

We have to go back to Gen. 13:16, where, for the first time, He made a promise to Abram, - as he was then called. *"I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth."*

That promise was the first of seven promises which God made to 'Abram the Hebrew.' It was later amplified and explained in the words:

"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves because of him?"

This is the promise to which Paul refers in Gal.3:

"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed."

There we find the answer to our question! It was God's purpose to bring salvation to mankind. Not to the Jews alone, but also to non-Jews. That purpose involved bringing His only begotten Son into the world. To accomplish this purpose, God chose a man Abraham. From him, God produced a nation - Israel. From that nation He chose a Tribe - tribe of Judah. Out of Judah He chose a House - the House of David.

And then, when the time had fully come, a baby was miraculously born in Bethlehem - a baby who was 'Immanuel' - 'God with us' and whose name was 'Jehoshua' - Jesus, which means, 'Yahweh is salvation.'

The entire progress of Israel's history reveals God's purpose being worked out in spite of human frailty and human sinfulness. Had He chosen to use any other nation, the story would have recorded a similar catalogue of shortcomings on Man's part.

What produced the Plan of Salvation was the Sovereignty of God, which always over-ruled and which could *"turn the wrath of men to His glory."*

*(Questions please, to Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way,
Houston, Renfrewshire, Scotland. PA6 7NZ).*

THE LORD'S SUPPER - "THIS PASSOVER"

INTRODUCTION

This the first of seven articles that, Lord willing, will cover the key elements of the feast from its institution, through the early history of the Church to the present day. Different traditions will be reviewed in order that a balanced perspective may be formed as to what should be its structure and purpose within the Church today. Not until the last article when all the evidence presented and summated will conclusions be drawn as to what options I feel are open to us today, and why. It will be my intent to base these recommendations solely on a scriptural basis. However, as our view may have been coloured by practices that have developed around us over the last few

generations, the use of history will be made to shed some light on the meaning of the original text. The prime purpose is to get closer to an understanding of the Christianity as taught and practised in the New Testament times.

THE PASSOVER

The night before He was crucified Jesus met with His disciples to inaugurate a custom for His followers (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). For around 1500 years the Jews had been slaughtering a lamb late on Nisan 14th (Nisan being the first month of the Jewish Year) and holding a feast on Nisan 15th to commemorate their release from captivity in Egypt. On the night of the first feast (Passover) the Lord struck dead all the first-born of Egypt (Exodus 12). After the Jews crossed over the Red Sea, God gave Moses specific instructions on how their escape from Egypt was to be remembered (Numbers 28:16). Mark 14:12 says *"And on the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, His disciples said unto Him. Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the Passover?"* Jesus went to the prepared room in the evening (Mark 14:17), 'after sunset' as in Mark 1:32. The disciples then gathered at the start (night) of Nisan 14th for the Lord's Supper at which Jesus said, *"With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"* (Luke 22:15). In John 18:28 it says *"Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgement: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgement hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover."* It is clear then that the Passover that Jesus ate was not the same as that the Jews were to eat the following night. This view is supported by the Jerusalem Rabbi's record, the Talmud, written in the early days of Christianity, in Sanh 43 (Baraita) says "on the eve of the Passover they hanged Yesu (of Nazereth)" and by the anthropologist E.S. Drowser who reports seeing in the 1930's hundreds of Jews in Iraq, going down to the river on Passover eve with new jars on their shoulders in order to fill them with ritually drawn water during which a special grace was recited. She also says that in Kurdistan at that time the Jews only allowed men to draw water on Nisan 13th for them to make the matzah (compare Luke 22:10).

Before the Jewish Passover, the house where the Passover meal was to be held had to be cleansed of all leaven (Exodus 12:19). Then, before the day of the feast, a ceremonial searching for leaven was made to allow the house to be pronounced "clean." The night Jesus held His Passover was at this searching.

LEAVEN

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7 says *"Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."* As it is important for us to grasp the full import of what Paul is saying here in connection with leaven and its relation to 'Christ as our Passover' the following background is provided to form a base for further articles.

The Jewish word for leaven is *chametz* (pronounced Scottish "ch" - hum - its) which is refined by Rabbi Menachen M. Schneerson of Lubavitch (1998) as a general term for all food and drink made from wheat, barley, rye, oats, spelt or their derivatives, which are forbidden on Pesach (Passover) because they are leavened. In addition the Ashkenazic Jews avoid rice, corn, peanuts, legumes, because all these are used to make bread.

The Jews have a sixtieth rule which allows them to eat food as long as the prohibited substance is present in less than a sixtieth of an allowed substance. However, in the case of *chametz during Passover* it is forbidden no matter how small the amount, even if a single crumb of *chametz* falls into a thousand drams of food, the entire food is forbidden. In the Hebrew the words *chamez* and *matzah* (i.e. unleavened bread) have the same letters except the letters *Cheth* in the former is replaced by *Heh*.

The difference between these letters is a tiny gap in between two lines. The same amount of minute chametz is forbidden on Passover.

The act of abolishing the chametz is considered by the Sephardic Jews to be like one who is a partner with God in the act of creation, and observing the Passover like keeping all the 613 commandments of the Torah (The Passover Haggadah by Rabbi Culi 1700) The Haggadah also relates the importance of collecting fresh water in an unused pot the night before the Passover for making the matzah. This task and that of making the matzah was for the male head of the household to do.

With such an emphasis on the importance on the removal of chametz from their homes, it is not surprising that for a devout Jew this is an enormous task and takes several days. The wife is expected to even remove the fillings of cushions and bed covers to wash them to ensure no traces of chametz have found their way into the crevices over the past year. The Passover Haggadah donates nearly 3,500 words to the cleaning of the oven and kitchen equipment, 2,000 to details of what to do with the things that have been in contact with spices, smoked foods, starched linen etc. When the house has been cleaned, really cleaned, a formal search is then made to ensure nothing has been missed (1500 words on these details).

The above has excluded the making of bread, which falls on the head of the house to do. This takes about 9,000 words to describe, and starts with the field where the grain is to be grown through harvesting, transporting to storage, sieving, inspection of each grain! milling, storage mixing the dough, cooking and storage of the bread.

The requirements throughout the process are very precise and even defines in what manner the dough once wet is to be kept moving at all times until it is put in the oven; how to make the holes in the matzah, etc. etc. The final cooked matzah is called "watched Matzah" (matzah shemurah) as it has literally been watched from the time of its harvest. This attention to detail remains until today as Rabbi Menachem Schneerson shows in updating the historic traditions to include microwaves etc. and now says (1997), for example, on sinks - "Meticulously clean the sink." (other rabbi's required this is done with a tooth pick). "For 24 hours before "Koshering" it, do not pour hot water from Chometz pots into it. Afterwards, boil water in a clean pot that has not been used for 24 hours, and pour it 3 times onto every part of the sink, including the drain stopper. Afterwards, line the sink."

IMPLICATIONS

The relevance to the above to Christians today is threefold. One, to be able to explain the scriptural usage's of the word "leaven." Secondly to comprehend a little of the phrase of Jesus when He said in Luke 22:8 *"And He sent Peter and John, saying Go and prepare us the Passover, that we may eat."*

Finally to grasp the full implications behind Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 5:8 *"Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."* The Greek for 'sincerity' is 'eilikrines' which Vine says some regard as meaning "tested by sunlight" and which Zodhiates elaborates as meaning "to judge, to discern. Sincere, pure, unsullied, free from spot or blemish to such a degree as to bear examination in the full splendour of the sun. In the NT, it is generally understood to relate to the lives or wills of Christians."

Attendance at the Lord's Supper requires for a man, as set out in 1 Corinthians 11:28, to *"examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup."* In the original Greek 'examine' is used in the Septuagint in Zechariah 13:9 and Proverbs 17:3 the latter reads *"As silver and gold are tried in the furnace so are choice hearts with the Lord"* or as Zechariah says *"I will try them as silver is tried, and I will try*

them as gold is proved; they shall call upon my name, and I will hear them, and say "This is my People" and they will say "The Lord is my God." We, then, all need to examine ourselves as closely as the Jews do their homes in removing all the leaven from them. If we do not accept this challenge we will be as those in 1 Corinthians 11:30 "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Failure to do so means meeting the judgement of verse 27 "wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." As Paul says in Romans 13:11,12 "now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."

BRIAN BOLAND.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

July 5	Lamentations 3:22-40	2 Cor. 13
July 12	Psalms 19	1 Timothy 1
July 19	Proverbs 19:1-14	1 Timothy 2
July 26	Ezekiel 34:1-16	1 Timothy 3

PAUL'S FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

Writer: the apostle Paul.

Recipient: Timothy, Paul's "son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). He was a native of Lystra and the fruit of a mixed marriage, his mother being a Jewess and his father a Greek. His mother's name was Eunice and Lois was his grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy became an important figure in the Pauline circle and it is a worth-while exercise to examine all the passages in which he is mentioned. He, of course, laboured with Paul in many fields, including Corinth and Ephesus. He was with the great apostle on his last voyage to Judea (Acts 20:4) and he appears during the imprisonment of Paul in Rome (Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; Philimon 1). Later on he himself was imprisoned for the sake of the gospel (Hebrews 13:23).

Purpose: "... Paul wrote this epistle chiefly to instruct him in the choice of proper officers in the church . . . Another and very important part of the apostle's design was to caution this young

evangelist against the influence of those false teachers who, by their subtle distinctions and endless controversies, had corrupted the purity and simplicity of the gospel . . ." (Thomas Hartwell Horne).

Date: possibly between A.D. 64 and 67.

Comment: 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are frequently classified as "The Pastoral Epistles." This title became affixed to these letters in 1726 as the result of the work of the scholar Paul Anton.

CHAPTER ONE

Thompson's Chain-Reference Bible gives these marginal headings for the first chapter: Paul's Counsel to Timothy: Unsound Doctrine Condemned; The Purpose of the Law; and Solemn Charges. Ephesus is mentioned (1:3). This was the largest city in Asia Minor and an important one in which to spread the good news of Jesus. Paul saw the need for Timothy to refute false teaching here. Heresy was, undoubtedly, a constant threat in those days. It appears that heretical teaching was coming both from the Jewish world and the Greek world. For example, there were idle tales, as well as genealogical passions and gnostic speculations to contend with. It would take all of Timothy's strength and ability to expose then wrong and promote the right.

There is so much in this chapter that we can only touch on a few points. We learn that laws exist to deal with evil-

doers. "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully. Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane . . ." (1:8,9). Paul continues with a terrible catalogue of sin, which reveals just how bad society was in the early days of the Church. Into this dark and frightful world came the good news about Jesus. Here was one who brought love, peace, joy and hope. Paul regarded himself as a weak and unworthy ambassador for the Saviour, given his past hostilities. I think verse 15 is one of the great verses of the Bible: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners: of whom I am chief." It is a verse that sums up the work of Christ; it is also a verse that reveals the humility and frankness of the apostle Paul.

Timothy, the evangelist, was encouraged to "war a good warfare" (1:18) for the cause of Christ. There were two weapons of equipment: faith and a good conscience (1:19). Many were the enemies of the gospel, including those who arose from within the Church, such as Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20). It is hard to fight those without, but harder to fight those from within. Paul's action was certainly tough. It had to be.

CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter we read of the Universality of the Gospel; The Way of Prayer; Prayer for Those in Authority; The Gifts of God; One God and One Saviour; Barriers to Prayer and Women in the Church. Paul liked to get as much into his letters as possible!

It is difficult to imagine a religion without prayer. Tennyson once wrote: "More things are wrought by prayer than the world dreams of". Lange has said: "Prayer is the true thermometer of the spiritual life". Someone unknown once commented: "The Christian on his knees knows more and can see further than the

philosopher on tip-toe". Paul wrote: "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (2:8). It is to be noted that the Jews at that time, when praying, stood with hands outstretched and the palms upwards. The early Church seems to have adopted their posture. The modern Church, generally, has not.

I have heard it said that the apostle Paul was a misogynist. This, of course, is absolute nonsense. Paul had a deep respect for women and often encouraged them in the faith. He gave clear teaching on women's role in society and the Church. I like the fact he refers to Adam and Eve (2:13,14). They were as real to him as Jesus was. I agree with Alexander Campbell when he wrote: "Woman, with me, is to society what the spirit is to the body; for as the body without the spirit is dead, society without woman is dead also. She is then the quickening, animating, conservative element of society. If man . . . be the glory of God, most certainly woman is the glory of man".

CHAPTER THREE

In this chapter we are given the qualifications of an elder and a deacon. The terms "elder", "pastor", "presbyter" and "bishop" are terms that describe the same office or function. "Elder" or "presbyter" speak of age and experience; "bishop" of one who guides and directs; and "pastor" or "shepherd" of one who leads and feeds. For the eldership there are moral, social, domestic and administrative qualifications given. Each one should be analysed very thoroughly. For example, "blameless" (1:2) is from *anepileptos* and means one against whom no evil charge can be maintained. "Sober" (1:2) is the Greek word *sophron* and means a well-regulated mind and has reference to a person who is free from excesses. "Patient" (1:3) is *epieikes* in the Greek and means equitable, fair, mild and gentle. It speaks of one who is

concerned about everything, but not over-concerned about any one thing. *Epieikes* has often been described as the most beautiful word in the Greek language.

The first deacons were appointed in the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6). Their task was to "serve tables". In other words, they had to take care of the needy or poor. Thayer defined a deacon thus: "One, who by virtue of the office assigned him by the Church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use". David King has written: "Deacons were to wait upon the secular affairs of the Church. Nothing of preaching or teaching appertained to their office. They were not to be excluded from ministering in word and doctrine, nor did their office disqualify them from the eldership; but in teaching, preaching, or ruling, they would not act by virtue of their standing as deacons. We also see, that they were specially elected for their work, and duly ordained to the same".

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. King Solomon's palace was called the Palace of the Forest of ?
2. What was the third beast of Daniel's first vision?
3. Who was the son of Hilkiah and a priest of Anathoth?
4. Who was Abraham's grandfather?
5. Who was Esther's father?
6. In which Persian city did Nehemiah live?
7. In which city did Eutychus fall from the window?
8. In which city did Ananias visit Paul?
9. Precisely how many fish did the disciples catch when Jesus told them to drop their nets?
10. What colour is God's throne?

THANKS

Elsie and I would like to thank the brethren for their 'Get well' cards and visits during Elsie's recent stay in hospital. I would also like to thank those who took me in to visit. We certainly appreciated the loving concern and help of the brethren.

She is now back at home and starting to get about again and we hope she continues to make good progress,

JAMES SINCLAIR,
Tranent.

THANKS FROM NIGERIA

Bro. Emmanuel H. Hokon has written to express the thanks of the church at Badagry, Lagos State, Nigeria, for the sum of £89.77 sent by R.B.S., in Glasgow. ("R.B.S." may, of course, refer to the Royal Bank Of Scotland). However, the anonymous sender is assured of the grateful thanks of these good brethren in Nigeria.

EDITOR.

COMING EVENTS

ANNUAL SOCIAL
NEWTONGRANGE

on 3rd OCTOBER, 1998

(a note for your diary) at 4.00pm

Speaker: Ian Davidson, Motherwell

Chairman: Joe Currie

A Warm Welcome is Extended To All.

HELP

I have recently received a request from: Deacon Majorson D. Singani and Deacon Samson Masera, who run the Namikango Christian Orphans/Home, Thondwe Church Of Christ, P.O. Box 13, Thondwe, Republic of Malawi.

They have asked me to give them the address of Dr. Irving Maskowitz, a Jewish millionaire from the USA., so that they can approach him for financial help in keeping the orphans. They also ask that I pass on their request for financial aid to any interested brethren or churches. Needless to say I can't lay my hands on Dr. Maskowitz's address but if

anyone out there can help please contact these brethren at the above address, and make any further enquiries thought necessary.

EDITOR.

GHANA APPEAL

The Church continues to grow in Ghana with another two added last month. Obo-Kwahu near Nkawkaw and Kyelayebiase near Patriensa, I mentioned in the last report. In a letter to me written on 27th March this year, I was informed that a Muslim was converted to Christ in a remote village of Dambai, Volta Region. You won't forget his name, it is Paul and he never ceases witnessing for Christ.

In the same letter from the same district, a blind man who was also converted is currently being led through the villages and he is winning souls for Christ.

This new Church has a membership of 43 and all they want from me are benches to sit on. The word spread to the next village which now has a membership of 20. The church in Okumah where John and I visited in November have shared their benches to help out but they need more. Tell me who are blessed? We cannot fill seats and we live in comfort. They cannot find seats and they have burdens we cannot begin to understand.

The "Where there is no Doctor" books I recently appealed for have not yet been purchased, we had not received

enough support for the order, but a church only last week has financed the shortfall. TALC (Teaching Aids at Low Cost) have produced a new book . . . "Where Women have no Doctor" I am writing this Appeal on the Deadline day for submitting into the Scripture Standard and I have received notification one copy of this book has been dispatched to me. We have 74 books to purchase and divide among 11 congregations, we may send a mixture, if this new book is for use in Africa. Hopefully we will send these out to new families added to the Church (in Nov 97) in June.

Please make cheques payable to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)" and send to Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife, KY12 ODU. Tel. (01383) 728624.

- 10. White (Revelation 20:11).
- 9. 153 (John 21:11).
- 8. Damascus (Acts 9:10,17).
- 7. Troas (Acts 20:6,9).
- 6. Susa (Nehemiah 1:1).
- 5. Abihail (Esther 2:15).
- 4. Nahor (Genesis 11:24-26).
- 3. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1).
- 2. Leopard (Daniel 7:6).
- 1. Lebanon (1 Kings 7:2).

ANSWERS

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