

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

BE INSPIRED...

Paul's letter to the Philippians is rightly regarded as one that expresses the depth of love and affection that Paul held for the Christians in that Roman colony. They had helped him in his ministry and even though now incarcerated in prison Paul writes about the joy and rejoicing that he maintains in their fellowship and his thankfulness for their loving kindness toward him.

Interwoven with the joyous expressions of faith and mutual love (and the words joy and rejoice recur frequently throughout the letter) are some of the most profound and emotive expressions of Paul's relationship with his Saviour. He reflected on the dilemma of knowing that his eternal home was with the Father and Son in heaven, yet acknowledged that he still had opportunity for "fruitful labour" whilst alive in the flesh. He writes of the "surpassing worth of knowing Christ" and makes it clear that he is not speaking of some intellectual knowledge or passing acquaintance with the Christ, but rather reveals a soul-searching, heart-aching acknowledgement of his own utter dependency on the grace of God and his own inner desire to understand and "share his (Christ's) sufferings".

Paul encourages his readers by pointing them towards the Christian's homeland, the "commonwealth of heaven", and perhaps the even more staggering prospect of in that homeland, not only being with Christ, but the Christians being changed by Christ, "who will change our body to be like his glorious body". What a glorious prospect it is for the faithful Christian.

Amidst all of the debate, fractiousness and division that tarnishes the religious world and even sometimes Christianity itself, there is also encouragement in the simplicity of the lifestyle that he asks of his readers. Thankfulness, joyfulness and rejoicing are bywords. He implores his readers to "shine as lights in the world" in stark contrast to the "crooked and perverse generation" amongst which they lived. And he pointed them to some of the 'unsung' qualities that are so important to the outworking of the Christian life and which are so far removed from the issues that all too often dominate religious debate and practice. **"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you."**

Let us too, act truthfully and honorably, be just in our dealings with others, be pure, show the fruits of love and graciousness; and God will be with us.

Contents: 1-Be Inspired; 2-Evil Spirit; 4-History and Culture of the New Testament; 6-Wonderful Womanhood; 8-Question Box; 10-God's Glorious Gracious Gifts; 13-Uncapping our Bibles; 15-News & Info.

"The Evil Spirit from the Lord"

Allan Ashurst, Stretford.

QUESTION

What does it mean in 1 Samuel 19:9 where it says: **"the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul?"**

1 Samuel 19:9,10 **"And the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played [*the harp*] with his hand. And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night."**

EXPLANATION

This evil spirit is the "evil spirit from the LORD" which came upon Saul when the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul because of his blatant disobedience.

1 Samuel 16:14 **"But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him."**

It is true that the word "evil" does not necessarily mean "morally bad". It can mean "unpleasant". However that does not help us much because in both cases the Hebrew text for "evil spirit **from** the Lord" should be translated "evil spirit **of the Lord** [*RUACH YHWH*]" which seems even more puzzling. How can it be that the absolutely holy GOD should not only send an unpleasant spiritual being to trouble a human being but that He even owns an unpleasant spiritual being?

ANSWER

The LORD God created all things, not only the physical universe and all in it but even the heavenly beings, the angelic spirits. So by divine right He owns absolutely everything. He owns even the angels. That means he owns even Satan and all those who along with him rebelled against the Creator and continually vie against GOD. A spiritual conflict is taking place in the unseen dimension.

Ephesians 6:12 **"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."**

THE BOOK OF JOB GIVES A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF HOW THE CHIEF EVIL SPIRIT - SATAN - WENT OUT FROM THE LORD GOD'S PRESENCE TO CAUSE TROUBLE

We are unaware of this when troubled by the evil in this life. Like Job we are not aware of it. In the book of Job we find Satan confronting GOD. Satan is the evil leader of all evil spirits. God points out that Job is exceptionally faithful to Him. Satan wants to discredit Job and indirectly discredit GOD. He challenges GOD to cause Job problems that would make Job blaspheme. He fails - and this in a nutshell is the subject matter of the book of Job. Throughout all his troubles Job was unaware that his faithfulness was the issue at stake in the conflict that was taking place between GOD and Satan.

Job 1:6-12. **"On a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, Satan* also came into their midst. And the LORD said to Satan, Where have you come from? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, from going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is no one like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one who fears God, and eschews evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Does Job fear God for nothing? Haven't you made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has on every side? You have blest the work of his hands, and his possessions are increased in the land. But now stretch out your hand, and touch everything he has, and he will curse you to your face. And the LORD said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power; only on himself do not**

stretch out your hand. So Satan went out of the LORD 's presence." *[Satan - Hebrew = the adversary]

However - even though it was Satan who both decided what damage to do and caused it - in a second confrontation GOD says to him:

"...Have you considered my servant Job, that there is no one like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one who fears God, and eschews evil? And still he holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy* him without reason." *[Hebrew: to allow him to be destroyed. See the article on **THE HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART** at <http://members.aol.com/d4web4s/addedinf/hardenq.htm>]

The LORD God was not the cause of Job's troubles. Satan was the instigator and perpetrator of those troubles.

I SUGGEST THAT SIMILARLY, ONE OF SATAN'S HENCHMEN USED SAUL, TRYING TO CAUSE DAVID TO BLASPHEME THE LORD GOD

When King Saul defected and David was anointed to be the next king, David became a conspicuous target whom Satan would want to destroy in order to discredit GOD. It appears to me that one of Satan's fellow demons took on the task and used delinquent Saul for the job. Notice how, apparently coincidentally, David was chosen to console Saul and so David was brought into close contact with the man who quickly and unreasonably became his arch enemy.

1.Samuel 16:15-19. **"And Saul's servants said to him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubles you. Now let our lord command your servants, who are here in your presence, to search for a man who is a skilled harpist and this will happen, when the evil spirit from God is on you, when he plays the harp with his hand, and you will be well. So Saul said to his servants, now get me a man who can play well, and bring him to me. Then one of the servants answered and said, Behold, I have seen one of Jesse the Bethlehemite's sons, who is skilled in playing... So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, send me David your son..."**

It is also significant that from the javelin incident onwards Saul constantly hounded David to have him killed. Yet David never blasphemed God despite all his many troubles. What was it that aroused Saul's rage as David tried to console him? Perhaps David was singing praises to the LORD God, which would not go down well with this remorseful delinquent man.

SUMMARY

The question was "What does it mean in 1 Samuel 19:9 where it says, **"the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul?"** Since it would be both slanderous and not necessary to draw the conclusion that the LORD God was the perpetrator of David's troubles, in the light of the above a satisfactory solution to the question could be found in the following possible scenario:

- 1) Satan's agent, "the evil spirit", was the instigator and perpetrator of those troubles.
- 2) That evil angel had argued with GOD over David's faithfulness. He was given permission to test David. He took advantage of Saul's evil disposition and used him to persecute David. But Satan's agent fails. David, despite the failings which he admittedly had, never wavered from trusting God implicitly and in that he was a man after God's own heart.

Acts 13:22. **"And when he had removed him [Saul], he raised up for them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will."**

Let us always trust the LORD God implicitly in all things. Even in troubles. Even though we do not know the reasons for our troubles.

FOOTNOTE

Why did not GOD just clamp down on Satan? If God had done that, I imagine Satan would have declared, "See, I told you, GOD is just like me." Satan's other name is the Devil, which means "the slanderer". He slandered God to Eve* and wants to perpetuate the lie that God cannot be trusted.

* [Genesis 3:1 "...he said to the woman, yes, **has God said...**?



The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (2)

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

HEROD

Herod the Great was king from 40 to 4 BC. It was the Roman senate, advised by Antony and Octavian, who gave Herod the title 'King of the Jews'. His reign was eventful, to say the least; and a recent study of his life from the writings of Josephus and the late Roman historian, Michael Grant, has proved quite fascinating. Grant, in his book on Herod, has written: "He had to be a match for both worlds, the Graeco-Roman and the Jewish, and in neither of them did he ever feel really at ease. Jew by religion, Idumaeian and Arab by race, Greek by cultural sympathy, Roman by political allegiance, these different instincts and inclinations mingled uncomfortably in Herod's mind and heart".

He went on to say: "It was only in the last decade that his domestic troubles affected his performance as a ruler. By then the impetuous, passionate element in his character had overcome the portentous brain-power that had kept it in check hitherto. Until that time, he had been a monarch of exceptional gifts – subtle, pertinacious, untiring; an admirable administrator, soldier, financier and diplomatist, and a person capable of exercising a charm that even the toughest Roman grandees found wholly irresistible."

I would say that a lot of Herod's problems stemmed from the fact that he was married ten times. The result was bitterness, hatred, jealousy and murder within his family. His growing paranoia led, of course, to the massacre of the babies in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus.

JUDEA

Herod ruled over Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Peraea (Transjordan), and the north-eastern territories of Gaulanitis, Batanaea, Trachonitis and Auranitis. Greater Judea stretched from the level of Shechem in the north to the Negev desert in the south and from the Jordan valley in the east to the Mediterranean coast in the west. The land consisted of a rich coastal plain, wooded hills, deserts and the large river valley of the Jordan. Here grew wheat, olives, grapes, figs and a variety of vegetables. The oasis at Jericho was famous for its date palms and balsam, which was prized both as a medicine and a perfume. Sheep and goats were common, even in the desert areas. Cattle were raised on the coastal plain. The wild life consisted of wild boars, antelope, wolves, bears, lions, lizards and snakes. Jerusalem was, of course, the main city of Judea and the centre of Jewish religious life.

TRADES

Joachim Jeremias' book '*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*' is really an investigation into the economic and social conditions during the New Testament period. It contains information I have found in no other work. He speaks of nail makers, flax traders, bakers, millers of pearl barley, carriers (those who dress and colour leather after it is tanned), scribes, copyists, clerks), sandal makers, stone-masons, asphalt merchants, carpenters, sculptors, tailors, weavers (a despised trade), fullers, workers in bronze and iron, workers in arts and crafts, oil producers, butchers, water sellers, producers of ointments and resins, jewellers, maintenance workers, road sweepers, labourers, barbers, laundry workers, money changers, doctors and merchants in glass-making, fish, cheese, fruit, vegetables, costly materials, sandals, plates, basins, baskets, spices, precious stones, grain, salt, oil, honey, wine, wood, animals, wool and slaves.

Wages were low. "A working man in Palestine ate meat only once a week, and in Palestine the working man and the day labourer were never far from the border-line of real hunger and actual starvation." (William Barclay) On an average, day labourers earned one *denarius* a day (Matthew 20:2,9). An indication of its purchasing power can be seen in the story of the Good Samaritan, who paid two *denarii* to the innkeeper (Luke 10:35). Incidentally, thirty pieces of silver was probably the equivalent of 120 Roman *denarii*, the average price of a plot of land. Suffice to say that the vast majority was poor in comparison with the wealth of the aristocracy, including the priestly aristocracy. The rich lived well. Their world was one of extravagance and luxury. Banquets were common. Jeremias has written: "Under the Herodian dynasty Jerusalem, as the capital city, was an example of royal splendour. Magnificent buildings arose, splendid games were organised by Herod every four years, and the cultus in the newly built Temple exhibited a magnificence scarcely known before."

THE TEMPLE AND ITS PRIESTS

The Temple was the most important factor in the commerce of Jerusalem. The Temple officials and workers were very well paid. Priests may be regarded as belonging to the middle classes. (The priestly aristocracy belonged to the wealthy class) Most of the ordinary priests lived in various places throughout the land and were divided into twenty-four courses. Priests shared in a portion of the sacrificial victims, the first-fruits and the agricultural produce. Some books refer to the 'priestly' tithe, which was virtually considered as income tax. The number of bulls, calves, sheep, goats and doves sacrificed, especially at festival times, was enormous. The pilgrims who came to Jerusalem, particularly at the Passover, contributed much to the economy of the city. The whole of worldwide Jewry also contributed hugely to the commerce of the city through the payment of the annual dues to the Temple treasury.

TAXATION

Taxation is always a thorny subject for most people. The temple tax, for example, was one half-shekel or the equivalent of two Greek *drachmae*. For most Jews, the sum amounted to two days' pay. But the Romans also looked for tribute. They exacted three regular taxes from their conquered people – ground tax (one tenth of the grain and one fifth of the oil and wine); income tax (one per cent of a man's income); and a poll tax (one *denarius* paid by every male aged fourteen to sixty-five and by every female aged twelve to sixty-five). In addition to these taxes were taxes on imported and exported goods; taxes to travel on main roads, cross bridges, enter market places and towns and harbours; taxes on the purchase and sale of goods; etc. Those who had the right to collect the taxes on behalf of the Roman government were known as *publicani*. Matthew, of course, was a *publicanus*. So was Zacchaeus. Universally, these people were hated because of malpractice and extortion. I understand that tax-gatherers were so hated by the Jews that they were debarred from the synagogue. They were classified with robbers and murderers.

JERUSALEM

The status of Jerusalem in New Testament times must not be underestimated. It was, as Jeremias has pointed out, an old capital city; the seat of the highest authority where the Sanhedrin sat; the centre for Jewish religious education; and the home of the Jewish cultus, the place of the presence of God on earth. Actually, the city experienced many problems because of its highland location, its shortage of water and raw materials for industry, and its unfavourable position for trade and commerce. Its population in Jesus' time has been estimated at between 25,000 and 55,000. The lower figure is probably nearer the mark. This excludes the number of pilgrims during the great



feasts. They probably increased the population by a further 125,000. However, I must point out that numbers in the ancient world are notoriously difficult to assess.

GALILEE

Galilee was the regional name of part of Northern Palestine. Here was the scene of Jesus' childhood and early ministry. I have always likened Galilee to Scotland and Judea to England. It is not a perfect analogy, but it has helped me to picture the geography of the ancient "Holy Land". Of course, Samaria divided these two Jewish territories and Samaria was very different from both, as we shall see. I always enjoy reading the works of Peter Connolly. In his book *'The Jews in the time of Jesus: a History'*, he writes: "Galilee was not a Jewish homeland, but there were scattered Jewish settlements there. About 102 BC Aristobulus 1 invaded the country to protect the Jewish settlers who were in open conflict with their Gentile neighbours. He forcibly converted the population and Jewish immigrants poured in from the south. Galilee was a frontier province bordering on Syria and much of the population remained Gentile, at least in spirit. Like most frontiersmen the Galilean Jews were a hardened people. Although Galilee became predominantly Jewish it was prone to disturbance."

Galilee was the most fertile area of Palestine. It has a sub-tropical climate with good rainfall. Josephus claimed that anything grew there. Galilee was especially well known for its wheat-fields and vineyards. It also grew flax, from which linen is made. Sepphoris, the capital, was the linen centre of Palestine. The Sea of Galilee, a freshwater lake, had a plentiful supply of fish. Galilee today has, sadly, lost much of the prosperity it enjoyed in New Testament times. "Its forests have been largely replaced by *maquis*, the characteristic scrub of the Mediterranean, and many of its towns and villages, places which Christ knew and visited, have disappeared from the map, leaving hardly a trace behind." (J.H. Paterson)

WONDERFUL WOMANHOOD

Women of the Bible 3

Ann Boland, Germany

SARAH

Not much is known about how Abraham and Sarah met or married, but the story starts in **Genesis 12**. God told Abraham to leave his country and family to go to a new land. Now, this doesn't seem such a big deal for us today – we have telephones, internet, e-mails, aeroplanes and such to keep in touch with family and friends. But in Abraham's day, there was no easy contact. He was being asked to go to a land he knew nothing about, to live with people he didn't know, and to fulfil a promise from God **Genesis 12:2 – 3**. I don't think many people would relish the thought of this kind of move. However, Abraham did as God told him (a good example of faithfulness).

It is too much to expect from Abraham and Sarah that they were perfect, as is shown in **Genesis 12:10 – 20**. Abraham was afraid that he would be killed if he said Sarah was his wife, so he said she was his sister, with almost disastrous results. Pharaoh took her as his wife, but realised the deception when God sent diseases to him and

his household. This is the first instance we read of where Abraham or Sarah took things into their own hands, without trusting God. They decided to lie about their relationship to make it easy for themselves – how true that is of humans.

Genesis 16 brings us to the importance of Sarah. In **Chapter 15**, God had promised Abraham that he would have a son, and that Abraham's offspring would be as many as the stars in heaven. As Sarah had had no children yet, she had decided that she never would have any, and told Abraham to take her servant, Hagar, as a wife, so the prophecy could be fulfilled. As we know, Hagar then treated Sarah with disrespect as soon as she was with child, and Sarah mistreated Hagar which caused her to run away. God told Hagar to return, and she had a son, Ishmael. Again, this was not what God wanted, and he appeared to Abraham in the form of three men. Sarah heard them saying that she would have a son in a year's time, and she laughed, knowing that she was **past the age of childbearing (Genesis 18:11)**. I'm sure many of us would have done the same in Sarah's situation, but for one thing – **God** had promised the child. This makes all the difference in the world, as faith will be rewarded (See the teachings of Jesus on faith).

In **Genesis 21**, we find the promise of a son fulfilled. Sarah bore a son, and called him Isaac, which means "laughter" as God had brought laughter to Sarah. In **Genesis 23**, we read of the death of Sarah, at the age of 127, and she was buried near Mamre or Hebron.

This seems like a fairly normal story of a woman, but there are many lessons to be learned.

Firstly, and probably most importantly, that of faith, believing in God's promise. As with Hagar, we bring so much sorrow to others by believing we can survive on our own, or by doing things not wanted by God. It is amazing to hear people saying: "You need to find your own happiness, you need to control your own life, you need to work out your own destiny". So much stress and worry would vanish if we just accept that God knows best, and that we don't always have to "go with the crowd".

Secondly, the lesson of lying, telling untruths to protect ourselves. There is much wisdom in the saying; Truth will out". It may not be today, or this year, but sooner or later the truth about something will be revealed, even if it is only on the Day of Judgement. How often have we learned (the hard way) to tell the truth? Things are much, much worse if we lie and then keep lying.

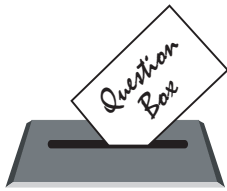
Thirdly, and just as important is that **God always keeps his promises**. It may not seem like it, but consider these things:

- God promised never to destroy the world again **Genesis 8:21**
- God promised Abraham a son **Genesis 15**
- God promised the Israelites their own land **Exodus 3:8**
- God promised Moses a sight of the promised land **Deuteronomy 3: 27**

And so we could list the promises God made, which would fill a book (as indeed it does in the Bible).

Finally, the story of Sarah shows us what God is capable of, and what we can expect with faith and obedience. Things might seem impossible, or threatening, but God is always there. Sarah became the **mother of nations** from whom **kings of people will come Genesis 17: 16**. Not really something to be laughed at, however impossible it seemed.

So remember, **Matthew 19:26 for all things are possible with God.**



QUESTION – What was the ‘mark’ of Cain referred to in Genesis 4:15



From the way in which verse 15 reads in some popular translations, it is not surprising that Bible readers are led to hold the view that God placed on Cain a physical mark which was intended to be a sign to any who might want to harm him, that he was under the protection of God.

Indeed, the expression, ‘*The Mark of Cain*’, has become proverbial. It may even have influenced Nathaniel Hawthorne, the American author, in 1850, to produce a novel which became a classic of American literature. “*The Scarlet Letter*” tells the story of a young woman who, in the early days of New England, was found guilty of immorality and was sentenced to be branded with the letter ‘A’, to indicate the nature of her sin.

Was Cain marked in a similar way, with a visible, physical emblem of some kind?

The Theories

Let me list some of the theories that have been advanced.

1. Some scholars have thought that Cain’s appearance was changed, so that people *could not recognize him* as the murderer of his brother Abel.
2. At the other extreme, some of the older writers believed that he was marked in the forehead in a way that *openly identified him as his brother’s murderer*.
3. There was also support for a theory which said that Cain’s *forehead was marked with the letters YHVH*, to warn possible aggressors that he was under God’s protection.
4. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament - (the Greek version) - describes him as being destined to ‘*groan and tremble*, and this translation caused other early commentators to suppose that God inflicted *some sort of physical disability* on Cain. Perhaps they were led to this view by the fact that, after Jacob’s struggle at Peniel, (Gen. 32:23-24 and 31-320), he walked with a limp. He was left with a physical handicap that was intended to serve as a reminder of the amazing event that changed both his life and his name.
5. But, to descend from the sublime to the ridiculous, one Jewish Rabbi had a ludicrous notion that the ‘*mark of Cain*’ was a *horn*, which God caused to grow out of his forehead! Probably some folk were gullible enough to believe it!

The word ‘mark’.

The problem is that word ‘*mark*’, and, if we discover what the original word means, we may reach a clearer understanding of what happened to Cain.

The Hebrew word is the word ‘*oth*’. It occurs 79 times in the Old Testament and is mostly rendered ‘*sign*’. But, 14 times it is translated ‘*token*’, and, significantly I think, only once does it appear as ‘*mark*’, and this one time occurs here, in Gen. 4:15.

The Differing Versions.

You can understand, then, why the various English translations differ as widely as they do.

- The ‘Authorized Version’ says that ‘*YHVH, set a mark upon Cain*’, and this is the translation followed by a fairly large number of versions.

- For example, 'The Living Bible', tell us that God, 'put an identifying mark on Cain'.
- However, both the 'English Revised Version' and the 'American Standard Version' say that God 'appointed a sign for Cain', whilst the 'Revised Standard Version' of 1884, for some strange reason reverts to the rendering of the Authorised Version of 1611!
- 'Ellicott's Commentary' on Genesis, dismisses this view with the words, "This rendering suggests an utterly false idea'. Cain was not branded or marked in any way. What the Hebrew says is, 'And YHVH set – that is appointed - unto Cain a sign'".
- The Greek translation also, says that He 'gave to Cain a mark'. Notice; God did not 'put a mark on Cain', but 'gave to him a mark.'
- 'Young's Version' says that God 'set a token to Cain'.

The literal meaning of these phrases is that, to confirm a promise, God gave to Cain a sign, token or pledge, that no-one who met him would harm him.

A Similar Grammatical Construction.

The language is similar to that used in Gen. 9, where we read that God promised Noah that He would never again destroy mankind by a flood. As a permanent reminder of this promise God gave a token – a sign. **"I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth"** (Gen.9:8-17, R.S.V.) In this passage the word 'sign' occurs three times.

The Sign of a Divine Promise.

We see, then, that the 'sign' which God gave to Noah served as a both a reminder and a confirmation of a promise made by God. In a similar fashion, the 'sign', or 'token', that was given to Cain, was intended to assure him of the faithfulness of God's gracious promise of safety. What that token was can only be a matter for speculation. We cannot know, because we are not told. What we can know with certainty is that it was a sign given to Cain and not a 'mark' on him.

I stress this fact. It was a sign or token, given to Cain and to no-one else. There is nothing in the chapter that suggests that anyone else even knew about this 'sign'. It was an act of God's compassion shown to a man who was obviously suffering the fear and anguish of a tortured conscience. Bear in mind that, in those days, Cain had little understanding of the truth of the omnipresence of God and therefore he was afraid that, being driven 'from the presence of God', that is, away from Eden, the place with which he associated God, he would be outside the protection of God. And therefore he felt very vulnerable – exposed to danger from any who might want to avenge the death of Abel.

If God had placed on Cain a physical mark that identified him as the murderer of his brother, it is reasonable to suppose that, instead of protecting him, it would have placed him in greater danger. But God acted in mercy, not in judgment, in giving him this assurance, and was granting him the opportunity to repent. We may learn that even in Genesis there are glimmers of the grace and tenderness of God that was later to emerge fully in the Gospel.

Whether Cain later gave evidence of repentance we are not told, and therefore we cannot know. Sadly, we do know, however, that, along with those of his parents, Adam and Eve, his name is absent from the list of those who, in Hebrews chapter 11, are honoured because they lived 'by faith'.

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God's Glorious Gracious Gifts

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Towards spiritual maturity

Writing to the saints in Ephesus Paul makes a most significant statement about the growth to spiritual maturity of the corporate body of the Christ, the Church, and the individual follower of Jesus. The Church which was bought with His shed blood, and he (Jesus) was **"designated Son of God according to the Spirit of Holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus the CHRIST our Lord."**

Ephesians 4:11 – 13 states, **"And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of the Christ."**

Note the use of the preposition 'FOR'. FOR (Gk pros) literally means that these gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, ordained in the redemptive plan, and in the wisdom of God before the world's foundation, were given 'FOR THE PURPOSE OF'. That purpose is clearly stated as 'equipping the saints' or as in some translations to 'perfect' (Gk. Katartisis) the saints; Paul prays that this perfection should become the lot of the saints in Corinth. At the end of the most sublime statement about human behaviour Jesus says, and I like to think it is in an exultant, stentorian manner, so that the whole world may hear, **"Be perfect (i.e. complete, mature) therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect."**

A journey to perfection

We are here treading the realm of sanctification, begun when the spirit is regenerate by the belief in, and obedience toward, Jesus and continuing through a life committed to holiness, righteousness and knowledge. The word 'perfect' (Gk. Teleios) has to do with arriving at a destination, to be finished or complete. In the first century A.D., God gave those glorious gifts out of his bountiful grace so that this journey could be experienced by those who love the Lord. These divine qualities are gifted to believers: **"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us, to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature."**

The work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in the young, fragile church in Jerusalem continued the redemptive scheme which had seen **"this Jesus, delivered up ACCORDING TO THE DEFINITE PLAN AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD,"** who was crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. **"But God, raised Him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it."**

Paul informs believers in Rome that through Jesus he has received grace and his apostleship. The purpose of this received grace and office is to bring about 'the obedience of faith' for the sake of His authority (His Name) among all nations. This is the self same message that Paul sought to deliver to the Ephesian church. Precisely the purpose of these early officers was so that the saints were perfected, "For the work of the ministry" and "for the building of the Body of the Christ". The preposition 'FOR' is used twice in the preceding quotation and the Greek is 'eis' not 'pros'. This denotes a shift of emphasis; the officer gifts were given 'for the purpose of' providing a sign-posted pathway towards maturity or completeness (the Scriptures use the word perfection).

The saints were therefore 'equipped' with 'a view to' (Gk. eis):

1. doing the work of the ministry; this is sanctification in operation at all levels of experience
2. building up the Body of the Christ i.e. the establishment of a holy, sanctified, righteous and knowledgeable community of saints at local, national and international levels. We have been gifted a most wonderful vehicle to experience this sanctifying journey while we dwell in an 'alien land' - and that is the fellowship of the saints.

The two activities, i.e. the work of the ministry and the edification of the Church, have specific objectives in view. In general the objective is to promote the spiritual growth and development of believers. This is a process demanding patience and a commitment to hard work on the basis of an acquired knowledge of the Word of Truth. This high ethical aim is defined in various ways in the scripture:

- **"Put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator..."**
- **"Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."**

Looking to Jesus

Ephesians 4:13-17 provides a precise and specific statement about the process of moral and spiritual maturation of the individual follower of the Christ. The nub of the sanctifying process is the Christ, Himself. Jesus of Nazareth is the standard in His morality and spirituality. The measure for which we strive is to the Christ, growing in spiritual maturity becoming like Him, advancing in piety and knowledge. This centrality of Jesus in all matters relating to the redemptive purpose of God is emphasised significantly in 1 Timothy 3:16, **"Great indeed, we confess is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."**

This type of MYSTERY is a secret hitherto hidden or obscured truth until the time to reveal it was ripe. Many mysteries, formerly covert, have now been revealed by God for all to understand. The word mystery is applied to the incarnation, the murder of the Christ, the composition of the New Testament Church, i.e. an amalgam of Jew and Gentile and the wisdom of God is referred to as a mystery.

The phrase from 1Timothy 3:16, 'the mystery of our religion', refers to a secret now revealed. A correct interpretation of the phrase would be 'the revealed secret of our piety'. The revealed secret that produces piety is made clear in the remainder of the verse. The revelation is, in fact, Jesus of Nazareth Himself. This is the very message that the 'officers' referred to in Ephesians 4 preached from the Day of Pentecost onward; the message that was carried to the 'furthest parts' after Stephen was murdered and the saving message so clearly apparent in the printed Word of God.

Building the Body of Christ

In Ephesians 4 the offices of the Church which are listed are referred to as gifts of the Christ; the same in 1 Cor. 12:28 are said to be the gifts of God while earlier 1 Cor. 12 Paul intimates that the Holy Spirit dispenses special gifts. The fullness of the Godhead is thus involved in the love story of the ages and the rescue mission of all time. In the beginning of the Church, when the 'body of the Christ' was at its most fragile in the hostile environment of the city of David, God calls men to specific offices in His redemptive administration. Not only are these offices specific in their remit but divine gifts or endowments are given to these officers to make their work effective in "equipping the saints" with a view to the saints "doing the work of the ministry" and with a view to "building up the body of the Christ". There is an end product of completeness, perfection or maturity in this work:

1. the attainment of the unity of the faith;
2. an understanding of the Son of God;
3. the attainment of mature manhood, which is a measure of the fullness of the Christ;
4. an ability to cope with the deceit and cunning craftiness of those who pervert the truth and the gospel of the Christ; and to behave as mature adults rather than impressionable children;
5. to speak the truth on a basis of love, as shown by Jesus;
6. to grow up into the Christ. to become like Him in an ethical sense;
7. to play our part, however minor, in the body of the Christ, the Church, so that every joint knits together harmoniously into the head, which is the Christ;
8. to upbuild, edify, the saints in love.

The issues and goals have not changed today. The gospel, the saving plan of God, is still what Paul received by revelation and then gave to the Corinthians: **"Now I make known unto you brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance, what I also received, that the Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures, and that He appeared..."**

Christian make it your committed objective to become like the Christ; grasp the gift of God's holiness, righteousness and knowledge; seek the wisdom which is from above which is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. If you would follow Jesus as your Saviour, obey the gospel as preached by the early specific officers of the first century: "AND PETER SAID...REPENT AND BE IMMERSSED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS, THE CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT."

Uncapping our Bibles

A lesson in observation

Una Birch, Morley

I am a birdwatcher and gain immense enjoyment out of it. On my kitchen ledge I keep one small pair of binoculars, another pair is kept in my car, and my more powerful ones go with me whenever I go out bird-watching.

To maintain them in pristine condition I used to keep them in their bag with the caps on the lenses, Unfortunately when I was walking along the canal or through the woods I would see a movement in the distance but by the time I had undone the zip and taken off the lens covers, whatever it was had flown.

Now I am always prepared and no longer bother too much about first-class condition. Birds, especially the rarer ones, are too good to miss. It is hard to describe the pleasure of using binoculars; admiring red kites in flight; the courtship dance of the Great Crested Grebes; puffins and razorbills on the cliffs.



Some birds are very much alike. Take the humble sparrow for instance. An amateur on seeing one might say, 'Oh, its only a small sparrow, nothing special!' I am still an amateur but I have learned that there are three types of sparrow – the tree sparrow, the house sparrow and the dunnock, sometimes known as the hedge sparrow – and each is delicately different. And if you want to identify correctly, the zoom lens comes into it's own. Zooming in on a tree sparrow for example, the markings become clearer and you can see what makes it distinct from the other sparrows.

I would hope that most people have a Bible somewhere in their home. Sadly many of them will be in the same perfect condition as when they were sold, even to the extent of still being in the box. I remember once attending a meeting at which the local Vicar was the speaker. A competition connected to the subject of the evening was arranged and on this occasion it was a Religious Book. I, Like most other attendees, took a Bible. Mine sat on the display table with the rest, but I noticed that it received quite a few glances, mainly because it was not in the best condition compared to many of the others. In fact it was a bit tatty. It won first prize! Why? Because it was a bit tatty – a Bible that was used!

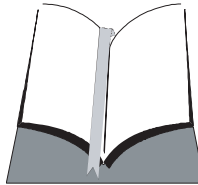
Most of the time when I am out bird watching it is clear who has just bought a new pair of binoculars. Regular users equipment is normally covered in stickers, has worn areas of plastic coating, deteriorating straps etc. I don't boast in my well-used binoculars, just as I don't boast in my well-used Bible, but I have noticed that questions are always addressed to eager users, because the questioner has confidence that the question will be answered by someone who knows their subject and is enthusiastic about it too.

I only know a little about birds, but the knowledge that I do have is the result of observation and learning and I am willing to share that knowledge. Equally when someone asks me a Biblical question, it is only if I have looked and learned that I can answer. My aim is to know more. Uncapping our Bibles is very important for Christians who wish to teach the gospel and impart the contentment of living God's way. Observation is negated if our Bibles are 'left in the box' and there is so much that the owner then misses out on. When we 'zoom in' we find interesting detail that maybe has been missed before.

Take Luke 1:21 for example. The girl's name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, **"Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you."** Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message and she wondered what his words meant. The angel said to her, **"Don't be afraid, Mary, God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord will make him a king as his ancestor David was and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end."** Yes, even in such statements it can be overlooked that many of the deep and immortal truths of the nature and work of Jesus are revealed – Son of the Most High God; he was to be made a king; and he would establish an eternal kingdom.

Many stories have a moral to them and the moral in this one for me is that in keeping binoculars covered, I miss many beautiful things. Just imagine missing a Golden Eagle in flight; a dolphin at sea; or a herd of deer on a distant mountainside. Equally if I keep my Bible covered I miss such gems as:

- The creative Power of God
- The Faithfulness of Ruth
- The Graciousness of Hannah
- The Wisdom of the Proverbs and so very much more.



- The Prophecies of Isaiah
- The Motivation of Haggai
- The Strategies of Joshua

We can also observe, study and learn from the actions and nature of Jesus himself. We can study his teaching, witness the lives that he touched in physical and spiritual ways, reflect on His tolerance, copy his thoughtfulness. His tenderness was displayed in the manner that he dealt compassionately but firmly with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3 ff). We can take joy and hope from his ultimate triumph and rejoice in the words, **"Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, He is not here, see the place where they laid Him."** (Mark 16:6) And as we learn more of Jesus through the word and grow closer to Him, we can, when doubts are done, exclaim with Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

My experience is that when people know you are a birdwatcher they will ask you questions about birds. When they know you are a Bible reader and student, they will ask Biblical questions. The moral is plain. Just as through observation of birds my knowledge has grown, so with the cover off our Bibles we can and should **observe and learn**. Then we are ready to answer for our faith.

As Paul wrote to Timothy, **"Timothy, do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."**

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

While thanking us for the medical aid his wife received a brother informed us of a sister suffering the effects of a snake bite. This is now affecting her eyes and she has been taken to hospital for treatment. He also describes another sister's ailment as stomach hernia and this requires an operation.

These are two of the many urgent cases to receive treatment through this Appeal and your donations are very much appreciated. We also express our sincere thanks for the thousand pounds received in February receipt number 208.

Church meetinghouses are a great help to congregations and it is hard to refuse help to build them but unfortunately, our funds are inadequate to supply this need. In remote villages buildings can be made with mud bricks but in towns approval will only be given for traditional brick or concrete block construction. Through faithful preaching and teaching new congregations continue to be established and grow and this increases the number required. Another such request has just been received from a town church, which is also reaching out to establish a church in a village.

As well as a twenty nine year old man, new converts among one congregation include two fetish priests aged seventy and fifty nine, as well as two ladies from the same ancestral religion. All have disposed of their idols.

Those wishing to help please make cheques payable to: **Dennyloanhead**

Church of Christ Ghana Fund and send to the treasurer,
Mrs Janet McDonald,
12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk,
Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB.
Tel: 01324 562480

Coming Events

Peterhead, Scotland Gospel Mission

**Wednesday 22nd June –
Sunday 26th June.**

Weekday meetings at 7.00 pm
Saturday meeting at 6.00 pm.

Speaker: Mike Ireland

A warm welcome awaits all.

Peterhead Annual Social

**Saturday 1st and
Sunday 2nd October 2005.**

Saturday

3.00pm Start followed by refreshments
6.00pm Evening Service

Sunday

10.00 am Bible Class
11.00 am Breaking of Bread
6.00 pm Gospel meeting

Speakers: Frank Worgan (Corby)
and Mitch Vick (Stirling)

A warm welcome awaits all.

Stretford, Manchester

The Church meeting in Stretford invites you to 3 special Saturday Meetings in the Green Hut, 538 Kings Road, Stretford, Manchester.

Each meeting at 7.00pm.

The talks will be followed by light refreshments and discussion.

September 17th –

Speaker: Robert Marsden, Wigan

October 22nd –

Speaker: John Morgan, Hindley.

November 19th –

Speaker: Mark Hill, Loughborough.

Longshoot, Wigan

Fellowship Day:

Saturday, September 24th 2005

A day of fellowship, lessons and fun
from 10.30 am

Speaker: David Walker (Northampton)

Newtongrange, Scotland

The Annual Social is to be held on
Saturday 8th October 2005
commencing at 1.00 pm.

Speaker: John Kneller, Tranent.

*We will extend a warm welcome
to all who attend.*

WHERE SHALL I WORK TODAY?

"Master, where shall I work today?"
And my love flowed warm and free
Then He pointed out a tiny plot,
And He said "Work there for me."

But I answered quickly.

"Oh, no, not there!

Not anyone could see,

No matter how well my task is done -
Not that small place for me!"

And His voice, when He spoke,
it was not stern,

But He answered me tenderly,

"Disciple, search that heart of thine
Are you working for them or for me?
Nazareth was just a little place,
And so was Galilee."

Harris & Irving Reminder.

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