

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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GOD'S WAY WITH WATER

As schoolboys (and schoolgirls) perhaps we have often wondered who discovered the wheel and who first decided to boil vegetables, who was first to die from eating poisonous plants, who was first to discover that flames would burn the skin or that water would drown the non-swimmer. A few moments reflection upon the entire history of man, as revealed in the Bible, will amaze us in the way fire and water have been employed. Fire and water have both played a major part in the destiny and history of men - and yet will. Indeed when God decides to wind up this old world for all time he will accomplish the task by fire. Peter, who has a great deal to say in his two epistles about water and fire, says, concerning the end of the world, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat, the earth also (and the works which are therein) shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversations and godliness. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat". (2 Peter 3:10) When God employs fire the end is final and irrevocable. John the baptist said that Jesus would "thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire". (Matt. 3:12). This future role of fire should not surprise us seeing that in Gen. 19 God used fire to the same effect - "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew these cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of these cities, and that which grew upon the ground"

Water, just like fire, is mans' greatest friend and greatest enemy, both at the same time. Water, like fire, when kept under control and in its rightful place, is a great and essential blessing of mankind. To a man dying of thirst, water is of indescribable value and joy - to a drowning man, water is implacable, merciless and deadly. Water has an incredible history recorded in the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, in its use by God in his relationship with mankind, (quite apart from its use in creation). Like fire, God has also used water as a cleansing agent and as a great separator. Indeed, the important difference between God's employment of fire and water is that fire destroys completely whereas water destroys and saves at the same time, and ably performs the function of a separating agent. For instance, early in mans' history when

man became so vile and wicked that God repented having made him and decided to destroy His creation we find that water was employed in such a manner that the destruction of the wicked was achieved but so also was the saving of the righteous - in a very ingenious way. God could of course have destroyed the world by plague, or by disease, or by fire, or by a great war, or by a terrible famine, but he chose to destroy the world by a great flood of water. The apostle Peter in his first epistle pinpoints the overriding reason, i.e. so that in destroying the evil He could at the same time, *and by the same means*, save the good. Whoever would have thought it? Peter says, (in referring to Noah's generation) "which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were *saved by water*". (1 Peter 3:20). Most commentators would have referred to the hundreds of thousands who were destroyed in the floodwaters but Peter sees the plus-side of the equation - the saving of eight precious souls by the ark. When we come to think about it, it must be exceedingly difficult, in a global context, to destroy the evil of mankind and save the just, while at the same time, retaining the vital element of free-choice on man's part. In Noah's day God, through Noah, warned the world for many decades of the impending destruction and the measure of salvation He had provided (in the form of the ark). The required result was acquired by the employment of water - so says Peter - eight souls were "*saved BY WATER*" - not necessarily 'by water only' or 'by faith only', but none can deny his words - "eight souls were *saved by water*". Thus were the good separated from the evil; by water.

Perhaps we may also consider the saving of the Children of Israel, as they passed through the Red Sea, as an example of God using water to save and destroy - to separate the people of God from the enemies of God. Moses commanded that the people "Fear Not, stand still and see the Salvation of the Lord". To the Israelites the water was a means of escape - to the Egyptians it was the place of destruction. Water, in many less spectacular forms (but with just as much importance for those involved) has likewise been employed in the scriptures. It was used, for instance, (in Judges 7) to separate the soldiers who would represent Israel in their battle with the Midianites and reduce the Israelite army from 32,000 to a mere 300 soldiers. Those who lapped the water were the chosen ones. We may think also of the test imposed on Naaman the leper (2 Kings 5) which involved water. He was commanded to dip himself seven times in the Jordan if he wanted to lose his leprosy. Naaman could not, of course, see any connection between the two, nor could he envisage any purpose being served in dipping himself in the Jordan - except perhaps to make a fool of himself. The dipping test was, therefore, in reality one which was designed to separate the faithless from those who would have faith enough in God to do His bidding. In like manner Jesus said to the blind man (after he had anointed his eyes with clay) "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." "He went his way therefore and washed, and came seeing". In all these cases God could have effected a cure, or any desired result, without the water, but God, in His infinite wisdom employed the water. Naaman could have continued to refuse, as could the blind man, and such refusal would merely have highlighted their lack of faith in God. In that event Naaman would have remained a leper and the blind man would have remained in darkness. It is recorded in Luke 7:29 (speaking of John the Baptist) "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptised with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, *being not baptised of him*". The publicans, allegedly evil men, justified God in obeying John's instruction to be immersed (baptised) but the so-called religious elite rejected the counsel of God (against themselves) by refusing to be immersed. Readers themselves can perhaps think of

other instances in the scriptures where God has employed water in a similar manner - Ex.30 (laver); Jer.2:13 (broken cisterns); Is.12:3; 55:1 (come ye to the waters). Ezek.47.

It is very interesting and enlightening to note that, of all the references to the use of water in the O.T. the one to which the apostle Peter refers is the instance already alluded to, (in 1 Peter 3:20) where the apostle speaks of eight souls being saved by water. It is extremely more interesting to note that the apostle draws the telling comparison between Noah's salvation by water and the salvation of those in his (Peter's) day who had been baptised. The full quotation is thus: "Which (Noah's generation) sometime were disobedient when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even *baptism doth also now save us* (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ". Peter says, in effect, that just as the water of the flood saved Noah and his family so baptism in water will save all those who pass through the baptismal waters. A great separation is involved. Just as the floodwaters of Noah's day destroyed nearly everyone (except eight souls) so will the waters of baptism preclude from salvation the many millions who discount it and even scoff at it. James Macknight in his New Translation of 'Apostolic Epistles' says "By building the ark, and by entering into it, Noah shewed a strong faith in the promise of God, concerning his preservation by the very water which was to destroy the antediluvians for their sins, so, by giving ourselves to be buried in the water of baptism, we show a like faith in God's promise, that though we die and are buried (Rom. 6), he will save us from death, the punishment of sin, by raising us from the dead at the last day". There are many in the religious world who are at odds with the apostle Peter and who, sometimes vehemently, deny that baptism saves. The inspired apostle Peter entertains no ambiguity in the matter and could not be more categorical. The *water* which saved Noah was the type - the *water* of baptism is the anti-type. Just as the water saved Noah and family, the water of baptism will save all those who apply it. Those who baulk at the bath of immersion will ever be separated from those who, in faith, have welcomed it. The baptismal bath separates those 'born of water' from those still unborn; it separates those 'translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son' from those not so translated; it separates those who have 'risen to walk in newness of life' from those who have not yet agreed to be buried; it separates those 'who have washed away their sins' from those who have not, as yet, had their sins washed away; it separates those who have the interrogation of a good conscience towards God from those who can not have a good conscience on the matter. Even Saul, who was later to become the apostle Paul, was instructed to "...arise and be baptised and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord". (Acts 22:16). If baptism does not save us, then Noah and family were not saved in the ark. The apostle is not saying that *baptism alone* saves us; for we are saved by many other important circumstances including, for example, Christ's death; His shed blood; His words; His grace; our faith; our sorrow for sin and repentance; our steadfastness; and others but, *in addition to these* Peter, the apostle of Christ, says that we are saved also by baptism.

I do hope that any reading this article, who may presently be of the view that baptism is some unimportant religious appendage, or even a frivolity, will think seriously again, and study deeply and humbly the words of the apostle Peter. May they be like Naaman, who with the encouragement of some true friends overcame his natural antagonism to the words of God's prophet, and eventually went willingly and dipped himself in conformity to God's word, and emerged pure and clean. May they.

like the poor blind man, be led to the pool and wash - and come seeing again. May they not, like the Pharisees and lawyers, 'reject the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptised of him'. (If this was said of those who refused John's baptism, what shall befall those who reject the baptism of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ). Another baptism is yet to come - the baptism of fire. We may deride the baptism in water but we shall not sidestep the baptism of fire. Let us urgently embrace the baptism in water so that we may surely escape the baptism of fire. Let us be *born of water* as well as the spirit. Let us be washed in the bath of regeneration that we might truly rise to walk in newness of life. Noah was saved by water, says Peter; and this is a true likeness of how baptism doth also now save us.

EDITOR

PREACHING "OUT OF SEASON"

ALL who endeavour to win souls are distressed by the religious disinterest of our generation. The majority seem to be concerned only with the world and temporal things. They want to eat, drink and play while giving no thought to judgement and eternity.

This condition is not new. It existed, for example, in ancient Corinth where Paul went preaching. He describes the situation: "*For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness*" (I Cor. 1:22-23).

What did Paul do in Corinth? His approach is surely an example for us.

No other incentives

Paul did not offer other incentives. He might have done so. He had miraculous gifts which announced a great "healing service" or a "Holy Ghost Revival" where signs they were seeking would be performed. Paul was also quite well educated in the wisdom which the Gentiles so highly valued. He could have announced a lecture on "The Judeo-Christian Ethic" or on "The Philosophical Assumptions of Moses" and some would have come to hear. Paul might well have defended such an approach on the ground that, once he had them there he could teach them a little about Jesus or, at least, enrol them in a correspondence course.

Is this not the justification for many activities in which churches are involved these days? We have seen printed announcements from the Lord's people offering recreation, entertainment, coffee and doughnuts, magic shows, secular music performances and various other treats for those who would attend some gathering. When we ask for scriptural authority for the church's involvement in such things, the answer usually is: "We can make contact in this way and teach them about Jesus."

Paul recalled his work in Corinth in these words: "*For I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified*" (I Cor. 2: 2). The church of our Lord **must** be recognised for its proclamation of Christ crucified, not for its social programmes. Recreation, secular education and entertainment are no part of its assigned work. Involvement in such things not only violates its charter, but also detracts from its sacred and holy mission.

No human adornment

Paul did not attempt to "dress up" the gospel with his own personality to make it more palatable to secular minded people. Some who will reject the approach already described, yet believe the gospel can be glamourised by human presentation. They want the most eloquent speakers possible — men with dynamic personalities — men with "charisma." They like to have those to do the preaching whose

educational attainments or whose achievements in business or even on the stage will attract even the worldly minded. We once saw a full page advertisement of a campaign, featuring a large picture of the speaker and listing in bold type his credentials: "Educator, Lecturer, Author, TV personality, World Traveller and Promoter." We have also heard the suggestion that the gospel can best be preached by a large and well-trained choir.

In contrast Paul wrote: "*And when I came to you, brethren. I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God . . . And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God*" (I Cor. 2:1, 3-5).

Out there amongst the masses there are still a few who are interested in the simple undisguised "preaching of the cross." These are the only ones who can be saved anyway. Others may be briefly drawn by our devices; they may even be brought into the church as "wood, hay and stubble" (I Cor. 3:12), but they will not be saved as long as they disdain the cross. Instead of taxing our ingenuity and exhausting our finances in trying to attract the secular minded, we need to use our resources and opportunities to preach the simple gospel to the largest number of people in the simplest manner possible. In this way we can hope to preach "*to all who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*" (I Cor. 1:24).

Sewell Hall
(From Words of Truth)

GLEANINGS

"Let her glean even among the sheaves". Ruth 2:15

A Grand Thing

"Always stick to the truth! A farmer speaking to me about one of our local preachers, an auctioneer by profession, said, "I should like to hear Mr. Turner preach, because I have bought a great deal off him, and attended nearly all his sales during the last nineteen years, and I have never known him tell a lie in all that time." Is it not a grand thing when a man's word is his bond?"

Peter Mackenzie.

"Yes", "No", "Wait".

"Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear".
Isaiah 65:24.

"Sometimes we find ourselves in circumstances like Peter (Matt. 14:30,31), which demand an *immediate* answer to our prayers. Delay may be disastrous. For him, delay meant drowning. At such a time, today's promise is most precious and peace-producing. But more often, we must become "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12). Faith believes God will do it; patience waits for His time to do it. And the waiting period can prove to be a fruitful experience. There are three possible answers to prayer: "yes", "no", "wait".

H.G. Mackay

The Right Way

"He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation".
Psalm 107:7

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths".
Proverbs 3:6

"God led the Israelites to and fro: forward and backward, as in a maize or labyrinth and yet they were all the while under the direction of the pillar of cloud. He led them about, and yet He led them by a right way. His way in bringing His people home is always the best, though it may not be the nearest".

Matthew Henry.

Why Not Say Thank You

"Some men treat God; not as a father, but a stranger, and act suspiciously toward Him, as though they were afraid he would steal something. It is high time you began to thank God for present blessing. Thank Him for your children, happy, buoyant, and bounding. Praise him for your home, with its fountain of song and laughter. Adore him for morning light and evening shadow. Praise him for fresh, cool water, bubbling from the rock, leaping in the cascade, soaring in the mist, falling in the shower, dashing against the rock, and clapping its hands in the tempest. Love him for the grass that cushions the earth, and the clouds that curtain the sky, and the foliage that waves in the forest. Thank Him for a Bible to read, and a Saviour to deliver".

T. De Witt Talmage.

We Quote - R.W.Dale

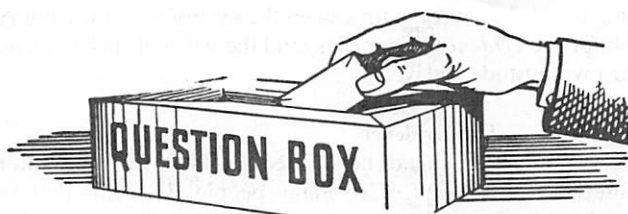
"There are people who sometimes tell us that the Christian Faith is but another form of selfishness, that it is perpetually appealing to the dread of suffering, and promising crowns, and thrones, and happiness, and glory as the reward of well-doing. If they can show us any good reason why we should not warn men that sin will certainly be punished, and why we should not try to subdue the false and fading splendours of this world by telling them of the transcendent brightness and blessedness of the world to come, we shall not refuse to consider what they have to say. But it is possible, as we believe, to paralyse some evil passions by the power of terror, and to give hope and energy to the better instincts and impulses of the soul, by the assurance that the sharpness and severity of present conflicts with temptation will be more than recompensed by the peace, and purity, and rapture of the ultimate triumph. It was God who made us susceptible to hope and to fear; and we have not learnt that any of the original instincts and passions of our nature are common or unclean. But the allegation that Christianity intensifies the selfishness of the human heart is a slander, so wild, so extravagant, so monstrous, that it deserves no reply. The history of the Church is its sufficient confutation."

A Lesson To Me

"John Wesley saw two women standing opposite each other, the one speaking and gesticulating wildly while the other stood perfectly still and silent. Finally the first woman stamped her feet and shouted, "Speak, wretch, that I may have something to say!" Wesley said, "That was a lesson to me; silence is often the best answer to abuse."

C.G.

Selected by LEONARD MORGAN



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“We read of angels working miracles in a pool in New Testament times. Could the same kind of miracles be happening today - e.g. at Lourdes or anywhere else?”

There are many people who believe that the age of miracles is not passed. It seems that man is quite ready to place his confidence in the natural and material which he sees around him, but when for some reason the natural seems to fail him, he then begins to look for the intervention of the supernatural into his personal affairs. He is forced to do this because there is no other place for him to look to, irrespective of whether he believes that God is the Divine supernatural agency on whom he wants to call, or not.

So far as the Bible is concerned there are two fundamental ideas which should be considered. The word ‘miracle’ is a somewhat unfortunate translation of the Greek word SEMEION which means ‘a sign’; the other word is DUNAMIS which means power. So the Biblical idea of miracle is that we should regard it as ‘a sign’ of the Divine presence; a word of Divine authority backed by a demonstration of Divine power. You will notice that this is so if you examine the scripture which the questioner refers to, i.e. John 5:2-9.

If it is true to say, as it undoubtedly is, that miracles *were* performed in times past, then it must also be true to say that miracles are *possible* at any time in the present or future. The same Divine power is still available, but whether or not the credibility of miracles, or the evidence of performance, can be sustained in modern times is the question to which we must turn our minds.

The Modern View

A thing which is credible is deserving of, or entitled to, belief, and obviously this credibility will alter, so far as people are concerned, with differing circumstances. For example, someone who had lived all of his life in blistering heat would find it incredible that other people could live in houses made of ice. Conversely, a person who lived, ate, and slept in furs would find it difficult to believe that anyone could survive by just wearing a loincloth. Taking this reasoning a stage further, we can understand that the credibility regarding miracles would only be proved if miracles had ever formed part of human experience.

Has the idea of miracle been carried over into modern society? Do people really expect intervention into human affairs? If we say no, then how do we explain the attendance of many people at seances and meetings of spiritists; the belief in protection offered by the carrying of St. Christopher badges; the mascots carried by thousands of people in all walks of life; the petitions to some deity to intervene in certain circumstances. The paradox is that many who practice such things are themselves professed atheists and materialists. When one sees such examples of widespread superstition, one can only conclude that the idea of supernatural interference in human affairs is deep-rooted in many peoples minds. This in turn

suggests that the belief in miracles has at some time been the experience of the human race. But we need to look for the *evidence* of miracles, and the *value* of such evidence before we can define our own attitude today.

The Evidence

Scriptural examples of miracles should never be confused with the more superstitious types of interference beloved of so many people. It seems that the majority of miracles noted in the Biblical narratives are confined to three specific periods of time. The first of these is the period when the Israelites were removed from the bondage of Egypt, and set forth as God's chosen people with the express purpose of guarding His revelation and laws. The second period is that of Elijah and Elisha when the nation seemed to be heading for apostasy, and God had to demonstrate His power to the peoples and nations around the Israelites. The third and final phase is concerned with the Incarnation of the Lord, and the subsequent declaration by the Apostles of salvation in Christ Jesus. The scriptural *evidence* of such miracles is clearly seen when the events of these three periods of time are studied. The *value* of that evidence is seen in the fact that in no way did the working of these miracles portray the glory of the people who performed them, but were rather the glorious and powerful signs of God Himself (even the Lord sought not His own glory, but His that sent Him).

The Conclusion

There is irrefutable evidence to the fact that miracles have been part of the human experience. This evidence suggests that such miracles have been most prevalent during crises which have affected human morality, indeed, in the three instances I have mentioned God's concern has been to take people out of bondage and bring them into a safe relationship with Him. It is interesting to note that miracles associated with the confirmation of the Gospel of Christ seem to be no longer necessary. Faith has come in order to take the place of the supernatural confirmatory 'sign', and consequently we read in Jude 3 "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints". So in that sense, we now live by faith and not by sight. There is no longer any need for God to work miracles.

The Experiential Problem

The Christian would be the first to admit that a notable miracle has been worked in his life, namely, the gracious in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit in his life. The miracle of grace still goes on. But the Christian also realises that the purpose of this is so that the glory of *God* should be seen in him.

This is not so of the so-called charismatic groups. They believe that God intervenes in their lives and gives them supernatural experiences such as speaking in tongues, gifts of healing, exorcism of evil spirits, etc., and they regard these interventions as confirmatory signs of *their* personal faith and not the expression of the glory of God. They would infer rather deprecatingly that those who did not have these miraculous interventions had still a long way to go before they were pleasing to God. Christians need to beware of this attitude, and should try to expose it for what it is, an attempt to satisfy an ego trip. God has never promised the perpetuity of His intervention in human affairs by the miraculous. When the sick were brought to Jesus, the Bible teaches that He healed *them all*. There is no identifiable evidence, medical or otherwise, of this sort of miraculous power either at famous shrines to which sick people go or are taken, or at any other place that I know of. Oh, I can well imagine the eager expectation and hope of pilgrims as they make their journeys to such places, and perhaps it would be unwise and unloving to undermine the therapeutic value of such belief and hope in the case of some, but surely God would be a respecter of persons if

He indiscriminately bestowed His miraculous gifts on some and withheld them from others who needed them just as urgently.

Furthermore, we Christians need to be quite clear in our minds what we are petitioning God for when we pray. Let us at least be consistent in our thinking. I know of Christians who have prayed for fine weather on the occasion of a Bible School outing. What do such expect? That the Divine hand will reach down and sweep all the clouds away over *their* particular area? Don't misunderstand me; I know that we are exhorted to pray and to ask God for things, but how do we expect God to deliver? Either we believe that He intervenes or that He doesn't. We cannot expect Him to intervene when *we* ask Him to, and then roundly condemn others who say that He has intervened in *their* lives in some specific way. Personally, it presents me with all sorts of problems if I have to believe that God intervenes in human affairs in a miraculous sense today.

Perhaps we ought to re-think our position in the light of what James teaches. It is not a scrap of use petitioning God to miraculously provide clothes for some poor soul when we ourselves have the means to provide them. It is little use petitioning God for the spread of the Gospel when our lingering feet are treading in opposite directions. You know what I am talking about, don't you? Perhaps we are looking to God for intervention with miracles, when we are not exploiting to the full the wondrous miracle which He has wrought in each one of us. If we can do that, then perhaps the world will see and understand the greatest miracle ever - transformed lives outworking His will.

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

KEEP ON TRYING

THINK back to the time when you were baptized and began to walk the Christian life. Can you recall problems and temptations that faced you in past and indeed, many that trouble you even to this day?

Presently, in Australia, we are not confronted with what the early Christians faced (Acts 8:1-3). Even so, in these days we often hear the cry, "I give up!" or "What's the use in trying". This attitude or a lack of determination is evident in all individuals during their lives, more in some than in others.

When we fail in something, instead of becoming disheartened, we should pray and turn to the Bible, seeking strength, encouragement and guidance from its pages. Jesus overcame temptation by using the scriptures (Matt. 4:1-11). Though Jesus was tempted in all things and sinned not, we often yield to temptation and sin many times in our lives. But this should not deter us from constantly trying to overcome our weaknesses. Instead, like many characters in the Bible, we should and must try, again and again.

The story of Job is one that stands out in the Old Testament as an example of patience, determination and perseverance in a time of severe testing. In Job 1:8-19 we read where Satan was allowed by God to take away all that Job possessed, even his family. The average person would despair and show anger and resentment over this sweeping tragedy, and question why God would allow such a thing to happen — *but not Job*. In verses 20-22 we find that his reaction was quite the opposite of what most people would expect.

Job's troubles, however, were not over yet, as we find in Job 2:3-10. But even then he refused to submit to Satan and turn from God. He *kept on trying* and, by this, showed determination and a deep faith in his creator.

In the New Testament we have a similar example, under different circumstances, in Saul of Tarsus.

Saul, a zealous persecutor of Christians, was on his way to Damascus when Jesus appeared to him. After realising the error of his past actions, he repented and was baptised. He didn't say to Jesus, "Well, I know that I have been wrong all this time, but it is too late to change my ways now; what will people say and do to me?" No Saul humbly and obediently allowed Jesus to direct his way. Saul didn't wait a year, a month or even a few days (so that his past life would be forgotten) before beginning to preach the gospel. He began immediately! (Acts 9:20-22).

In these two examples we can see the willingness and sheer determination of both these characters as they refused to "throw in the towel." Even all Paul's afflictions and sufferings didn't keep him from serving the Lord (2 Cor. 11: 24-28).

It must always be kept in mind that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond that which we are able to endure (1 Cor. 10:13).

When family, financial, or any other problem arises, we must be determined not to let these weight us down. Don't give up! Surely, as Paul did (2 Tim. 4:7, 8), we also can look forward to receiving that "crown of righteousness" if we *keep on trying*.

Rod Chapman,

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SCRIPTURE READINGS

DECEMBER 1982

5 Isa 40:18-31	Luke 4:1-15
12 Isa 61	Luke 4:16-41
19 Lev 14:1-20	Luke 4:42 to 5:16
26 Psa 34	Luke 5:17-39

THE DEVIL

The devil is a real personality. This can be clearly seen from this passage because Jesus conversed with him. He has a number of names or titles in the scriptures. For example, devil (accuser), satan (adversary), evil one (one devoid of all good), old serpent (crafty, sly and cunning one), and the great dragon (the great persecuting power). The Bible teaches that in heaven the devil was an archangel who became discontented with his position and who attempted to seize power from God. What got into him? The answer is that he was lifted up with pride - "the great sin" as C.S. Lewis has so rightly described it in his book *Mere*

Christianity. So there was a war in heaven which resulted in the devil's defeat and his being cast out into the earth and his angels with him (Jude 6; Revelation chapter 12; 2 Peter 2:4; 1 Timothy 3:6).

We should never underestimate the wiles of satan. He is a master deceiver, and one of his greatest deceptions is the tricking of many into thinking that he himself does not exist.

He is also the greatest counterfeiter. In the New Testament we read of false prophets, false christs, false apostles, false teachers, false letters, lying wonders, etc. These were the result of his work. They led to confusion and the destruction of the order created by Almighty God.

The Temptation

Satan had fought long and hard to prevent the Messiah entering the world. But once the Saviour had come, he tried to tempt Him to sin. The devil's approach was the same as that which he had made in the garden of Eden. He appealed to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Jesus

was the place in which to deliver it. As William Barclay has written: "Here, then, was the place for Jesus to begin. Here, at least at the beginning of his ministry, before he was branded as rebel and heretic, he would find a ready made congregation and an opportunity to speak to them" Paul once commented that Jesus was sent "when the fulness of the time was come" (Galatians 4:4). That means it was the most fit and proper time. One reason Paul could say this, I believe, was the fact that numerous synagogues were there ready to furnish facilities to Jesus and the apostles to preach the gospel.

Nazareth and Capernaum

Jesus' home town was Nazareth of Galilee. Matthew wrote that the Saviour's dwelling in that city fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarine". (See Zechariah 3:8, 6:12, etc). Nathaniel once asked the question; "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:45). This indicates that Nazareth was rather an undistinguished place in those days. The Son of man living in an undistinguished town! That should give us some thought. So should the Nazarenes' hatred and hostility towards him.

Capernaum was a city on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was an important city in the days of Christ. Jesus made it his headquarters for a time. Eventually, he condemned it for its lack of faith and predicted its downfall (Matthew 11:23). In Capernaum the people were astonished at his doctrine because his word was with power or authority. (Luke 4:32). This authority was unique. It was not a delegated authority. Jesus was authority incarnate.

The Apostles

The word "apostle" means one sent, that is, on a mission. Jesus chose twelve men for his work. They were his special envoys, first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and then to the whole world.

They are unique. They sit upon the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Their names are engraved upon the foundation of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14). In spite of the claims of many, there are no modern apostles of Christ, no new ambassadors. David King has written: "They have no successors, and any attempt upon the part of the church, conference, synod or council to change their enactments is an act of rebellion against the Lord. But the preparation needed was not larger than the head of the Church supplies. As the plenipotentiaries, on earth, of the Lord of both heaven and earth they were invested with all authority and power necessary to the establishment, and right administration of the Kingdom of Heaven, and of the Church of Christ".

Why did Jesus select these particular men? Alexander Campbell in his debate with Robert Owen said: "They are the most extraordinary men the world ever saw..... They appear to have been selected, not only because they were obscure and illiterate, but because they were men of the humblest capacity. I have often admired the wisdom of the founder in selecting such advocates of his cause. He wanted eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses, and selected men from a calling which was more favourable to the production of good eyes and ears than perhaps any other". He chose Simon Peter, Andrew his brother, James and John the sons of Zebedee, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew (Levi) and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the brother of James (Thaddaeus), and Judas Iscariot who was later to turn traitor.

Ian Davidson

A MINUTE WITH GEORGE ALDER

The Call of the Goose

Some years ago a friend of mine heavily burdened with problems went out one night into his field to pray.

The night was dark, and the wind was howling. He was out in the storm praying to God and in His Son, Jesus, but he had no part in the church. Bill was going it alone, just he and God.

Suddenly, through the sound of the gale he heard the frantic honking of a lone goose. Up above in the darkness it was alone and lost. In the storm it was seeking its way and the companionship of the flock.

Soon after, Bill heard the sounds of the flock coming over, the quiet, calm "goose talk" of the family in flight. Even though he could not see them, he could imagine their formation, their great wedgelike flight pattern, splitting the wind, giving help to each other.

And then Bill got the message. He was that lone goose, struggling in the night, lost, without companionship or the helping strength of his fellows. Almost as if God had spoken to him he knew that he must have the flock; he must become a part of God's family, the church.

So that's how my friend Bill gave up being a loner to become a part of the body of Christ.

The honk of the lone goose and the comforting call of the flock can be heard whenever we are tempted to live outside the body. We might even be tempted to be outside the body while we attend church services, serve on committees, sing in the choir, or teach Sunday-school classes. How? We just choose not to share our inner lives, our real selves or needs with others. We choose not to be personally helpful to those in the body who may need our help and fellowship. We become loners inside the church, flying alone in the storm.

Even in His deepest trial, Jesus took three disciples with Him to watch and pray with Him. And although He counsels us to pray alone, yet He gives us the example of sharing with others as well.

In once sense, each of us must exist alone. But we don't have to fly through the storms of life that way. Getting into

the formation of the flock gives us guidance, strength, companionship and the opportunity to be helpful. We all need that.

From: "The Lookout."

WHO AM I?

I am the greatest criminal in history.

I have killed more men than have fallen in all the wars of the world.

I have turned men into brutes.

I have made millions of homes unhappy.

I have transformed many promising youths into hopeless parasites.

I have made smooth the downward path for countless millions.

I destroy the weak and weaken the strong.

I make the wise man a fool and trample the fool into his folly.

I ensnare the innocent.

The abandoned wife and the hungry children know me.

The parents, whose child has bowed their grey heads in sorrow, know me.

I have ruined millions.

I shall ruin millions more.

I AM ALCOHOL.

FAITH

Faith is for such a time,
When earthly hopes are low,
The day of strife and crime,
When countless evils grow.

As wordly darkness falls,
Then shines the Gospel light,
A lantern scored by day,
Life-saving in the night.

Israel remembered God,
When in captivity,
Eternal hope still speaks,
To man's extremity.

Take heart, you twos and threes,
His church will yet prevail,
Despairing souls will find,
Material idols fail.

Like prodigals come home,
Driven by adversity,
Who never thought on God,
In their prosperity.

The father ever waits,
The light of truth yet burns,
Now is the time for faith,
Until the Lord returns.

(Miss) R. M. Payne.

BELIEF :(3)

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:16).

SO Peter answered Jesus' question, "But whom say ye that I am?" This was the paramount truth to be believed. This is abundantly proved by the fact that it is what the apostles preached in obedience to the Lord's command, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is immersed, shall be saved". (Mark 16:15-16). After the Ascension the disciples proclaimed exultantly the good news of a resurrected Christ who had power over death and the grave and could save people from their sins.

The Proof

That Jesus came in fulfilment of prophecy was proof in itself that his claims to be divine were true. So Paul sought to persuade his hearers (Acts 28:23). We read, "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" (verse 24). This was the method adopted by Jesus himself, and which he taught his disciples (Luke 24:45-49). This in turn was what the apostles preached, as we see from the sequel in Acts 2:22-36. It is difficult to understand how some folks just cannot believe the truth, even when it "stares them in the face". So, as an added means of inducing belief, our Lord wrought his miracles. "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

The Miracles

Here we see the purpose behind the miracles of our Lord. Strangely enough, these have caused some who have erred or wandered from the faith to disbelieve, simply because they cannot understand how such miracles could possibly have happened. What a strange reason for disbelief. No wonder the Lord told people to "believe the works" even if they could not believe his words (John 10:38). No wonder he said, "O ye of little faith". But this was itself a fulfilment of prophecy (John 12:37-41).

The very fact that miracles did happen is clear proof that he who performed them could have been no other than the Son of God. That is why Nicodemus said, "We know thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that thou doest except God be with him" (John 3:2). Nicodemus was beginning to realise within his heart that here before him was some strange Being who had the power of life itself within him and who was indeed come from God.

John's Gospel - Chapter Three

This is one of the many striking and important chapters of the New Testament. It is important because of its dramatic promises and prophecies not only of the life that is, but of that which is to come. It pulsates with life, and with truths that are half-revealed, hidden and partially hidden. It is like the sun as it is about to rise above the horizon in a sky half-clouded in the semi-darkness of a reluctantly fading night. As it sheds its rays in a mixture of light and darkness, it is poised in space, eager as it were to sweep away in a burst of glory all the shadows of a darkling world. This Light of the World seems to present to every man and woman on this earth a declaration of the most wonderful truth and at the same time the most terrible penalty the world has ever known. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life,

and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:35-36). What remarkable and awe-inspiring words these are! Do they not so affect everyone who reads them seriously? Note that they are not our words, but the words of the Son of God. Do they not have a familiar ring? They remind us of the words of Jesus to the Pharisees, quoted in our first article, "If ye believe not that I am he ye shall die in your sins. He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, Because ye are not of God". (John 8:24;8:47).

Are you hearing

"Come, let us reason together", saith the Lord, "though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). Listen again to the divine appeal, "Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

Jesus came to deliver God's message in person. He said, "I am come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13). Since "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). and "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), it follows that all must come to repentance. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*. It simply means a change of mind. Repentance then is a change of mind in the direction of God brought about by listening to what he has to say to us - in other words, hearing what God says. "Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:3).

Exercises in Belief

Matthew 17:5; John 8:24, 47, 51; 9:35-37; 10:27-28; 14:6.

W.BROWN

(TO BE CONTINUED)

REPORT FROM THE CHURCH AT ULVERSTON

THE Christians meeting at Mill Street, Ulverston, are pleased to report on the progress of their building and the relative financial position, in order that those who have their interest at heart, and have generously helped in the past, may be brought up to date with the news of their efforts.

Building

The existing building designated for two classrooms, a small kitchen, and toilet is now almost structurally completed, with the relevant electrical, heating, and plumbing facilities installed. Drains and footing excavations have also been made in the other part of the building, which will eventually be the main meeting hall. The laying of the drains is also complete. We presently use an upstairs classroom for our meetings, and our aim is to expedite the completion of the main hall, so that we can do more effective work in evangelisation.

Finance

Expenditure.

Cost of original building and legal fees	£2329.53
Contractors - Material and labour	6729..03
New roof	1507.00
Electrical work - Heating, lighting, etc.	758.95
Building material and equipment used by brethren.	813.31
Cost of furniture	140.68
	<hr/>
	£12278.50
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Income

Gifts from churches	£4399.00
Gifts from individuals	1541.00
Balance met from our own contributions	6338.50
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	£12278.50
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This generous financial help has been received from 40 congregations and 33 individual brethren. Others from various places in England and Scotland, along with the brethren here, have also expended much physical effort on the project, and for all this support, we thank our heavenly Father. We have not incurred any monetary debt, and the work progresses with the availability of finance. Hopefully, in the near future, we shall embark on the final stage of the building.

Living Stones

We are pleased to report that Jane Blackhurst of Barrow-in-Furness, who was baptised at Dunoon last year, meets with us at Ulverston. We are also happy to welcome Anne Bothwell of Bowness-on-Windermere, who, prior to her marriage, was a member of the church at Castlemilk, Glasgow. Two friends attend our mid-week Bible study and others have expressed an interest in our plea.

Appeal

Although still small in numbers we feel that we shall be able to work more effectively when the main hall is completed. Thus far, we have been encouraged by much generosity. If at this time, you can help us to further the work here in Ulverston, your help will be

greatly appreciated and we ask you to remember us in your prayers. It is estimated that a further £9000 will be necessary for the final completion and the church has currently a credit of £1300, most of which will be used for the purchase of building materials in the near future.

Robert Brown. Sec.
Beckstones,
Next Ness Lane
Ulverston
Cumbria LA12

MARRIAGE

Newtongrange: The church is happy to announce that on Saturday 9th October, sister Nancy Wilson and brother Brian Sharp were united in marriage.

The ceremony was conducted by Bro. Hugh Davidson, of the church in Motherwell. Afterwards the many friends and family removed to the Eskdale Rooms at Musselburgh for a time of fellowship and festivity. Brian and Nancy wish to thank all at St. Davids who helped with the arrangements and prepared so well the meetinghouse.

We trust and pray that the young couple may be abundantly blessed in the Lord.

A.P. SHARP Sec.

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