

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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DON'T BLAME GOD

We seem increasingly to live in a culture in which it is important to be able to apportion blame particularly for the less welcome events that happen whether those events are individual, local, national or international. (Should we be surprised that there isn't the same culture of praise for the pleasurable occurrences?) There's hardly such a thing as an accident anymore - someone has to be at fault. Just in the last few days it has been reported that many organisations are struggling to cope with 300% or more increases in the cost of public liability insurance because people are so keen to make personal injury claims. It's reported that some parents have been known to make claims against pre-school nurseries when children have grazed a knee at the nursery.

Now I'm all for making the places that we enter, and the activities that we engage in, as safe as possible. Nurseries ought to be safe and secure places for parents to leave their children. Employees should be able to go to work every day secure in the knowledge that the employer takes seriously a legal duty to provide a safe and healthy working environment. We should be able to travel on planes confident that air traffic control is professionally managed and on railways sure that the signals and points on the rail system are well maintained. And when all of that has been done, accidents happen. Children fall over and graze knees and elbows (or worse); mechanical failure occurs in jet engines with horrific consequences; human error intervenes and people are injured or killed. An inquiry is held, report produced and recommendations made "to ensure that such an event never happens again". Then it does. And someone has to be blamed.

WHAT IS GOD DOING?

When high profile catastrophic events occur, the questions, especially it seems from those without a faith, become quite familiar. "What is God doing whilst millions of children are starving in Africa?" "Why does God not deal with an ostensibly 'religious' conflict in the Middle East?" Over the last several days our newspapers and television have been filled with the terrible circumstances of the murder of two 10-year-old girls in Cambridgeshire. As this article is written the anniversary of September 11th is upon us. And people might legitimately ask "Where was God whilst these awful events were

unfolding?" I recently noted down the contents of a letter that was printed in a national newspaper because it seemed to sum up very adequately the attitude that many people have to terrible events. The correspondent wrote, **"If there is a God He shouldn't allow the United States to drop daisy-cutters (a type of bomb - Editor's note) on innocent Iraqi women and children."** The context of the letter didn't allow for any interpretation of that statement other than its face value. So there we have it. If there is a conflict with Iraq, and people are injured or killed, it will have nothing to do with decisions taken by President Bush or Prime Minister Blair, or the intransigence of the Iraqi leader, it will all be God's fault for allowing it to happen (even though it's fair to assume that the writer of that particular letter does not believe in God). And there is the ongoing conundrum that people who don't believe in God think that the God they don't believe in should intervene to stop all nasty things that happen in the world. I simply don't ever recall seeing a letter written to the press that put the blame where it really belongs and calls on Satan to stop being an evil force in the world.

Of course, we Christians are, quite naturally, biased in favour of God. We don't contemplate the hand of God in natural or man-made disasters, and even though we believe that God could intervene to control world events, to do so would completely undermine His plan for mankind. It's the Big Picture of God's eternal purpose that needs to be understood but which the vast majority of people don't come close to recognising. If God were to intervene to orchestrate events by stopping people from undertaking acts of terrorism, or murdering young children or starting wars then we all become nothing more than God's puppets. He pulls the strings and we dance to His tune whether we like it or not. Down that route there is no responsibility or accountability for our own actions and so we become automatons.

RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

From the very earliest point in His relationship with human creation and forever since then God has offered mankind choices and required men and women to take responsibility for their actions. And in setting out the choices God always has been careful to be very clear about the consequences of the choices that are made. **"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die."** Gen. 2:16,17. The choices open to the children of Israel, and what they could expect as a result, were very clearly set out before them on many occasions. Joshua warned them that they couldn't serve God and idols and if they were to serve other gods, then they had better decide which one. One of the more daunting experiences (and doubtless one of the most humbling in the extreme) associated with Christ's second coming will be the requirement laid upon us all of having to account to Him for our actions and stewardship. **"So each of us shall give account of himself to God"** Rom. 14:12. Perhaps we can imagine in our mind's eye the look of complete disdain on God's face as we begin to splutter, "But it wasn't my fault God, you see . . ."

The point that many people miss is that although the creation is God's, **(The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers. Psalm24:1)**

through the agency of His Son, God has nevertheless given a remarkable degree of autonomy to mankind to be steward of that creation. Man was made in the image of God and given dominion over God's creation, (Genesis 1:26-30). After God had formed the animals and the birds, Genesis 2:19 records that **"the Lord God . . . brought them (animals and birds) to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was to be its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air and to every beast of the field."** The Psalms confirm the status of man as God's agent on earth. Psalm 115:16 **"The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men."** And in Psalm 8:5-8, Speaking of man, the Psalmist says **"Yet thou hast made Him little less than God, and dost crown Him with glory and honour. Thou hast given Him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under His feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea."**

God in His infinite wisdom, and as an essential part of His plan of salvation, has given mankind, individually and corporately, responsibility for his actions and rendered him accountable for them. If men and women choose to do evil, then evil will be done. It is irrational of people, having a faith or no faith, to believe that God will stay the hand of the murderer or the terrorist or the political leader who chooses the path of conflict. God is not to blame for the millions who are starving in Africa and nor will He be responsible for injury or death that arises if armed conflict with Iraq does take place as the correspondent mentioned above implies. There is no more classical example of the self-interest and greed which dominates man's actions, all of them freely made decisions, which cause so many of the world's problems (and for which God gets blamed in the eyes of many) than the recent Earth Summit in Johannesburg. Even faced with the potentially catastrophic result of our rapacious use of the resources over which God has given us dominion, it seems that the will to find solutions for the common good, eludes us.

GOD'S ETERNAL PROVISION

Many will continue to ask questions and make statements about God's role in the affairs of the world. They will find our God an apparently easy target and one senses that with a degree of mockery will say - "If there is a God why doesn't He do something about all the problems that are in the world?" It is reminiscent of the attitude of the soldiers as they watched Jesus on the cross. **"The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up and offering Him vinegar and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews save yourself."** Well, of course, the glorious reality is that God has done something about it all. At the very moment that the soldiers mocked, Jesus was completing His work of atonement. Even as the scribes and elders continued to mock His claims to be the Son of God, Jesus completed the will of His Father with the most loving act ever known to humankind. Many will continue to speculate about and anticipate what God will do and will completely overlook what He has already done. There are many remarkable passages of Scripture and one that must be a constant source of inspiration is contained in the first chapter of Ephesians. **"In Him (Jesus) we have redemption through His**

blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us. For He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph. 1:7-10).

There are some truly heart-breaking events that occur in the lives of individuals, families and nations around the world, many unseen and unpublicised. It is perhaps natural that in those circumstances there is a human need to blame someone or something; to flail out in anger or deep sadness for the cause of distress and what better a target than the Almighty God. Who else but God should be able to prevent or fix the problem. But of course, the glorious truth is that God has fixed the problem. Not in a way that many would recognise, by constantly intervening in the physical affairs of men and women (and even if He did He wouldn't get the credit), but by the once-for-all purchase of our redemption through the life, death and resurrection of His Son. If only the world could learn to see God not as a scapegoat (He's already performed that role once), not as the person to be blamed for the world's wrongs, not even as a disinterested onlooker as events unfold, but as the one who loves His creation so much that no sacrifice was too great for Him to provide for our eternal salvation.

EDITOR

I assume the editorship of the SS with a mixture of keen anticipation (and some trepidation). The only motivation is to serve the Lord, and you the magazine readers, by continuing to produce a Bible-based, and spiritually uplifting, teaching magazines. A 3-year bound volume is due to be produced at the end of this year so any changes to the format of the magazine will be held over until January 2003's edition. Articles, information, news are always needed so please keep them coming.

I would like to add my thanks to James for his tremendous work over so many years and the helpful and efficient manner in which he has conducted the handover. Thanks also to John Kneller for his (continuing) help and advice.

ROBERT

THANKS TO JAMES GARDINER

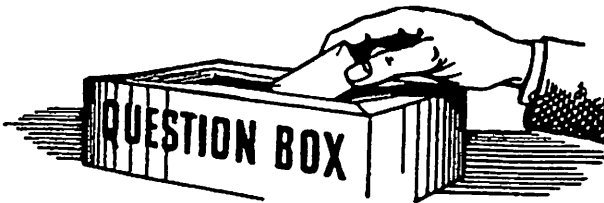
James indicated his desire to step down as Editor of the Scripture Standard earlier this year. Since then we have been making arrangements with Robert Marsden to continue as Editor of the magazine. These arrangements are now complete and we are pleased to welcome Robert 'on board'.

James' literary association with the Scripture Standard began in May 1967 when he ran the 'Question Box' feature. This has always been a popular item with our readers and as question master he demonstrated a sound knowledge of the Scriptures and a flair for writing in a readable style. When Carlton Melling, the previous Editor, resigned through ill health at the beginning of 1974 James took up the post of Editor. For almost

29 years he has produced the editorial lead article and organised the remainder of the contents for each issue. That is without doubt a very demanding and draining task and James has completed it without fuss month after month. His editorials have been interesting, thought provoking, often topical and always Bible centred. He has guided the magazine through changing and turbulent times with the objective of following where the Scriptures lead.

James is rather self-effacing and sometimes dismissive about his own contribution but his articles speak for themselves. It has been a pleasure to be associated with him in this work and it is as I consider his substantial contribution over so many years that I would like to record my own appreciation for his long service. I believe I also speak for all our readers in expressing our sincere thanks to James. As Treasurer I do receive many letters each year which express thanks for the work put into producing the SS and for James' contribution in particular. I would therefore on their behalf like to assure him of his readers' appreciation and wish him a very happy and pleasant retirement.

JOHN KNELLER



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

Question- *"Please explain what Peter meant when he spoke about 'the gift of the Holy Spirit', in Acts 2:38".*

The verse referred to is unquestionably one with which every member in the Church of Christ is familiar, having frequently heard it quoted when the Gospel has been preached.

It is, however, a pity that in our anxiety to convince people of their need to obey the Gospel by being baptised in obedience to the Lord's command (Matt. 28:18-20), very often only the first part of the verse is emphasised; *'be baptised for the remission of your sins'*, whilst the latter part; *'and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'*, is hurried over, with sometimes scarcely a mention.

The consequence has been that many members of the Church are not as familiar as they ought to be with what the New Testament teaches concerning the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, and people in other religious bodies have even been known to accuse us of not really believing in the Holy Spirit.

There are, also, other circumstances that have a bearing on this situation.

False teaching about the Spirit

In 1856, William Arthur wrote a book entitled 'The Tongue of Fire' which, if you will excuse the expression, 're-ignited' interest in the doctrine of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. Many religious bodies suddenly rediscovered such scriptural

expressions as, 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit', 'indwelling of the Spirit', 'filled with the Spirit', 'gifts of the Spirit', etc.

Unfortunately, however, the churches which like to be known as 'Evangelical', along with the so-called 'Charismatic' groups which quickly emerged in the early 1900's, used - (and continue to use) - these scriptural terms to propagate teaching about the Holy Spirit that is far from scriptural, and this has had the effect of causing preachers and teachers to appear reluctant to deal with the subject, lest they be misunderstood and are accused of holding suspect views, or even of leaning towards the 'Charismatic' movement.

The Godhead

Again, the matter has not been helped by the way in which the Holy Spirit is described by those churches that are usually regarded as 'orthodox' or 'traditional' in their views, because they often refer to Him as '*the Third Person in the Godhead*', implying that the Father is the First Person, the Son is the Second Person, whilst the Holy Spirit is Number Three in the order.

We must understand that the Holy Spirit should never be regarded as 'third' in importance or rank, nor should He be thought of as being in any way inferior in nature to either the Father or the Son. The only way in which He might reasonably be described as the 'Third' Person in the Godhead, is in relation to the time of His coming and the commencement of His personal ministry.

The Age of the Spirit's Ministry

In John 14:15-16, having in mind His own imminent return to the Father after the fulfilment of His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus spoke to His followers about the coming of the Holy Spirit. He promised His followers, "*I will pray the Father and He will send you another Comforter*". The word that is used - '*parakletos*' - translated '*Comforter*' in the 'A.V.' and the 'R.V.' describes '*one called alongside to help*'.

Furthermore, Jesus promised that when the Spirit of Truth came, He would abide with believers 'for ever'. The word '*meno*' - '*abide*', means '*remain permanently*'.

He also explained, in John 16:7-15, that, the Holy Spirit's ministry would be to '*convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment*'.

That ministry commenced on the day of Pentecost, as Acts ch.1 reveals. The Holy Spirit came, as the Lord had promised. And the Holy Spirit has never left! Today we see the ridiculous sight of 'Pentecostal' congregations earnestly praying for someone to come who has never gone away! What is more, He will not leave until the close of the Christian Age, when the Lord Himself returns.

So, we see, then, that the plan of salvation which originated in the mind of the Father, was implemented and fully realised in the life, death and resurrection of the Son, and today it continues to be made effective by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the Good News.

That gospel was first presented in its fullness by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and it was on that day that he announced that those who believe the message, repented and

were baptised, would receive not only the forgiveness of their sins, but also the gift of the Holy Spirit.

'Gift' - not 'gifts'

As I have already suggested, it is this second promise which many Christians find difficult to understand.

Let us notice, therefore, that Peter spoke of the 'gift' - not 'gifts' - of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 2:38 the word 'gift' is the word '*dorea*', which is accurately defined as '*free gift*'. One translation renders it rather expressively as, '*the plus*' of the Holy Spirit. The word describes the Holy Spirit Himself as the *extra* gift, provided by God, for those who obey the Gospel.

Thus, Acts 2:38 does not refer to some sort of miraculous or spiritual gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit. It tells us that the Holy Spirit *Himself* is the Heavenly Father's *own* gift to His obedient people; given to enable them to live a successful and satisfied Christian life.

The 'Gifts' - another subject

When, later, Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church about '*spiritual gifts*', he was dealing with a very different subject.

In 1st Corinthians chapters 12 to 14, the *nine* gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit are described as '*charisma*', or '*grace gifts*', and it is important to distinguish between the Holy Spirit as God's own gift, and the miraculous gifts which, in the New Testament age, the Spirit Himself bestowed. Please notice that:-

1. The '*charismata*' were various miraculous abilities or endowments, which the Holy Spirit Himself gave to individual believers, according to His own, will (1st Cor. 12:11).
2. Believers did not all receive the same gifts (ch. 12:29-30).
3. Nor were these gifts intended to last (1st Cor. 13:8).

1. In contrast, the '*gift of the Holy Spirit*' is the gift of God Himself, offered to every obedient believer (Acts 5:32).
2. All are offered the same gift - the indwelling presence of His Spirit (1st Cor. 6:19. Rom. 8:9).
3. And, along with salvation, the gift of the Spirit's presence, will continue to be offered until the end of the Christian Age.

The Purpose of the Gift

What will this 'gift' do for us? This is a question worthy of a separate study, but think about just two aspects of His ministry.

a) The Holy Spirit is described as the 'Comforter'. That English word comes from the Latin, '*con forts*', which means, '*with strength*'. Thus, the Holy Spirit strengthens us. We need to lean on Him.

b) Romans 8:26-27 tells us that the Holy Spirit helps us when we pray, taking our faltering, stumbling petitions and presenting them to the Father, as our intercessor. We should make use of His intercession.

If you have obeyed the Gospel and accepted God's gift of forgiveness, the question is, *have you also accepted His 'extra' gift?*

THE BIBLE

The Bible deals with authentic history. There are many important historical figures mentioned in it, such as, the Queen of Sheba, Tiglath-pileser III, Shishak or Pharaoh Seshonq I, Ashurbanipal, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Darius I, Artaxerxes I, Cyrus the Great, Hiram, Caesar Augustus, Tiberius Caesar, Herod the Great, Pontius Pilatus, Antonius Felix, Porcius Festus, Gamaliel, Lucius Junius Annaeus Gallio, and many more.

Many famous cities are featured in the Bible. For example, Sodom, Gomorrah, Ur, Jericho, Nineveh, Babylon, Jerusalem, Damascus, Tyre, Sidon, Persepolis, Memphis, Dyrion Antioch, Alexandria, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome. There are countless other villages, towns and cities to study.

We should also take time to study up on such countries as Canaan, Egypt, Sumeria, Assyria, Babylonia, Phoenicia, Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, Arabia, Syria, Persia, Greece and Italy. There is a lot in each of these!

The Bible is a book of contrasts. We have God and Satan; good and evil; right and wrong; light and darkness; life and death; salvation and condemnation; truth and falsehood, reward and punishment; natural and spiritual; Time and eternity; history and prophecy; mystery and revelation; the Divine and the human; heaven and earth; heaven and hell; shadows and realities; righteousness and wickedness; the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh; saints and sinners; sheep and goats; beggars and kings; slavery and liberty; law and grace; faith and unbelief; unity and diversity; strength and weakness; prosperity and poverty; rich and poor; young and old; wisdom and folly; old and new; simplicity and profundity; knowledge and ignorance; do's and don'ts; pride and humility; hunger and thirst; labour and rest; lions and lambs; heroes and villains; peace and war; day and night; victory and defeat; many and few; Jews and Gentiles; hope and despair; joy and sadness; giving and taking; love and hatred; marriage and divorce; comings and goings; ups and downs; etc. I could go on and on.

Many occupations feature in the Bible: shepherds, herdsmen, farmers, builders, metal-workers, cooks, bakers, butlers, fishermen, soldiers, sailors, clothiers, tanners, lawyers, doctors, bankers, carpenters, potters, inn-keepers, shop-keepers, temple-keepers, tent-keepers, vine-growers, animal-breeders, olive-growers, oil producers, weavers, dyers, silver-smiths, stonemasons, foresters, fullers, spinners, musicians, artists, perfumiers, goldsmiths, glass-makers, embroiderers, politicians, civil servants, administrators, wine-producers, etc.

The Bible promotes love, goodness, righteousness, meekness, godliness, faithfulness, kindness, patience, joy, gentleness, thankfulness, virtuousness, justice, temperance, peace, graciousness, forgiveness, mercy, goodwill, holiness, steadfastness,

truthfulness, generosity, decency, reverence, compassion, liberality, obedience, cleanliness, discipline, humility, hospitality, sobriety, modesty, tolerance, reconciliation, good citizenship, sincerity, reliability, etc. It opposes sin, evil, envy, jealousy, malice, pride, greed, wrath, theft, hatred, feuding, idolatry, deceit, blood-letting, murder, drunkenness, debauchery, sexual vice, lust, incest, indecency, adultery, selfishness, strife, bitterness, slander, cursing, sedition, abuse, bigotry, division, dishonesty, heresy, hypocrisy, ingratitude, injustice, rebellion, apathy, homosexuality, lesbianism, violence, impurity, witchcraft, spiritualism, lying, intolerance, negligence, corruption, covetousness, betrayal, revelry, backsliding, sedition, etc,

There are three ages in the Bible: the Patriarchal age (or the Starlight age); the Mosaic age (or the Moonlight age); and the Gospel age (or the Sunlight age). The Bible is also a book of covenants. It reveals the covenant with Noah; the covenant with Abraham; the first or old covenant; and the new covenant. A study of the covenants is vitally important to all students of God's revelation because God has chosen to relate to mankind on the basis of covenants. All of the covenants with man have been designed to achieve the good of humanity. God has clearly revealed Himself as a covenant-making God. A better understanding of the covenants will lead to a better understanding of God's mind and will. For example, it is important to realise that the design of the Jewish religion and the design of the Christian are not the same. As Alexander Campbell has pointed out: "The former looked exclusively to this present world; the latter primarily, and almost exclusively, looks to the next".

A lot of Christians read and study the New Testament Scriptures to the exclusion of the Old Testament books, This is a great mistake. The former are of equal importance. The greater the knowledge of the 39 books of the OT, the better the understanding there will be of the 25 books of the NT. After all, there are 260 direct quotations of the OT in the NT. I appreciate that the OT is three times larger than the NT, but size should not discourage us. Paul wrote: "For whatsoever things are written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4). Also, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). (Both verses, of course, should read within their context.) The complete revelation of God consists of all 66 books. Why neglect 39 of them?

There are other books, over and above the Bible, which many claim are additional revelations from God. For example, there are the books collectively known as the Apocrypha; the Koran and the Book of Mormon. I have read all of them. The *Apocrypha* consists of 15 books and most of them were written in Judaism's post-biblical period. Let me point out that Jesus and the New Testament writers never once quoted the Apocrypha although there are hundreds of quotes and references to almost all of the canonical books of the OT. Philo never quoted from the Apocrypha as inspired and the same goes for Josephus. Many of the great Fathers of the early Church spoke out against the Apocrypha, for example, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem and Athanasius. Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, rejected the Apocrypha as part of the canon. Years later, so did Luther and the Reformers.

The *Koran* is the holy book of Islam, regarded by Muslims as the true word of God that was revealed to the prophet Muhammad and collected in book form after his death. Its length is comparable with the New Testament. Its main division is into 114 chapters,

called Surahs, of very unequal length. The Surahs deal generally with the subjects of God, human destiny, and ethical and ritual guidance. Each Surah has a title, for example, *The Bee, The Cow, The Poets*. The Koran is an Arabic book and it is regarded as unfitting to translate it. However, it has been translated into most European languages.

The Book of Mormon, the Mormons claim, relates the history of a group of Hebrews who migrated from Jerusalem to America about 600 BC, led by a prophet, Lehi. They multiplied and eventually split into two groups. One group, the Lamenites, forgot their beliefs, became savages, and were the ancestors of the American Indians. The other group, the Nephites, developed culturally and built great cities, but were eventually destroyed by the Lamenites about 400 AD. Before this occurred, however, Jesus had appeared and taught the Nephites (after His ascension). The history and teachings were abridged and written on gold plates by the prophet Mormon. His son, Moroni, made additions and buried the plates in the ground where they remained about 1400 years, until Moroni, a resurrected being or angel, delivered them to Joseph Smith. Subsequently, they disappeared. I have a photo reprint of the original Book of Mormon (1830 edition). There have been at least 3913 changes made from the time it was first published. Alexander Campbell, whose friend Sidney Rigdon left to become an early leader in the Mormon movement, once said this of Mormonism: "Every person who receives the book of Mormon is an apostate from all that we ever professed."

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

THE GOOSE STORY

Next Autumn, when you see geese heading south for the winter, flying in V formation, you might consider what science has discovered as to why they fly that way.

As each bird flaps its wings, it creates a uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in V formation the whole flock has at least 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own. People who share a common direction and a sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and easily because they are travelling on the thrust of one another.

When a goose falls out of formation it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird on front. If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation with those who are headed the same way we are.

When the head goose gets tired it rotates back in the wing and another goose flies point. It is sensible to take turns doing the demanding jobs - with people or with geese flying south. Geese honk from behind to encourage those in front to keep up their speed.

Finally, and this is important, when a goose gets sick or is wounded by gun shots and falls out of formation, two other geese will fall out with that goose and follow it down to lend help and protection. They stay with the fallen goose until it is able to fly or dies and only then do they launch out on their own or with another formation to

catch up with their flock. If we have the sense of a goose, we will stand by each other like that.

ANGELES ARIEN

“TODAY, thou wilt be with me in paradise”

(Alan Ashurst, Stretford)

The "Jehovah's Witnesses" assert that when a person dies, all that is left of them is their corpse and that at the resurrection a fresh body is made similar to the one that died, and that this new body is given the personality of the person who died.

During His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus said to the thief on the cross next to Him, "Verily I say unto thee, **today** thou wilt be with Me in paradise." (Luke 23:43). Jehovah's Witnesses say that this passage is properly rendered, "Verily I say to thee today, thou wilt be with Me in paradise" with the comma placed after the word today. The obvious question is why would the Lord state the obvious saying "I say to thee **today**". What other day would He be saying this? Those who hold to this rendering of this passage argue that it was for emphasis, like a person might say "I am telling you **now**". Is this how we should understand this statement of Jesus?

The Greek word for today is 'saymeron.' Sometimes it is translated "this day". It actually occurs 40 times in the New Testament and in none of the other 39 occurrences it is used, by the speaker, to emphasise the fact the He is speaking "this day" or "today". When the Lord wanted to emphasise the importance of what He was saying He used the word "verily" (also translated 'amen' and 'truly'). For extra emphasis He would repeat it as in "Verily, Verily I say unto you".

In another place there is a similar sentence construction to that in Luke 23:43. In Hebrews 3:7 the writer states ". . . as the Holy Spirit saith, **today** if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. . . ." it would make a nonsense of that statement to translate it ". . . as the Holy Spirit saith today, if you will hear His voice harden not your hearts . . ." Similarly, it seems nonsense to render Luke 23:43 as "Verily I say to thee today, thou wilt be with Me in Paradise".

The Lord Jesus was reassuring the repentant thief that they would both be in Paradise that very day. In the same way the faithful are assured that when they die they will be with the Lord Jesus (1 Thess. 4:14; Phil. 1:23). This is a far better hope than that of the Jehovah's Witnesses of being merely a rotting corpse in a grave. Let us rejoice in our sure hope in the Lord.

WALKING AND WAITING

The ingredient that is needed to effect a serene, or peaceful heart in this day and age, is a godly walk. We needs must be, walking the way of the Lord. To achieve this, the wonderful truths of the Bible must become **living realities**. Not stories. Not records, but living truths; we must let the Holy Spirit apply them.

We must submit to Him, because it is through the working of the Holy Spirit within, that creates the blessing of a peaceful heart.

To experience the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit (depicted in Rom. 8:16), one should experience a daily time of devotion and fellowship with other believers.

We need to encourage one-another.

We are under obligation, as Christians, to obey the laws that flow from God's holy nature.

We need to strive to do right.

We have the ingredients for a satisfying life.

We, knowing Christ as Saviour, have the joyous assurance that living is worth-while God is **willing and able** to keep us; It's a promise of God himself.

We need to take a positive attitude toward the gospel.

In following Christ, a peaceful heart and worth-while life will be found.

"Hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God to keep all His commandments, which I command thee this day: that which is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God." (Deut. 13:18).

Beloved, we must take care not to make a ritual of our worship. Hearken, listen, walk, follow, praise and worship these are part-and-parcel of the Christian's duty and joy.

It **should be** a joyous experience to praise and worship.

If we walk obediently, we will find heart and soul at peace with God and self: a wonderful blessing.

The way of the Lord is sure, Life - abundant in Christ, is assured to those that walk fully in the way of the Lord.

Psalms 19:7-9 reads:-

"The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, the commandment of the Lord is pure enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clear, enduring forever; the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether"

Need more be said...perfect...enlightening...enduring, is the word of God...beloved take time to be holy. It's for the best...

ANDREW P. SHARP,
Newtongrange.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nov. 3	Isaiah 49:1-12	Acts 13:42-52
Nov. 10	Genesis 8	Acts 14
Nov. 17	Amos 9	Acts 15:1-21
Nov. 24	Leviticus 3	Acts 15:22-35

GENTILE INTEREST - JEWISH ENVY

"And the next sabbath day came

almost the whole city together to hear the word of God" (13:44). These words were written of Pisidain Antioch. If only they were written today of all the towns and cities in the world! The world needs the gospel of Christ more than ever. The world needs to be saved.

Tragically, in Antioch, the Jews "were filled with envy" (45). They were envious over the number of people Paul and Barnabas had attracted. They, therefore, "spoke against those things

which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (45). Later they "stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts" (50). Clearly, Satan was at work here, doing all he could to prevent sinners being saved. How he hates the gospel! However, the message did get through to the Gentiles and many who heard the word of the Lord believed (48).

ICONIUM, LYSTRA, DERBE

We now read of events in the above cities, which were close to one another in the province of Galatia in Asia Minor. Iconium was, at one time, the chief city of Lycaonia. However, under Roman rule, it eventually found itself in the Roman province of Galatia. "Its fame and prestige grew greatly under Roman rule: Claudius honoured it with the title of Caludiconium, and under Hadrian it became a colony in an honorary sense (since no Italians were settled there). In NT times, then it maintained the policy of a Hellenistic city, the juridical powers of assembly being vested in two magistrates annually appointed" (New Bible Dictionary). Lystra was 18 miles from Iconium. It was a city singled out by Augustus as the site of one of a number of Roman colonies that were intended to consolidate the new province of Galatia. The NT does not disclose it as a colony. Derbe was 60 miles south-east of Lystra. The ancient site of Derbe was only identified by archaeologists in 1956. It was the most easterly place visited by Paul and Barnabas in South Galatia.

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas preached in the Jewish synagogue to great effect. Many Greeks also believed

(14:1). Miracles were performed by both the missionaries, which confirmed that the word delivered was the word of God (Mark 16:20). Persecution again rose and so they fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of the Lyconian region.

In Lystra, Paul; healed a crippled man, which led to the people worshipping Paul and Barnabas as gods. "They called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercury, because he was the chief speaker" (14:12 AV). Actually, Luke records their Greek names - Zeus and Hermes. Zeus was the chief god in the Greek pantheon; Hermes, son of Zeus by Maia, was the herald of the gods. The sight of preparations for pagan sacrifice horrified the missionaries and so they dissuaded the priest of Zeus and others from paying divine honours to "Men of like passions" (15a). They were messengers of the true and living God. The summary of their speech is a fascinating one because it shows how they addressed a pagan audience (15 - 17). Paul's speech in Athens (chapter 17) is in a similar vein. Paul was stoned and left for dead in Lystra (19). He later recalled this very incident in his second letter to the Corinthians (11:25). Verse 20, I believe, reveals a miracle.

In Derbe, they again preached the gospel and taught many people (21a). A church was founded there. We know this because Paul was to return to Derbe during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1). One of Paul's later companions, Gaius was from Derbe (Acts 20:4).

Paul and Barnabas then retraced their steps and, in doing so, strengthened the young churches they had planted. They did not hide the fact that tribulation would come the way of the disciples (22). They also ordained elders

in every church - important for their well-being. Their return to Syrian Antioch meant a rehearsal of all that God had done for them, especially in opening "the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (27).

THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

We read now of an event of the highest importance in the early Church - the meeting of the Council of Jerusalem to discuss circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses (15:5). We can see clearly from this event that the old religion still had a strong influence on many of the early saints, especially in Jerusalem. Even Peter was affected (Galatians 2:11-12). Barnabas too was inclined to follow Peter's example (Galatians 2:13). The answer to the problem was for Paul and Barnabas and others to go to Jerusalem to undertake full discussions with the apostles and the elders there (15:2). This they did.

Peter's comments were first recorded (7-11). He "spoke unambiguously in the interests of gospel liberty" (Bruce). Paul and Barnabas then informed everyone of the "miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (12). All eyes then fell upon James, The Lord's brother, for his response. In short, he supported Peter. Circumcision and the keeping of the law were not to be imposed upon Gentile believers. However, Gentiles were asked to respect Jewish scruples. They were to "abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled and from blood" (20). A letter to this effect was prepared for the Gentile churches (22-29). "This is the earliest document, so far as we know, that issued from the pen of any apostle. It antedated all of the Gospels, and all of Paul's epistles. It circulated as a separate

document among the churches until it was incorporated into Acts, when previously existing copies were naturally allowed to perish" (J. W. McGarvey).

Alexander Brown in his outstanding book *Conversion to God* deals with the subject - "The Importance of Language". For example, he wrote: "There are numerous intimations in Acts xiv. of speaking. Paul and Barnabas so spoke that a great multitude believed. They spoke boldly. That they preached the gospel is affirmed twice. The cripple heard Paul speak. By speech the Lystrians were persuaded to desist from their sacrifice. Paul and Barnabas taught many. They exhorted. They commended them to the Lord. They preached the word. Speech was used mischievously by the Jews to persuade the Gentiles against Christianity; but it was constantly and effectually used by the heralds of Christianity to persuade men in the right direction. Much was accomplished by means of language".

What exactly is language? It is pictured or embodied thought, feeling and emotion. Someone once wrote: "Language is the spiritual or intellectual and moral currency between man and man, between nation and nation, between ancestors and their descendants; by which, though dead, they commune with us and we with them. This is the whole circuit of language that decorates, enriches and beautifies the halls of literature, science and religion". What did Sir Winston Churchill once say? "Give us the tools, and we will finish the job". God has given us the necessary tools to finish His job. He has given us language and He has given us a tongue to use this wonderful gift. We are without excuse if

we do not speak up for Christ and preach His gospel. Of course, as has been pointed out, there is the written word as well as the spoken word. We can also write to others to reveal, explain, encourage, etc.

There is the spoken word and the written word; but there is also the Living Word, who is Christ Jesus. He spoke to us the wonderful words of Life.

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. What did Hilkiah the priest find in the temple of the Lord?
2. What did Noah build after he left the ark?
3. Name a prophetess who lived in the days of king Josiah.
4. Where were King Saul's bones buried?
5. Who used stones for a pillow?
6. "Under the sun" is a phrase found in which book?
7. On the cross, Jesus refused to take what kind of drink?
8. In which town did Jesus stay after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem?
9. Who was the tetrarch of Galilee when John the Baptist began his ministry?
10. Who was the father of the apostle Levi?

GHANA APPEAL

Donations received for the Ghana Fund have been of great benefit to the Church and are greatly appreciated. Conditions there have been examined as carefully as we can so that available funds are used to best advantage.

New medical cases continue to arise, including a brother with hernia and many ailments come from conditions common to tropical countries. Some conditions require continuing treatment and so far we have been able to supply this. Our sister with a heart ailment who discontinued treatment because of the inability to pay, is continuing treatment through your funding. A sister with epilepsy is on an eleven month course of treatment. This not only helps the patient but also relieves the strain on her Christian husband who is extremely anxious about her condition. The baby girl with severe internal abnormalities is responding well and her surgery continues.

There continues to be a great response to the Outreach and as new babes in Christ are added to the Church the need for bibles, literature and spiritual guidance increases. Although new congregations require places to meet the number is now greater than we can help in his respect.

Brethren, your donations to help in this work are very much appreciated and we would also ask for your prayers.

Those wishing to contribute please make cheques payable to:
Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund and send to our treasurer, Mrs. Janet Macdonald, 12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk, Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB. Tel: 01324 562480.

COMING EVENTS

MERCANT STREET,
PETERHEAD
2002

5th & 6th October and
12th & 13th October

Speaker: Clifford Payne, Florida

9th & 10th November
Speaker: Andy Davies, Clarkston
 7th & 8th December
Speaker: Robert Hughes, Kirkcaldy

2003

11th. & 12th January
Speaker: David Murray, Aberdeen
 8th & 9th February
Speaker: Alistair Fernie, Dundee
 1st & 2nd March
Speaker: John Mooney, Livingston

On each occasion meeting times will be:

Saturday 7.00 p.m.
 (followed by refreshments)
 Sunday 10.00 a.m. - Bible Class
 11.00 a.m. - Breaking of Bread
 6.00 p.m. - Gospel Meeting

Annual Social:

12th & 13th April. 2003

Saturday 12 at 3.00 p.m. & 6.00 p.m.

Speakers:

Joe Nisbet, Aberdeen and
 Graham Gorton, Manchester

These brothers will also speak on
 Sunday, 13th April at times noted above

**KINGS ROAD, STRETFORD,
 MANCHESTER**

2nd November. 2002 at 7.00 p.m.

Speaker: Alan Ashurst
Subject: "Get a Life"

To be held at:

**The Green Hut,
 Kings Road, Stretford**

For further information ring
 0161 865 4242

NEWTONGRANGE

We would like to point out that we
 will not be holding our
Annual Social
 in October this year.

1. Book of God's Law (2 Chron. 34:14).
2. An altar (Gen. 8:20).
3. Huldah (2 Kings 22:14).
4. Jabez (1 Sam. 31:13).
5. Jacob (Gen. 28:11).
6. Ecclesiastes.
7. Wine mixed with myth (Mk. 15:23).
8. Bethany (Matt. 21:17).
9. Herod Antipas (Luke 3:1).
10. Alphaeus (Mk. 2:14).

ANSWERS

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