

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

Editorial

It all rests on faith in God and Jesus

There can surely be little doubt that the absolute bedrock of the Christian experience is faith. To have faith means that we are firmly persuaded about the matter in hand and that we have come to a conviction, based upon what we have heard, about that matter. In the New Testament, when the word PISTIS, faith, is used it is always used in reference to faith in God or Christ. This is one of the essential elements of Christian faith, that it is not vested in creeds or patterns but in persons – in this case God, and his Christ. In this sense,

statements or 'articles of faith' are somewhat misdirected because they inevitably start to define a pattern or creed. Yet a statement of our simple faith in God, and his Christ, is a perfectly sound foundation for our spiritual lives.

Quite how faith arises in people is of course a very personal experience. The only essential seems to be that we must have had the opportunity to hear of the person about whom our persuasion and conviction is to grow and, ultimately, be fulfilled. For some this persuasion appears to come very quickly (as on the Day of Pentecost) almost upon their first hearing of the nature and love of God and Jesus. For others the persuasion comes slowly, tortuously even, with questions tossed around and deliberated upon until that real sense of conviction is formed (as perhaps with the Ethiopian eunuch). This probably has much more to do with the personality and nature of the hearer than it does with any quality of the person through whom the hearing comes or the message itself. Some people are naturally impulsive and quick to take on board those things that they are presented with, whilst others are naturally more forensic, cautious and considered in their approach to matters. Both approaches seem to me to have their merits and drawbacks, though what we can't do is dictate to people **how** they should respond. Conviction is a deeply personal experience.

In this respect I've always been slightly bemused by those Christians who take a dim view of a conversion late in life or if you like a 'death-bed' conversion. Their attitude seems to be that such a person has had it easy all of his/her life without the complications and maybe responsibilities of living the Christian life. In reality the

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person coming to Christ late in life should more appropriately be pitied because they have missed out on the joys of fellowship and the sure hope that comes from having lived life with a faith borne of conviction in the eternal nature of the Godhead. Whenever and wherever faith comes it should bring joy to the heart of both the newly-persuaded and those who have long enjoyed that persuasion.

I wrote earlier that faith is the bedrock of the Christian experience. We can go further and state that there is no Christian experience at all without faith because without a conviction about the person (in whom we have faith) there can be no acknowledgement of the blessings, security, joy and hope that flow from that conviction. It's an imperfect analogy but if a man or woman is not persuaded about the essential nature of a potential future wife or husband, then they are not going to enjoy the full fruits of that relationship (and would be foolish to become married) because there would be some residual element, however small, of suspicion and mistrust.

So faith is **"being sure of what we hope for and being certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients (people of faith before the coming of Jesus – editor's comment) were commended for."** (Hebrews 11:1 NIV) Now what did the 'ancients' have faith in? Not the ancient Scriptures – they were not extant; not a doctrinal pattern; not in the Law of Moses. They simply had faith in God. It wasn't even 'the promise' that Abraham had faith in; rather it was the fact that it was God who had made the promise that provided the grounds for his faith. **"He (Abraham) did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."** (Romans 4: 19-21)

Notice one other thing about Abraham's experience. The record states that, **"he (Abraham) grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God"**. It seems that the more Abraham reflected on his situation and what God had promised, far from becoming more sceptical about God, his faith actually grew stronger. In other places, the disciples, confronted with Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, asked for an increase in faith. Paul writes about how the strong in faith should interact with those who are weak in faith. Faith then is not static. It is not a gift in the same way that grace, for example, is a gift from God. Faith should be a growing, dynamic conviction in our lives; a persuasion that grows as we, like Abraham, give glory to God. The trend in our Western society at least is undoubtedly to deride faith in God (as demonstrated by the recent reaction of the evolutionists to the plan to introduce 'intelligent design', a euphemism for creationism, into religious teaching into American schools) as intellectually bankrupt. We must not allow our conviction to be shaken. As Paul wrote to the Galatian brethren, **"it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham"** and who are blessed with him and heirs according to promise.

When we have picked our way through all of the multifarious religious dogma that is around us; when all the liturgy has been spoken and all the creeds recited; when we have discussed the minutia of the doctrines of the various denominations and argued over the 'issues' that have so often caused problems; we are left with one essential, unassailable fact. All of this, yes, all of it, is irrelevant unless every Christian has as his or her foundation stone a deep and abiding faith in God the Father and Jesus, his Christ, and the indwelling Holy Spirit and the certainty of **their** eternal promises. Without it we will never produce those works of faith that are the natural joyous expression of the Christian's conviction. **"This (Jesus) is the stone that was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."** Without faith, there is no salvation.

The Influence of Sadducees

The Sadducees were, we are told, a rich and priestly political party which held about half the seats in the Sanhedrin but had little influence with the ordinary people. As pointed out in Matt. 22:23-32, they did not believe in any kind of resurrection, and attempted to make the idea seem ridiculous.

Nor did they believe in angels. They only recognised the first five books of the Old Testament as Scripture, and held this to be sufficient without any later books or any traditions, such as those of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus therefore answered them with Scripture from the books that they accepted (Matt. 22:32).

We read that the High Priests (Caiaphas and Annas) at the time of the New Testament were Sadducees (Acts 5:17), so this had considerable influence on events. Their hope was that by carefully keeping all the details of the Law of Moses, **“through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.”** (Deut. 32:47). Therefore their chief interest was the fate of their temple and country, and they sought to negotiate a peaceful existence with their conquerors, whether Greeks or Romans. This helps to explain why the High Priest advised that one man should be sacrificed to keep the peace with the Romans (as he saw it) and save the whole nation from being destroyed. (John 11:49, 50) They believed in the advent of a Messiah as far as this was revealed in the first five books of the Old Testament so were expecting some kind of earthly king and law-giver, but maybe hoping that it would not happen in their lifetimes and upset their arrangements for co-existing with the Romans.

The Sadducees could obviously be ruthless. As in the case of certain dictators in our own time, people who do not believe in the resurrection do not expect any judgment to come, so if they can get away with their actions in this life they imagine there is nothing more to be feared. After Lazarus was raised, the chief priests planned to kill him. (John 12:10) What had he done to deserve it? According to their beliefs he could not have been resurrected. Therefore he was never dead in the first place, but was taking part in an elaborate deception. This time they would make sure he was dead.

When Jesus was tried before Caiaphas and the others, they set up false witnesses who claimed that Jesus had said he could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (Matt. 26:61). The temple was of great importance to the Sadducees, especially those who were priests, and they could only take this statement about its destruction in the most literal sense. This charge having failed, they turned to the question of whether Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. When Jesus admitted this and also foretold that they would see him at the right hand of God, this was an outrage to their non-spiritual interpretation of scripture. He not only claimed that he would be in heaven himself, but that they also would be resurrected to see him there and therefore subject to God's judgment.

Later the chief priests (supported by the Pharisees) went to Pilate to ask for the tomb to be guarded. Having no faith in the raising of the dead, they suspected that the disciples might stage a fake resurrection. (Matt. 27:62) The guards were apparently under the control of the chief priests, for it was to them that they ran when they had been nearly frightened to death by the appearance of an angel at the tomb. (Matt. 28:4).

Here was a dilemma for the Sadducees! There is no reason to assume that the guards were really all asleep at their posts. There were several of them and they were expecting some ordinary tomb robbers to appear, which would not have caused them much trouble. The Sadducees could not admit that the appearance of an angel had thrown these men into such a state of shock, for it contradicted their materialist beliefs. Yet they did not disbelieve it, otherwise they would have had the guards punished for deserting their post and lying. Instead they gave them a large bribe and told them what to say (Matt. 28:12-15). It is not recorded that they made any search for the body or for the disciples. Any members of the Sanhedrin who were Pharisees would have been equally anxious to suppress any talk of the empty tomb.

Not many weeks afterwards (Acts 4:1) the Sadducees and others came upon the disciples proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus to all and sundry in the temple courtyard, right under their very noses. To make things worse for them, a well-known cripple had been miraculously cured in the name of Jesus and was present with the disciples, and again they found it impossible to deny that fact (Acts 4:16). They called the apostles before their Council to caution them, and here was an opportunity to accuse them of stealing the body of Jesus according to the rumour which they had caused to be circulated, but it is not recorded that they did so. At first they dealt very cautiously with the apostles. But before long a large number of priests came to believe in Jesus (Acts 6:7). Were some of these formerly Sadducees? At any rate the rest were soon jealous of the growing Church and persecuting it.

When Stephen was tried before the High Priest, his defence was influenced by the fact that he was speaking to a Sadducee. The Council again brought up the charge of foretelling the destruction of the holy place (the temple) and the alteration of the law (Acts 6:13). Stephen's defence (Acts 7:1-53) was again based mainly on the first five books of the Bible, because those were the ones which the High Priest and his fellow Sadducees accepted. He quotes the same verse as Jesus did (Acts 7:32), and Stephen insisted that these books also proved the existence of angels. He pointed out that their own forefathers had rejected Moses and turned to idolatry. He implied that if the Sadducees confined themselves to those five books, they would still be worshipping in the tabernacle, for they had to resort to later scriptures to find the details of the temple; but having accepted that Solomon was permitted to build a temple, they should also remember that Solomon had said that the Lord did not dwell in temples made with hands. They and the Pharisees had always fought against the Holy Spirit, by killing the prophets and now by rejecting the Messiah. He ends by describing his vision of Jesus at the right hand of God, where Jesus himself had foretold that he would be seen. It ended with the whole assembly condemning Stephen to be stoned, in spite of the fact that they were not allowed to apply the death penalty.

The Sadducees and the Pharisees often acted together to condemn the Christians, as when Saul, a Pharisee, obtained the authority of the high priest to arrest any Christians he found in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2). But they were still opponents and it was only necessary for Paul to claim to be a Pharisee (Acts 23:6) to start a violent argument between the two sects about the resurrection of the dead and angels. Yet a few years later the party of the Sadducees dwindled away. What the Jews had feared in John 11:48 had come to pass. They had sacrificed one man to save the nation, but because they refused to acknowledge his resurrection, the Romans had indeed come and taken away both their place and nation. For a sect that was devoted to their country and their temple, rather than the spiritual truths behind them, there was nothing left.

~ WHEN WILL THE KINGDOM OF GOD COME? ~

Allan Ashurst, Stretford

The Pharisees' question to the Lord Jesus: The coming of the Kingdom of God in Luke 17 - What is Jesus talking about?

The subject matter here in Luke 17, verses 20 to 37, and in Luke 21 verses 5 to 33 overlaps. Both refer to the siege of Jerusalem and the Lord's 'second coming' but the discussions are different.

In Luke 17 the Pharisees ask the Lord Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come (verse 20). Orthodox Jews earnestly desired the Messiah to appear to rid the nation of the Romans, expecting him to establish the nation as 'the kingdom of God' and be its king forever. (Luke 24:21, Daniel 7:13,14) Also they were expecting it to happen any time then because of the predictions in Daniel 9:24-26. These would be widely discussed issues of the day.

In Luke 21 it is the Lord's prediction of the devastation of Jerusalem which gives rise to the disciples' questions. The Lord had talked about his 'second coming' and the day of judgement (John 5:27-30) so they would have difficulty imagining the temple being destroyed and Jerusalem being devastated before then.

On the one hand, the Pharisees expected a militant Messianic liberator. On the other, the disciples confused the destruction of Jerusalem with the Lord's 'second coming.' This accounts for the different ways in which the Lord answers their questions and for differences between the two events.

Chronology: This sequence of historical events needs to be born in mind whilst studying this subject.

- The Lord's ministry began about AD 27 and he was crucified about AD 30. So this teaching was given in the Mosaic era when the Kingdom was still in the future.
- His Kingdom was established on the day of Pentecost - 50 days after his crucifixion. This was the beginning of the present era. The era when the Lord rules over hearts. The era of his kingdom. But those who rejected him couldn't see this.
- The Church suffered increasing persecution from the Jews.
- The siege of Jerusalem when the temple was destroyed was in AD 70.
- The Church suffered severe persecution under the Roman emperors Diocletian and Nero. Those who wanted to dominate the Church kept a low profile.
- Spiritual confusion set in the Church and came to the forefront after Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire.
- At the end of this era the Lord Jesus will appear. He will judge all the living and the dead and hand his Kingdom over to the Father and the physical universe will be annihilated.

Luke 17 verses 20 to 37

THE PHARISEES' QUESTION: WHEN IS THE COMING OF GOD'S KINGDOM?

The Pharisees really wanted to know when the Messiah would overthrow the Romans and establish Israel as the everlasting kingdom of God. So the Lord disabuses them of the idea that the Kingdom of God is a secular kingdom with the positive assertion

that it is a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom of the heart - **"The kingdom of God does not come with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is inside you."** (verses.20, 21).

They will yearn for the Messiah and be disappointed

Those who rejected the Lord Jesus would still be looking for the Messiah to come and this yearning would intensify as the political situation deteriorated culminating in rebellion and the siege of Jerusalem but he would not appear. That is why the Lord said, **"The days will come, when you shall desire to see one of the days* of the Son of man, and you shall not see it."** (verse 22). He warns his disciples not to follow those who would be masquerading as Messiahs at that time, because when he actually did come it would not be an obscure local event - It would be sudden and seen everywhere. **"And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: do not go after them, nor follow them."** (verse 23).

When he actually does come it will be sudden.

"For as the lightning, that lights out of the one part under heaven, and shines to the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day*." (verse 24). However first the Lord Jesus would suffer scorn, abuse and death and be rejected. Then these things would follow on.

Folk will be unprepared when he does come.

So lest any would think that during the reign of the Lord Jesus the whole world would submit to him he reminds them of what happened before the flood and in the days of Lot. **"And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.* They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all."** (verses 26, 27). **"Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all."** (verses 28-30). Just as most folk were unprepared when devastation came upon them so people of the world in general will be caught unawares when the Lord appears on judgement day. **"Even so shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."*** (verse 30).

* Note the difference between **"the days"** (of his rule) and **"the day"** (of him being the judge). The Pharisees were looking for the coming of the Kingdom of God - The days when the Messiah would be king. That is why in verses 22 and 26 the phrase "the days of the Son of man" is used to refer to the days of the Lord's rule, this present era - when the kingdom of God exists "within" the children of God. The phrases, "in his day" in verse 24 and "the day when the Son of man is revealed." in verse 30, refer to his appearing at the end of this present era to judge the alive and the dead. The Lord Jesus has said **"Verily, verily, I say to you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and those who hear shall live. For as the Father has life in himself; so has he given to the Son to have life in himself; And has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation."**

John 5:27-30

When Jerusalem is under siege they must get away.

Now in verse 31 the word 'that' introduces a parenthesis. The Lord refers back beyond what he has just said to what he said earlier (verses 22, 23) about the siege of Jerusalem to give them a word of warning and advice. **"In that day, he who shall be on the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away; and he who is in the field, let him likewise not return back."** The word "that" (ἐκεῖνη) is directing the mind back to what has been said earlier where, in verse 22, Jesus talks of the time immediately prior to the destruction of Jerusalem when the Pharisees would be yearning for the Messiah to appear and rid Israel of Roman occupation and there would be false Messiahs rallying patriotic Hebrews to fight against the Roman soldiers.

To save their lives they were not to hesitate. They needed to abandon everything. During the siege of AD 70 there was a short break in hostilities. That day Christians, heeding this advice, took that opportunity to flee Jerusalem. They were not to be like Lot's wife, reluctant to leave their belongings behind. **"Remember Lot's wife. Whoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."** (verses 32, 33)

When he comes, his saints will be go to be with him and the wicked will be rejected.

Having given them that advice, and using now the word 'this', the Lord Jesus redirects their attention to his most recent subject: 'the day when the Son of man is revealed.' (verse 30). **"I tell you, in this[§] night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be abandoned*. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other abandoned.* Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other abandoned.*"** (verses 34 to 36)

[§] ταυτη this. "this night" verse 30. The day when the Son of man is revealed. (The world is a sphere suspended in space where at the same time on one side it is night and on the other it is day and folk are working, vv.34-36. cp. Isaiah 40:22. 26:7. The Bible stated these facts many centuries before Galileo).

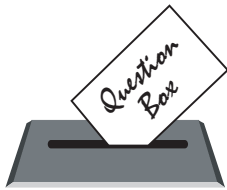
* ἀφιημι abandoned. ie. not one of those who will be gathered to be with the Lord. cp. v.31 and ch.25 v.46. This word does not imply that they are left to live on the earth. It should not be interpreted so as to contradict other scripture such as: John 5:28, 29, 2.Timothy 4:1 and 1.Peter 4:5.

Even of those claiming to be his, those who call him "Lord", the sheep and the goats will be separated - The sheep chosen and the goats rejected. **"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats."** (Matthew 25:31, 32)

No wicked person will escape the judgement.

Still confused the disciples ask where it will happen. The Lord makes it clear that none of the wicked will escape the day of Judgement. **"And they answered and said to him, Where, Lord? And he said to them, Wherever the body is, there will the vultures^ο be gathered together."** (verse 37)

^ο (αετος eagles) This word cannot here refer to the eagle on the Roman military standard because eagles do not usually gather around carrion, this most likely refers to vultures. The word "body" is evidently directed at the spiritually dead - the wicked.



QUESTION

“How long will the punishment of the wicked last?”



The subject of this month's 'Question Box' arises from what we considered in the June issue of the 'S.S.'

I must confess that when I first received this question I was rather puzzled, because I have always thought that the fate of the wicked is described in the Scriptures in such unequivocal terms as not to need discussion. But we live in a changing world, and it seems that at the present time, in both sacred and secular society, widely differing views are being advanced concerning the duration of the punishment that should be imposed, both on those who reject the Gospel of Christ, and on those who violate the laws of our secular society.

As I write this, the national press carries a further report concerning an offender upon whom a life-sentence has recently been imposed. You may have read the news-item and recall that it was stated that, although the judge recommended that the offender serve a prison-term of nine years, he may well only remain in prison for about four and a half years before being set at liberty. The reason? The judge had observed that these days, **'Life does not mean life'**.

Meanwhile, it is reported that in the theological world there are those who take a similar position in respect of the final punishment of the wicked and who claim that **'everlasting punishment'** will not be **'everlasting'**. The reason? They say that the fate of those on whom this sentence will be passed on the Day of Judgment is 'annihilation'. In other words, after the Judgment, the wicked will simply cease to exist. It is with this second, spiritual, question that we are concerned this month.

A wide spectrum of opinion,

It is interesting to notice how curiously wide-ranging are the denominational theories concerning the future of those who die outside of Christ.

The people known as 'Christadelphians' hold the theological view I have just described. They teach that the final punishment of the unsaved will be to have their existence – their life – terminated. It will be as if they had never existed. In the case of the 'Christadelphians', this notion is the natural consequence of their denial of **'the immortality of the soul'**. They do not believe that the soul of man is, in its very nature, immortal, and they claim that immortality will be **'bestowed'** as the final reward of the righteous on the Day of Judgment.

In stark contrast with this Christadelphian doctrine, there is the 'Mormon' notion of a **'second chance'** for those who did not accept the Mormon 'gospel' whilst in this life. According to Mormonism, when in the world beyond, those who die outside of the Mormon Church will be given another opportunity of hearing, believing and accepting its 'gospel'.

Of course, the matter of the **baptism** of these ultra-late converts might have been thought to create a problem, because – presumably – there is no water in the after-life. However, this also is conveniently managed, because those who have died will, when they accept the Mormon message, be able to undergo a **'baptism by proxy'**, by having a Mormon **'in good standing'** baptized on their behalf in a Mormon Temple. This is the Mormon doctrine of **'baptism for the dead'**, erroneously based on 1st Cor.15:29, and it is this doctrine which moved one early Mormon-leader to declare that the number of those who will finally be lost will **'be counted on the fingers of one hand!'** If only that were true!

Here is something to consider. In the light of Christadelphian and Mormon teaching, if one is wicked in this life, **what reason has he to fear when he dies?** On the one hand, the Christadelphians tell him that he will merely cease to exist – (something that many non-Christians already believe will happen to them anyway) – and this can hardly be called **'eternal punishment!'** And, at the other end of the spectrum, the Mormons tell him that, in the after-life, he will be given a second opportunity of accepting salvation; an opportunity of which, of course, he will gladly take advantage!

Does 'eternal' mean 'eternal'?

The question is, then, *does 'life' really mean life? Or, does 'everlasting punishment' really 'last for ever'?* In Matt.25:46, the Lord Jesus very plainly describes what will happen, when He declares; "***These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.***" The Revised Standard Version renders the verse: - "***And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life***"

This rendering is clearer and should be easier to understand, because it reveals that the two words, '***everlasting***' and '***eternal***', are actually translations of the same Greek word, '***aionios***', which qualifies both '***punishment***' and '***life***'.

In the overwhelming number of occasions in which '***aionios***' occurs in the Greek N.T., - (and this means in at least 66 places) - it refers to people, places and things ***which can only be regarded as never ending.*** For instance, the word is used:

- Of God Himself,
- Of His kingdom, His power, His glory.
- Of the Holy Spirit.
- Of the salvation that the sacrifice of Lord Jesus has made possible, the efficacy of which will remain '***for ever***'.
- In the Gospels, to describe the '***sin which hath no forgiveness***' - '***an eternal sin***', (Mark 3; 29), and
- In ***2nd Thess. 1:7-11***, which refers to the return of the Lord in glory and power, there '***aionios***' declares that the punishment of the unbelieving and disobedient will be endless. It will be their final punishment, and the phraseology declares that the purpose of this punishment will not be remedial, but retributive. That is to say, it is not designed to ***correct.*** It is intended to ***punish.***

Bear in mind that if a sin is not forgiven - or cannot be forgiven - because God's requirements are not met, the guilt remains eternally and the sentence also remains eternally.

An Early Statement.

The early Church had no doubts on this subject, and the doctrine was set out in the following words. "***The duration of the punishment corresponds to the duration of the fault, considered not so much as an act but as a stain; so long as that remains, the debt of punishment remains. The bitterness of the punishment corresponds to the gravity of the fault. An irreparable fault, of its very nature, endures for ever; hence it is due eternal punishment.***" (Thomas Aquinas, in 'Summa Theologica')

Two thoughts arise here:

1st. If the ***existence*** of the wicked is to be terminated after the Judgment, and they no longer exist, surely their ***punishment*** will also be terminated. How, then, can that be described as either '***eternal***' or '***punishment***'?

2nd. Since the word '***aionios***' qualifies the duration of both the ***punishment*** of the wicked and the ***life*** of the saved, it means that the punishment of the wicked will last as long as the life of the redeemed, and if the punishment of the wicked does not last '***aionia***' = '***for ever***', neither does the life of the redeemed.

What does the word 'destruction' mean?

When the word '***destruction***' is encountered in the scriptures, as in 2nd Thess. 1:9, it is often misunderstood. The Greek word '***olethros***', which occurs just four times in the Greek New Testament and, in the A.V., is each time translated as '***destruction***', does not mean '***annihilation***' and cannot be accurately translated by the use of any of the words which, in modern English, are synonymous with '***destruction***'.

The wicked are not said to be 'exterminated' or 'destroyed' or 'wiped out'. According to the Greek scholars Moulton and Milligan, in the first century '***olethros***' was used to speak of '***ruin; the loss of all that gives worth to life***'. Thayer, whose Greek Lexicon is probably more widely used by Bible students, gives its meaning as; '***The loss of a life of blessedness after***

death. Future misery'. In other words, the word describes a condition of existence, or a quality of life.

Indeed, simple logic alone should convince us that the wicked will not simply be **annihilated**. If that were to be their destiny, they would experience neither a future nor suffer a punishment. After the final Judgment, their future will be **'destruction'**, in the sense just described. They will suffer the loss of everything that makes life worthwhile, a punishment defined as a state of **'banishment from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might'**.

'Second death'

This eternal state of the wicked is also described in the scriptures as **'the second death'**; that is a 'death' which follows the **physical** death of the body; a **spiritual** death. Here, again, it is unfortunate that the meaning of the word **'thanatos'** = **'death'**, is also often misunderstood. In the scriptures it **never** means **'the cessation of existence'**. Its essential meaning is quite simply **'separation'**.

For example, separated from his father, the Prodigal was said to be **'dead'**, (Luke.15: 24), but restored to his father's fellowship, the prodigal was described as **'alive again'**. This is just one of many examples of the way the word is used in scripture, and, if we think about it for just a moment, it is easy to understand.

Indeed, we may ask the question: When the Lord died on the cross, did He cease to exist? He certainly 'died', because He **'dismissed his spirit'** – sent it away. That was, for Him, the moment of **'death'** – the separation of the soul from the body. But He did not cease to exist.

For us also, physical death will be the separation of the soul – the true personality – from the body; hence, Paul could speak of being **'absent from the body'** but **'at home with the Lord'**. (2nd Cor. 5: 1 - 9) The **'second death'** which the unsaved will suffer, is eternal separation from the Presence of God; Who Himself is both the Source and Sustainer of all true life.

So, the destiny of the righteous is to enjoy eternal life, whilst the fate of the wicked is to suffer eternal death, and this difference in their final destinies is stated clearly in 2nd Thess.1: 7-10, where we read that when Christ returns, He will:

'be glorified in His saints and marvelled at in all those who believe', whilst those who **'do not know God and who do not obey the gospel, shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power'**.

An interesting question remains.

Why, in view of the plain teaching of God's Word, should anyone seek to tone down the obvious severity of the language in which the final destiny of the wicked is described? Let me offer two suggestions.

- 1st. It is because men fail to realize the depth of a holy and righteous God's hatred of sin. Because we ourselves are sinners, we are inclined to more lenient in our attitude towards the violation of His law. We hear sin describes as 'a mistake', 'a fault', 'a weakness', when the Bible speaks of **'the exceeding sinfulness of sin'**. We have no real idea how great affront sin is, in the eyes of God, because none of us is perfect.
- 2nd. More serious than this; I suggest that just as in the secular world today there is a mindset that has been described as 'political correctness', which seeks to challenge and change the standards and attitudes that our society has accepted for generations – perhaps for centuries – so in some theological circles there is a kind of 'spiritual correctness', which think that what the scriptures say about eternal punishment is too harsh, and so they seek to emphasize the grace and love of God, at the expense of His holiness and justice.

Conclusion

When the Lord Jesus offers eternal life to all who believe in Him, He promises that those who follow Him shall live eternally in the Presence of God, whilst those who reject His offer of salvation must, because they remain unforgiven, be banished eternally from God's Presence. I repeat: the **duration of the 'punishment'** of the wicked is the same as the **duration of the 'life'** of the redeemed. **Both are declared to be 'eternal'- 'everlasting'**.



The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (4)

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

CULTURE

The word "culture" is from the Latin *colere*, which means to till or cultivate. Webster's International Dictionary defines the term thus: "The act of developing by education, discipline, social experience: the training or refining of the moral and intellectual faculties...the state of being cultivated; *esp*: the enlightenment and excellence of taste acquired by intellectual and aesthetic training: the intellectual and artistic content of civilisation: refinement in manners, taste, thought... the total pattern of human behaviour and its products embodied in thought, speech, action, and artefacts and dependent upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations through the use of tools, language, and systems of abstract thought..." So we see that to understand a culture, we have to understand the complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, morals, law, customs, opinions, religion, superstition and art.

LANGUAGE

Language is an important factor in any culture. The Jews, of course, originally spoke Hebrew. Today, Hebrew is still one of the official languages of the state of Israel. Robert Baker Girdlestone has written: "The Hebrew language, though poor in some respects, e.g. in tenses, is rich in others; and probably no better language could have been selected for the purpose of preparing the way for Christ. Its variations of voice give shades of meaning that cannot be found in the Indo-European languages. Its definite article, the way in which genders are marked in the verb as well as the noun, its mode of marking emphasis and comparison, the gravity and solemnity of its structure, the massive dignity of its style, the picturesqueness of its idiom – these make it peculiarly fitting for the expression of sacred truth." Hebrew, incidentally, has given us such words as amen, Messiah, hallelujah, rabbi, Satan, Eden, Sabbath, sack, cherub, myrrh, balsam, manna, Zion and jubilee.

In the period between the Old and New Testaments, Hebrew was replaced by Aramaic. Aramaic is a Semitic language and was originally used by the Aramaeans of Syria. The Aramaic alphabet was easier to use than the cumbersome cuneiform scripts and so it grew in popularity throughout the Near East. Aramaic is divided into Imperial Aramaic (700 - 200 BC), Middle Aramaic (200 BC - AD 200) and Late Aramaic (AD 200 - 700). "It was the language commonly spoken in Palestine in New Testament times, the customary language of our Lord and His apostles and the early Palestinian church." (F. F. Bruce). For example, Jesus' cry on the cross: "*Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani*" was a cry in Aramaic.

The original language of the New Testament Scriptures was not Hebrew or Aramaic, but Greek. The reason for the use of Greek is simple. The Greek language had become the most widely known throughout all the nations of the then-known world. (Greek influences stemmed from the conquests of Alexander the Great.) Even Latin (language of the Romans) could not displace Greek in the eastern Roman Empire. The ability of many people in the New Testament world to converse in various languages is really something to admire. Paul, for example, wrote his letters in Greek.

He could have written his Roman letter in Latin and the others in Hebrew, if he had wished. The Greek of the New Testament is, of course, *koine* Greek – a language of the common people. The myth that the New Testament was originally written in ‘a language of the Holy Ghost’ (a peculiar form of Greek) was exposed within the last hundred years or so by such men as Adolph Deissmann, the great German scholar, who wrote the monumental work *Licht vom Osten* or, to give it its English title, *Light from the Ancient East*.

PHARISEES

There were various Jewish religious sects around in Jesus’ day. We have already considered the Samaritans. We now look at the Pharisees. The name of the Pharisees literally means ‘separated ones’. There is much speculation about their origin. They first appear as a distinct group in the latter half of the second century BC. “...the Pharisees, following the tradition of earlier groups of strict pietists, arose as a party opposed to the Hasmonaean merger of the kingship with the high priesthood.” (Michael Grant) They became primarily scribes and interpreted the scriptures according to the oral law, which to them was as ancient as the written law. John R.W. Stott has commented: “The Pharisees clung tenaciously to a body of inherited traditions. They believed that these ‘traditions of the fathers’, although handed down orally and not found in the written law, had nevertheless been given to Moses on Mount Sinai in addition to the law, and that by God Himself. In the conviction of the Pharisees, therefore, there were two parallel divine revelations, the written law and the oral tradition, equally important and equally authoritative”. It was during the second century BC that these oral traditions came to be preserved in written form in the Mishnah. As I write this article, I have before me a copy of The Talmud – a book that is divided into two parts, Mishnah and Gemarah. The latter is a commentary on the former. The Mishnah has six divisions containing laws about agriculture, festivals and marriage, together with civil, criminal and ceremonial laws. “These Pharisaic traditions form the basis of orthodox Judaism today.” (Edwin Yamauchi). So we can see clearly that the Pharisees added to God’s word – a dangerous thing to do.

Hugh M. Scott has written: “The Pharisees had an elaborate doctrine of immortality, resurrection, angels, demons, heaven, hell, the intermediate state and the Messianic kingdom, about all of which the Sadducees were agnostic.” They were certainly nearer the truth than the Sadducees. They had famous rabbis such as Hillel and Gamaliel (Hillel’s grandson), who is mentioned in the Bible. (Acts 5:34; 22:3) The latter verse reveals the fact that Paul once studied under him. Paul was brought up as a strict Pharisee (Philippians 3:5) Jesus, of course, encountered the Pharisees during His ministry and was critical of them (Matthew 23) For example, He once said to them: “Thus you have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.” (Matthew 15: 6b; Mark 7:9). Jesus was truly a controversialist in His day.



SADDUCEES

The origin of the Sadducees is obscure. Some say they descended from Zadok, the high priest in the days of David and Solomon. “A more probable view is that ‘Sadducees’ (Heb. *Sadduqim*) is a Hebraization of the Greek word *syndikoi* (‘syndics’, ‘members of the council’) and that it marks them out as the councillors of the Hasmonaean; although they themselves came to associate the word with Heb. *saddiq*, ‘righteous.’” (F.F.Bruce) Theologically, they differed from the Pharisees and other groups. They rejected the ‘tradition of the fathers’ and observed the written

law revealed in the Books of Moses (Pentateuch). They of course, rejected belief in angels and the resurrection (Acts 23:8). Politically, they were an important sect. They consisted of the wealthy aristocratic families, who controlled the office of high priest. Josephus said of them: "They only gain the well-to-do and have not the people on their side." They collaborated with the Romans in order to maintain their comfort, wealth and privileges. Consequently, the Pharisees regarded them as unclean. The Sadducees hated Jesus because they saw Him as a threat to their privileges. Selfishness, pride and greed blinded them to the truth that He was the promised Messiah, the Son of the Living God. It is worth reading again Christ's discussion with them on the matter of the resurrection. (Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38) Clearly, they were in the wrong!

ESSENES

The Essenes were a sect not mentioned in the New Testament. However, Josephus, Philo and Pliny the Elder refer to them in their writings. Philo estimated their number at about four thousand. He describes how they worked hard at agriculture and in their quest to find answers to difficult moral and religious questions. They paid scrupulous attention to ceremonial purity and held all their property (money, food, clothes) in common. They abstained from animal sacrifice, from the swearing of oaths, from military service and commercial activity. They did not keep slaves and took care of the sick and elderly themselves. Philo also wrote of their practice of celibacy. The belief was that wives and families hindered them in their pursuit of goodness and truth. Josephus informs us that Essenes were scattered throughout all the cities of Palestine. Incidentally, the first individual Essene known to history is one Judah, who lived in the reign of Aristobulus 1 (104-103 BC). The Dead Sea Scrolls are believed to have belonged to a group of Essenes from Qumran, a site north-west of the Dead Sea.

WONDERFUL WOMANHOOD

Women of the Bible 5

Ann Boland, Germany

LEAH & RACHEL

I'm sure we have all experienced the situation when someone else was preferred to ourselves; it might have been siblings – a favoured brother or sister, or the person we fell in love with wanted someone else, or just someone else getting the job we wanted. This month's study involves two women who thought that of themselves at times in their lives, namely, Leah and Rachel. Last month we saw that Rebekah helped Jacob run away from Esau. She had sent him to her brother, Laban, who had two daughters, Leah and Rachel.

The first of the two sisters Jacob met was Rachel, and in strangely similar circumstances to those that had brought Rebekah to his father Isaac. I mean a water well. Only this time it was Jacob who helped his future wife, and not Rebekah helping Isaac's servant. Jacob was welcomed into Laban's house, and began to work for Laban. We are told that Jacob chose to work for Laban for 7 years in order to marry

Rachel, in lieu of payment **Gen 29:18 – 20**. Rachel was beautiful, and the seven years seemed like a few days to Jacob **Gen 29:17 and 20**. Of course Laban tricked Jacob by giving him Leah, the eldest daughter, and saying it was custom for the older to be married before the younger. Jacob then married Rachel in exchange for another seven years work for Laban.

We read that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah **Gen 29:30**, and so began the situation I have described above: preferring someone else. We can imagine Leah's feelings, as she was not as pretty as Rachel, having **weak eyes Gen 29: 17**. Added to that was the fact that Jacob preferred Rachel. Situations like this are potentially dangerous, in that people can be stirred to all sorts of acts by envy, or wanting revenge. This is what happened, in a way, in this story.

God knew that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and so he let Leah have children, while making Rachel barren **Gen 29: 31**. The name of Leah's first son, Reuben, reflects her unhappiness with the probable meaning of *he has seen my misery*. She bore four more sons to Jacob, which resulted in jealousy on the part of Rachel **Gen 30: 1**. She then gave Jacob her maidservant as a wife, and Bilhah bore him two sons. Rachel's feelings are reflected in her words about her sister, "**I have won.**" **Gen 30: 8**. Now it was Leah's turn to give Jacob *her* maidservant as a wife. Zilpah bore two sons to Jacob, but that wasn't the end of the jealousy between the sisters. The story in **Gen 30: 16** shows that the sisters were still vying for Jacob's affections.

This was the situation when Jacob decided to leave Laban, for various reasons, which are not important at this time. What is important is that Rachel stole the **household gods Gen 32: 19**, and didn't tell Jacob what she had done. We are not told what happened to these images, but the result was that Laban didn't find them, and made a covenant with Jacob to keep the peace between them. What would have happened if Laban *had* found the gods is anyone's guess. It is apparent from this story that God was not yet the God of Rachel (or Laban and his family). **Gen 31: 5** shows us that God was regarded as the "**God of my father**".

Not much more is said about Rachel until **Gen 35**, where her death is recorded (**v17 – 20**). We are told that Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb (**v 20**), which shows that he loved and respected her very much.

Looking at the story of Rachel and Leah, the "modern" Christian woman may find many differences, especially in the area of marriage. Nowadays it is custom (and law) in Western societies to have only one wife (and a very good thing too, according to many men and women!). In that time (as in some African societies today), it was a sign of a man's status that he could afford to have more than one wife. The moral of the story though remains true today – that the husband should love his wife. Although Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, there is no evidence that he treated Leah badly.

Another problem we might have is that Rachel stole the household gods. There is no mention of why – perhaps, again, God was using this, as the result was a "peace treaty" between Laban and Jacob. What would have happened if Laban *had* found the gods is anyone's guess. We cannot condemn those who came before us, as we have the benefit of hindsight. We can only learn from their stories – both Leah and Rachel were obedient to Jacob, and they were rewarded with many children. Certainly, obedience brings blessings **Colossians 3:25**, and we must keep this firmly in the front of our minds.

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Through donations received the work of healing, both physical and spiritual continues. We thank donors who have made this possible and pray that it will continue – it fulfils a great need.

Evangelism continues and at the time of writing yet another request has arrived for Bibles and benches to help a newly established church. It's important that those who hunger for the Word receive correct teaching so Bibles and study literature are needed, as well as hymn books and benches.

There is yet another case of hernia which can bring a man's wages to a full stop. We can deal with the medical problem, but the financial concerns of the patient and his family are just beginning. If he maintains his own farm, who will continue this until he sufficiently recovers?

There have also been several recent cases of snake-bite and, for these, immediate transport to hospital is essential. This is generally by taxi which, although expensive, saves lives.

Let us not forget our brethren who experience trials and tribulations that we do not. Not only does your help relieve difficult and even otherwise impossible situations, but it is encouraging for our Ghanaian brethren to realise the love overseas brethren have for them.

Those wishing to help, please make cheques payable to:

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

Baptism

Glenrothes, Scotland

It is with great joy that we report that Sarah Forrester was baptized into the Lord on Tuesday 17th May. To God be the glory.

We also welcome into fellowship Nina and family from the Tunbridge Wells congregation in Kent.

Richard Gilmour

Editors Note

I would like to apologise to all readers for the lateness of the July issue. This is simply down to pressure of work which meant that I was unable to have the copy ready for the printer before going on a pre-arranged holiday. Once again I would like to thank our printers for their superb work in getting the magazine out once they receive copy and to John Kneller and those who periodically assist him for extremely efficient distribution.

Coming Events

Peterhead Annual Social

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

Saturday

3.00pm Start followed by refreshments
6.00pm Evening Service

Sunday

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

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

A warm welcome awaits all.

**Stretford,
Manchester**

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

Each meeting at 7.00pm.

The talks will be followed by light refreshments and discussion.

September 17th –

Speaker: Robert Marsden, Wigan

October 22nd –

Speaker: John Morgan, Hindley.

November 19th –

Speaker: Mark Hill, Loughborough.

**Longshoot,
Wigan**

Fellowship Day:

Saturday, September 24th 2005

A day of fellowship, lessons and fun from 10.30 am

Speaker: David Walker (Northampton)

**Newtongrange,
Scotland**

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

Speaker: John Kneller, Tranent.

We will extend a warm welcome to all who attend.

Blessed are they who have the gift of making friends for it is one of God's best gifts. It involves many things, but above all, the power of going out of one's self, and appreciating whatever is noble and loving in another.

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