

The **SCRIPTURE STANDARD**

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

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UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE ALIKE

A question which keeps coming up is "Why can't we all see the Bible alike?" and it is a good question I suppose. When the lawyer (in Luke 10:26) tempted Jesus by asking, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?", Jesus said, "What is written in the law. How readest thou?" Obviously Jesus wanted to gauge the extent and accuracy of the lawyer's understanding of scripture: i.e. did he have a correct or faulty understanding of the law. The point is, that if the lawyer could have faulty understanding of scripture then, people today might similarly be misunderstanding scripture. Again (in Acts 8:30) when Philip encountered the eunuch (in his chariot and reading Isaiah 53) he asked "Understandest thou, what thou readest"? Perhaps Philip had good reasons for supposing that the eunuch might not understand Isaiah 53. In the event the eunuch replied, "How can I except some man should guide me" (a verse which J.W.'s use to justify their calls and booklets). Clearly "How readest thou?" is everlastingly a very pertinent question for everybody, and Robert Haldane (of the Haldane Brothers) used to say that he certainly much preferred "How readest thou?" to "What thinkest thou?". But why can't all men see the Bible in a similar light? The Bible never changes and so it obviously must really depend upon the reader. I suppose the first question to ask is "Can we understand the Bible?" and if the answer is in the affirmative then, logically there seems to be no good reason why we can't all understand it alike.

In the first place, we might think it strange that God did not ensure that the Bible would be incapable of misconstruction. Critics express surprise that the omniscient God would not foresee the problems in the religious world due to the many divergent interpretations of His word, and would have so constructed it that more than one interpretation would have been impossible. God can only communicate with man through language, words written or oral, and language is always capable of more than one meaning. Also, some human beings are better at understanding words than others. God could certainly have skirted around this difficulty by making everybody exactly the same: a world of mechanical robots: but he made us all unique in ourselves, each with a distinctive personality: no mean feat when we consider the teeming millions of men and women, now and in previous generations. Even if we think we understand all the various words in the Bible some of the obscure subject-matter, themes and prophecies might prove too deep for us, and we might well end up with different opinions on these. The Jews certainly did not all see the O.T. alike, and even had difficulty with very small and ordinary words like "work" and "rest". During six days, work was to be done, but "Whosoever doeth work (on the sabbath) shall be put to death" (so says Ex. 35:2). The definition of "work" would become an extremely vital definition if a man's life was at stake, and we can imagine the

convoluted arguments advanced by friends of the accused. Thus, even in respect of one little ordinary word, we can see how all men would not see the Bible alike. I am sure we would all quickly grasp the problem if we (personally) were forced to provide not only a complete definition of "work": but one which would perfectly coincide with everyone else's.

A BOOK OF WORDS

As the Bible is essentially a book of words, we must all come to grips with these words, for God does not send a representative to each successive generation to explain them. His representatives were the apostles who, through the Holy Spirit, provided the words nearly 2,000 years ago, and even at that time had difficulty in getting men to see their words in the same light. An added difficulty for us English speakers is, of course, the fact that, originally the words were given in the Greek language and have to endure the shock of translation into English. To minimise any loss that may have occurred in the translation, we are required to scurry back and forth to Greek Grammars and Lexicons. Like the Jews, we too, have difficulties with prophecy and I doubt if anyone has the audacity to claim, for instance, he, or she, entirely and accurately understands the Book of Revelation, or that there is the slightest possibility of everyone seeing it in a similar light.

It is true, however, that the GOSPEL MESSAGE is crystal clear, and no one will ever be able to say that they could not understand what was required of them. In almost one verse alone (Acts 2:38) the gospel terms are almost entirely encapsulated in the statement of Peter (on being asked what men must do to be saved): viz. "**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**" I know, of course, that even that short instruction can be sabotaged by false teachers and penitents can be sidetracked on the question of what 'baptism' means, but it must be generally true that any honest and ardent student of the N.T. can not fail to learn from the N.T. that baptism requires immersion.

Most of what Jesus said could easily be understood, even by the simple minded: although He had to help sometimes with the application of his words; and this is where we often do not see eye to eye: on the application of God's word. Christ had, for example, to explain the application of the parables to the disciples. Later, when the apostles got embroiled in debate and disputation with false teachers (like the Gnostics, Nicolaitans, Stoics, etc.) and Judaizers, Paul in his rebuttal, engaged in some deep argumentation in his epistle to the Romans, Corinthians and Hebrews, etc. which require sincere and lengthy study, and which even Peter described as, "**some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.**" (2 Peter 3:16). Here Peter obviously acknowledges that not all might see Paul's writings alike, and that the unlearned and unstable would wrest, or twist them, to their undoing.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

NO WRITTEN DOCUMENT, the Bible or otherwise, can possibly be free from the risk of misunderstanding, misconception or misuse by the ignorant or unscrupulous. The meaning of the words is of little consequence if we are reading a light novel, but is extremely important if we are dealing with instruments of a legally binding nature such as an Insurance Policy or Last Will and Testament. The N.T. is, after all, Christ's Last Will and Testament, and some might also see it as a great Spiritual Insurance Policy. Words make sentences and sentences make paragraphs, and we will not all see the Bible alike if we differ in our understanding of words: and of course words vary with context, and often have more than one meaning in any case. In my office days it was quite common to emerge from a meeting, where a dozen fairly intelligent people had all been listening to the same speaker, or the reading of the same document, and to discover that none of those present understood

the matter alike. In short, no document, whether the Bible or an Act of Parliament, is proof against misquotation, misconception or distortion, and, lets face it, no book is oftener misquoted than the Bible.

It is also a character of the human animal that he is moved by emotions as well as intellect (heart as well as head) and is not always consistent or rational in what he believes. Man often believes **what he wants to believe**: and this certainly applies to the Bible. This being so, **nothing** is likely to be seen in the same light, by human beings. Some would describe a bottle as half empty while others would say it was half full. Man is a fairly perverse creature ('Stiff-necked and impudent' as God described His people, the Jews) and in most fields of human endeavour there is usually a contingency plan for 'Disputes', for within five minutes of human concourse, disputes will surely arise; especially over the meaning of words. Even a tennis match was held up, the other day, until the umpire gave a decision on the wording of the rules. It would certainly be most difficult for anyone to maintain, after looking at Church history over the last 2,000 years, that **any** generation of men have seen the Bible alike, and there is a school of thought around today, that we can not expect it.

SOME COMMON REASONS

And so the question is not "DO people see the Bible alike"? for clearly they don't (not even the Churches of Christ), but **WHY** do they not? Some of the most obvious reasons might include:- **IGNORANCE** Sadly, in the world at large, there is a high degree of ignorance concerning the Good Book. In lands previously in the grip of Communism, where the Bible was actively suppressed, ignorance is understandable, but even in this country where the Bible is not so much suppressed as ignored, in most homes the occupants may not even possess a copy, Often, our knowledge of the Bible is confined to what we may have been taught at school, often by teachers who were not only sceptical but downright cynical. Many have avoided the Bible believing it to be boring, difficult to understand and full of contradictions. Some, trying to understand it, have mistakenly got bogged down in the O.T. and given up in despair.

The apostle Peter, speaking of Christ's final coming, refers to the latter-day scoffers who rejected the fact, and were "**willingly ignorant**" that the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished (2 Peter 3:5) and such ignorance was self induced: i.e. *willing ignorance*.

OBSTINATE REFUSAL. Isaiah's prediction of the spiritual state of Israel in Christ's own generation came true, (and it is just as true today): viz. "**For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed: lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them**" (Matt. 13:15). And just before being stoned to death Stephen described his assailants thus "**Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit, as your fathers did, so do ye**" (Acts 7:51). "Understanding the Bible alike" in such company and in such a climate would seem most unlikely.

BACKGROUND. Many are biased in their perception of the Bible by virtue of their religious background. Any child brought up in the R.C. faith will, for instance, have a very different conception of the word of God from a child brought up elsewhere. Religious denominations are largely self-perpetuating and have their own distinctive application of the Scriptures which is passed from generation to generation. Because each denomination protects, defends and promotes its own particular brand of teaching or doctrine; it follows that all men are most unlikely to see the Bible alike.

TRADITION. This is similar to the previous heading and results in God's word having

superimposed upon it the traditions of men to a point where the latter smothers the former. Jesus encountered the same thing in His day and told the Jews that "**the commandments of God are made of none effect by your traditions.**" (Matt. 15:6). 'Church Traditions' abound today, and God's word is set at naught by man-made Creeds, Confessions and Traditions, supported by a fiction that the great age of a Tradition gives validity, and God's approval. This factor also influences our inability to see the Scriptures alike.

MISINTERPRETATION. Obviously much depends upon our approach to the Bible, and **the respect and value** we accord to it. There are some among the trendy clergy who cast doubt upon the veracity of the Book and question the miracles, virgin birth, resurrection, Garden of Eden etc. and these have a very adverse effect upon the general public. Also in our interpretation, if we isolate a verse from its context we are never likely to understand it as others do. If we isolate not just a word but a whole verse, and build a meaning of doctrine upon it we shall never understand it as others do. For instance, Paul and Silas said to the jailer, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved . . .**" and if we isolate that verse and build upon it a 'faith only' doctrine, and ignore the rest of the N.T., we are never all likely to see the Bible with the same eyes.

These rough headings merely scratch the surface and readers will be able to think of other factors bearing on this question, ranging from vested interest to casual indifference. Certainly on the matter of indifference it must be said that Bible Studies are not always well attended: and although we are "babes in Christ" at baptism surely we should not still be babes twenty years later. Also under the heading of 'indifference' we might include those who are such nice people that they agree with everything and everybody.

CONCLUSIONS

What rough conclusions, then, can we draw? The evidence of our eyes and ears is that the world, in general, does not see the Bible alike, and there are great variations in its interpretations. Some things in the N.T. are, of course, simple: some are extremely profound. Everybody can understand alike the words, "**Jesus wept**" (shortest verse in the Bible) but might differ in their understanding of "**The Word was with God and the Word was God.**" Indeed Paul called it a mystery, viz. "**Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh.**" (1 Tim. 3:16). We don't all share the same I.Q. and some of us have difficulty in grasping the import of Income Tax Returns, let alone Divine Mysteries. Bible Study is an ongoing process requiring time and effort and we might, in a few years time, understand something we don't rightly understand now. Some understand the N.T. better than others because they spend more time trying. Surely there are a host of reasons why we might not all have a common understanding of the N.T. Jesus knew of this propensity in man, and having witnessed His **own disciples** in dispute as to who should be the greatest, prayed that His disciples might all "be one" and that no divisions would separate them. Nor was Paul naive in the matter, for even when he was busy raising congregations some were busy preaching 'another gospel' and perverting the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1) and Paul himself predicted that, after his departure, grievous wolves would not spare the flock but draw away disciples after themselves. Paul recommended "sound doctrine" that would "convict the gainsayer" thus acknowledging that there were gainsayers and un-sound doctrine, and that even in N.T. times men were not in unison in their interpretations.

It is, of course possible to exaggerate in all of this. False teaching and interpretations can, after all, be identified as such, by comparison with God's word. No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation, and the Bible is self-interpreting. We might not all visualize God alike, but we can still believe in God; we might not all agree on what heaven will be like, but we can still believe in heaven; we might not all agree on what will transpire

at "The Second Coming" but we all believe that Christ will certainly return in due time (and, of course, the events attending His coming will occur whether we fully understand them or not). Where the N.T. speaks plainly and categorically (which is most of the time) we must accept it and obey: but where the N.T. leaves room for opinion or speculation we can hold an opinion provided we do not foist it upon others, or teach it as fact. We must always approach God's word honestly, humbly and with an open mind. Paul said we must "Study (or agonise) to show ourselves approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth . . ." (2 Tim. 2:15) for it is possible to "handle the word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor. 4:2). "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God," says Peter. Our interpretation of the Bible carries a responsibility (James 3:1) and although we may all belong to various congregations we are, in the final analysis, personally responsible for what we believe, practise, accept or teach. Jesus said to the Lawyer, "How readest thou?" THOU! I am sure that that means YOU, and me: the buck stops with us.

EDITOR.

GLEANINGS

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

LAMPLIGHTERS

"But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." Matthew 25:4

THE BIBLE SPEAKS

AND FIVE WERE FOOLISH	Matthew 25:2
WATCH YE THEREFORE	Mark 13:35
THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL COME	2 Peter 3:10
THEREFORE BE YE ALSO READY	Matthew 24:44
AND YOUR LIGHTS BURNING	Luke 12:35
PUT ON THE ARMOUR OF LIGHT	Romans 13:12
LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE	Matthew 5:16

WE QUOTE CAMPBELL MORGAN

There are similarities between the five foolish and five wise virgins, and they are remarkable similarities. They all expected Him. Apparent expectation on the part of the foolish, apparent expectation also on the part of the wise. Of both the foolish and the wise it is said, "They went forth to meet the bridegroom." But of the foolish it is said, "They took no oil." There had been evident carelessness. Of the wise it is said, "they took oil." There had been *reality* in their attitudes . . .

What then are we to do? To see to it our lamps are burning, to see to it that we have the supply of that oil apart from which there is no shining of light, no flaming.

A CHORUS

"Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning
Give me oil in my lamp I pray;
Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning
Keep me burning till the break of day."

SOMEONE HAS SAID

"The candle burned none the worse, for every candle that was lighted from it."

LIGHT TODAY

Light today the lamp of Sacrifice

Light today the lamp of **Truth**
 Light today the lamp of **Power**
 Light today the lamp of **Beauty**
 Light today the lamp of **Memory**
 Light today the lamp of **Obedience**

A LAMPLIGHTER

"Aaron lighteth the lamps at even." Exodus 30:8

"In this world God Himself is the Chief Lamplighter. Every morning He lights the lamp of the blazing sun, and every evening He lights the lamps of the moon and the twinkling stars. He never forgets. His word is a lamp of love and faith and patience and kindness, you are doing what God is doing, and you can't do better than that!"

J.M.

SHINE WITHIN THIS HEART OF MINE

"In the morning when I waken,
 My first thought shall be of Thee,
 From the darkness I have risen,
 Light of Light to dwell in Thee.
 Jesus, source of Light Divine,
 Shine within this heart of mine."

TOM KEMP

Selected by Leonard Morgan

LETTER FROM PNG.

(PART 2)

Final part of Sister Coles' letter describing her recent return visit to the Wairia Valley, in PNG

Velma is a single mature woman who has been a Charge Nurse in hospitals in Canada for many years, and especially in children's wards. She is an excellent nurse and was a great asset to the medical work which we did in the Waria Valley, for she did the lion's share. We agreed that Velma would do the diagnosis and medication and that I would mainly do the dressings etc. This worked really well and Velma often went to the villages in the afternoon to treat the elderly who could not attend the clinics. I used to be able to walk to all of the villages in the same way, but at seventy two, I am not quite as smart as I used to be. I am really glad that Velma likes visiting the Waria Valley and plans to go there fairly often in the future. The people love her too.

Several women had attended the Women's annual workshop which was held in Popondetta in April of this year. Each year it is held in a different area of Papua New Guinea, and the Waria women volunteered to host the 1996 workshop. Everyone is very excited about this, and the men are very supportive of the women in this venture. The men will build houses for the visiting women and help in the preparations for this event. It is usually held in the towns and this is the first time that a congregation in the "bush" has offered to host this event. The brethren were very pleased when I told them that I had set aside six hundred kina to help them to purchase food for the workshop. They know that this money was donated by you and they really appreciate your love for the Lord, and your interest in the needs of your brethren in Papua New Guinea.

It was very interesting and encouraging to me to see how much the brethren had grown. The Bible classes were well conducted and the preaching on Sunday mornings and evenings was very good and sound. It was good to see the young men leading the singing and serving

the Lord's supper and being involved in the work of the Church.

Nokokuna had to resign from the eldership three years ago because of old age, Ari moved to Aroba and Seheque who was left, naturally stepped down, so there are now no elders or deacons in Orouba. They are at present discussing this problem. I was pleased to hear that the men had started a fund called "mani bilong sori". This is a fund to help people in real need. I am confident that the Church in the Waria Valley will continue to grow both spiritually and numerically. Although I was unable to visit the congregations in Qaro and Aroba because of the distance from Orouba, the brethren did visit me in Orouba.

When it was time to leave Orouba, it was again a time of sadness for my brethren and me. Many people accompanied me to the airstrip, as I had decided to spend the night there rather than have to walk up quickly in the early morning. Manike, the man who Reg and I had sent for medical training in 1975, was now employed in the health centre at Kira and he and his wife had asked me to stay with them. They were very short of supplies at the health centre we had already given about half of what we had brought, and would leave the remainder of our medical supplies with them. Velma stayed in Orouba and walked up the following morning. We waited all day but the plane failed to arrive. Many of the brethren returned to their villages and came back the following morning. Several people chose to spend the night at Kira, and Manike and Qasira insisted that many stay in their large bush house. We were able to help with food as twenty one people stayed in Manike's house.

The following day was Saturday, and as the day wore on, we began to think that we would be there for the weekend, when the plane landed late in the afternoon. There were seven of us travelling to Lae, Saoba was accompanying me to buy paint and other necessary things for the Church building. Also there was a small girl who Velma had diagnosed as having thyroid problem, and she was travelling to the hospital with her mother. We had a good flight to Lae and John Kerenga, the headmaster of the Bible College picked us all up in Velma's bus.

Jab Mesa, is a teacher at the Bible College and also is responsible for the College finances. Jab gives a great deal of support to the Waria Valley work, for he takes care of their finances, purchases tickets and buys supplies.

Jab's parents and relatives live on Tami Island, a coral island in the Pacific ocean off the coast of Finchaven. Many of his relatives had been taught the good news by Jab and had been immersed into Christ. The congregation there numbered about twenty two. However, they were being persecuted by the hierarchy of the Lutheran church because they were all formerly Lutherans. Jab wanted me to talk to the Christians and tell them of the trouble Reg and I had experienced with the Lutheran church in the Waria valley and how we had dealt with it.

Jab, Velma and I set out on Thursday morning in a coastal steamer from Lae to Finchaven. There we were met by Jab's father and cousin in a speed boat. It was raining heavily, and for the next hour the little boat ploughed through the heavy seas, while we clung on at the mercy of the rain and wind. I was glad when we sighted a group of five islands, two of which are inhabited. We could see people waving on the beach, for we had arrived on Tami island.

There was a small two roomed guest house where we were to stay, with a cold shower and small kitchen. We had brought sleeping bags and food etc. so we would be very comfortable for the three nights stay. There was a round house close to the guest house on the beach where everyone gathered in the evening for a Bible study. Following the Bible study Jab asked me to talk about the work of Reg and I in the Waria valley and the problems we had encountered. I believe that the people were encouraged by what I had to say.

Next day Velma held a small clinic and the women asked me if I would teach a Bible class to the women in the afternoon. They requested another class the next day and I was really happy about that. Following the class they asked Velma and I if we could tell them

how to prepare lessons. We spent some time talking about this and I thought how refreshing it was to have such intense interest from relatively young Christians.

That evening we all met for a fellowship meal which included smoked and fresh fish. The men were interested when I told them that my father and grandfathers had all been herring fishermen. The next day was Sunday and we met for Bible class at 8 a.m. followed by the worship service. There was something beautiful about sitting on mats woven by the women, in the sunshine on a small coral island, remembering the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Following the service, we had to say goodbye to those lovely hospitable people, as we had to meet the steamer which was taking us back to Lae. We were back in Lae in time for the evening meeting.

During my first two weeks in Lae I had taught ladies' class, and my last week there I taught the class again. I have many friends in Lae, for Reg and I spent our first two years in PNG in Lae. Some of the Christians were in my Sunday school class in 1973.

Many of you will be surprised at the address on this letter. The reason for this is, that when I left PNG I intended to spend six months with my daughter and family in Searcy, Arkansas, and I had sublet my house in Glenrothes until February 1996. However, I had earache the evening before I left PNG which gradually got worse. I saw the E.N.T. doctor in Searcy, Dr Hatfield, who is also a member of the Church. He treated me for three weeks. I had an abscess incised three times and was eventually having antibiotics intra-venously because my ear was not healing. Dr. Hatfield was very kind and did not charge me for many of my visits, but the injections given at the hospital were very expensive and I did not have insurance cover. As there was some doubt about my immune system which would involve hospital tests, I decided to return home. Thankfully, my ear seems to be healing and I get the results of my blood test etc. tomorrow.

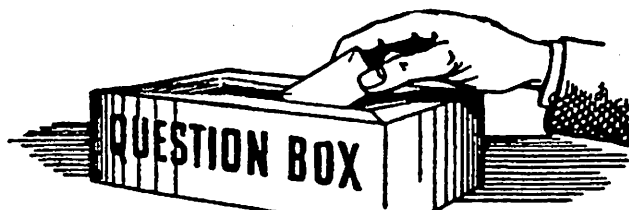
I had intended to send out this letter much earlier and I apologise for the delay.

When Reg and I were in the Waria valley we had a 3kw diesel generator to supply power for the circular saw and other tools. It also provided us with a light. The generator is now old and the brethren cannot afford to buy fuel from Wau which has to be air-freighted into Kira. It has lain idle for years but the brethren will not part with it. With the help of a man who has returned to the area from Bougainville where he worked as an electrician for a mining company, the men managed to get the generator working while I was there. This rekindled the desire in the brethren to have electric light in the Church building. They use small kerosene lamps in their homes, when they can get kerosene.

When I talked with Aleks the electrician, he told me that he had installed solar power units in buildings in Bougainville and had put a panel on his own roof in Kira and it was working well. He agreed with me that this was the answer for our Church building. The initial cost would be great but running costs after that would be minimal, with no fuel bills. I asked Aleks if he would draw up a plan for solar power for the church building, which he did. I took this to a company called Tolec in Lae which is the only company there supplying solar panels and batteries etc. The manager worked out an estimate for me which was K4338.10 which would be about £2,000. I intend to try and raise this sum, because I believe that this is the answer to supplying light to the church building in Orouba. I was very impressed by the dedication of the brethren in Orouba while I was with them, especially as there are no paid workers in the Waria Valley. This is unusual even in PNG. I think that they deserve our help. I hate to request funds for PNG again so soon, but this is something I had not foreseen. If you can help, will you send your donation to me, c/o Frank Worgan, 34 Malmesburgh Road, Cheadle Hume, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 7QH. England.

Thank you

In the Master's service,
Ruth B. Coles (Mrs)



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"If the Kingdom of Heaven is the same institution as the Church, why should two different descriptions be used? Was 'Kingdom of God' an inadequate expression, or is there a vital difference between 'Kingdom of God' and 'Church of Christ?'"

During my early days in the Church, one used to hear many fine sermons and lessons on the 'Kingdom'. Much of the teaching was used to counter premillennialism. Today we do not hear much teaching about the kingdom, but it is undoubtedly true that there are still many people in the world who believe that because Israel rejected the King, the Kingdom which God wanted to establish was postponed until the second coming of Christ (when presumably He would literally reign on earth occupying the literal throne of David). However, this scriptural argument is outside the scope of this question, although it may impinge on the answer in some shape or form. So it seems we shall have to explore the differences (if any) of the titles Kingdom of God; Kingdom of Heaven; and the Church.

KINGDOM OF GOD

'Kingdom' denotes sovereignty, royal power, dominion, etc. It is the territory or the people ruled over by the king. When applied to God it is His sovereign rule over the universe. (See 1 Chron. 29:10-12.) On this basis rests the doctrine of His unlimited power and domination in the natural and spiritual realm: He is the Creator of the universe. More on this point later.

It is quite obvious that there must have been rebellion against the rule of God before the world was created, hence Satan and his host. On earth, God gave His laws to a nation and expected willing obedience from them. He appointed kings in that nation to administer His Kingdom. However, that nation also rebelled against His rule and authority. We understand, of course, that God's Kingdom cannot include those who are in rebellion against Him. Therefore, as a general principle, we can say that the Kingdom of God, at any given time and place, is where His sovereign rule is acknowledged.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God should come, He replied, "The Kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is', because the Kingdom of God is within you". Luke 17:20,21. N.I.V. The Kingdom is not going to be visible, as was the nation of Israel. You will no doubt recall that Jeremiah prophesied, "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will make my law in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" Jer. 31:31-33. The Kingdom to be established, then, would be a spiritual one, as Jesus indicated to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God". John 3:3. Jesus goes on to indicate that unless that new birth is by water and the Spirit, then a person cannot enter the kingdom of God. We should also notice that since all the world is condemned under sin, then the establishment of such a Kingdom must inevitably be by grace, and that, of course, by the gracious hand of God.

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

It is recorded in 2 Tim. 4:18 that Paul, in captivity, said, "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his Heavenly Kingdom". In Eph.

5:5 we read, ". . . hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God". This kingdom is identical with the Kingdom of the Father Matt. 26:29, and the Kingdom of the Son Luke 22:30. This leads us to the conclusion that there is but one Kingdom, which is variously described as of the Son of Man, Matt. 13:41; of Christ Jesus, 2 Tim. 4:1; of our Lord and His Christ, Rev. 11:15.

God, of course, is above all dispensations. I have always found it easier to understand if I look upon God as delegating authority and rule in both Old and New Dispensations; to kings in the Old, and to Christ in the New. Visible Israel failed God and so a new covenant relationship was established which included the Gentiles; there was to be a new 'Israel of God', and as Jeremiah prophesied, it would be of a spiritual nature, and it would acknowledge the reign of the new King, the Christ of God. (We should not forget that Christ, before Pilate, affirmed that He was a King, and that he had a kingdom which was not of this world). We should always remember that if God delegates authority and accountability that He has ultimate power to do so, and that He Himself has the ultimate authority and accountability. This is made clear in 1 Cor. 15:23-28.

It is also true that there will be those in the Heavenly Kingdom from both dispensations; those who remain faithful to God. In Heb. 11, the writer catalogues the faith of those in the Old Dispensation. In vv 39,40, he says that these had not received the promise, "God having provided some better thing for us, that **they without us** should not be made perfect". That 'better thing' we read about in Heb. 9:15ff.

The words 'heaven' and 'earth' make a contrast of ideas. It seems - and I believe - that the saints on earth are part of the Heavenly Kingdom. As I pointed out earlier, our God is God of the Universe, and His Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, is a general term for the Kingdom at any time in the world, and ultimately the sphere of God's rule will become identical with the sphere of Christ's rule at the final consummation of all things. See Rev. 11:15 R.S.V. In the meantime, Christ reigns over His saints on earth.

THE CHURCH

I mentioned earlier that the Kingdom was not going to be visible; that is because its intention in the hearts and minds of people was and is spiritual by nature. However, the ones so motivated by the Spirit, and who are subject in Christ's Kingdom, form the Church here on earth. Jesus commenced His reign when He was received up into glory. 1 Tim. 3:16. On the first Pentecost after the ascension, Peter, through the Spirit said, "**Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord (God) said unto my Lord (Christ), Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ**". Acts 2:33-36. See also Heb. 1:3, and Col. 1:13. He will sit there, according to Paul in 1 Cor. 15, until the last enemy, death, is conquered. After that He will surrender the kingdom to God. See 1 Cor. 15:24-28 again. I think we can say at this point that there will be no millennial reign on earth on any Davidic throne. The way to the throne in Heaven was by the way of the Cross on earth.

CONCLUSION

This is a big subject and I'm afraid I have only been able to 'trim the edges', as it were, but I have tried to keep my answer so that the points made in the question may become a little clearer.

The Kingdom of Christ - the Heavenly Kingdom - is identical with the Church. There can be little doubt of this, especially when Jesus gave 'the keys of the Kingdom' to Peter, who duly opened the door when he preached the first Gospel message at Pentecost. Matt.

16:16-19. It is also worth noting that the other Apostles were given the 'keys' to the Kingdom. Matt. 18:18.

As regards 'Kingdom of God' and 'Kingdom of heaven', these are sometimes interchangeable. There *is* a difference, but it is only a difference of time and place; *there is no inadequacy*. In the final analysis, the Kingdom of Christ will be surrendered to God so that God can be all in all.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden, 20 Costessey Way,
Winstanley, Wigan. WN3 6ES.)

SEEKING THE LOST CHRIST

Just about the whole world was travelling on the big road, and Jerusalem had been packed with people and excitement at this year's Passover celebrations. Mary and Joseph hardly noticed the first day's journey homeward. There was one thing after another to talk over with several friends and relatives in the company of travellers. Mary and Joseph had not even checked up on young Jesus, but why worry? He was sure to be with his friends or cousins, playing happily. He was old enough now to look after himself for a day without having to be watched continually.

It was later that the elongated shadows and the movement of people preparing for the night hours made Joseph uneasy "Jesus should have come around by now," he mused, "Do you think I should look for him, Mary?" "Never mind," his wife called back, "I suppose Elizabeth has given him food. He will come by directly. He will not be in a hurry to leave his friends."

We do not know exactly what Mary and Joseph thought and said, but it was probably something like that. What we do know, however, is that Jesus did not come by that night. He was nowhere to be found. Distraught with worry, Joseph and Mary turned back to Jerusalem, retraced their steps seeking for the lost Christ child.

Three despairing days later they found him . . . in the Temple. He offered the explanation that he must be about his Father's business. But this was just another of those statements this boy made which Joseph and Mary could not understand. Mary stored up his sayings in her heart, awaiting the day when she would understand.

ANY LESSONS?

It may be that this story was told without the intention of teaching us the following lessons. Nevertheless, in Luke 2:44-46, we can take note of these things:

They supposed him to have been in the company. In the first day's journey of life, through teens and twenties, many people just suppose Christ to be with them, somewhere in the company they keep, because that company is more or less Christian.

After a day's journey, they sought Jesus among their kinsfolk and acquaintance, but they found him not. As the sun sets in their day of youth, many people begin actually seeking Christ, instead of simply supposing him to be around. Often they find that Christ is not where they thought at all - not among their relatives and friends.

They turned back again to Jerusalem. Many people who seek Christ try turning back to Jerusalem. That is where Christ's church was first built, and his gospel first preached. People who have travelled away from Christ need to go back to where they left him. This means going right back to the first century when the word of the Lord went out from Jerusalem and there were people who had Christ with them and in them.

They found him in the Temple. The Church of Christ is God's temple today (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19-22). Today we will find "*the Lord in his holy Temple*" (Psalms 11:4). Let us go back to that temple and worship again in the ancient church of God: worship and

obey according to the faith of the gospel as it used to be in the first century A.D. We will find Christ.

R. Graham

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

"Another parable spake he unto them, The Kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matt. 13:33). The kingdom of heaven is like "leaven" for it will permeate and influence everyone that it comes in contact with. Leaven hid in meal will diffuse itself by its very nature and will permeate the entire loaf. The parable simply means that the word of God, when planted in the heart, will influence that life, and that life will continue to influence others until society is affected by it. Let us consider this parable under three headings.

INNER INFLUENCE

Leaven does no work until it is placed inside the dough. It is placed there by human hands. The gospel must be planted in hearts. "Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:18). Paul and Silas preached the word of the Lord to the Philippian jailor and his household (See Acts 16:32-34). They were saved from their sins and experienced the joy of salvation.

CHANGING QUALITY

Inner influence results in a changed life. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). This joy will be expressed in life. The entire life is changed for the better. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

CONTAGIOUS INFLUENCE

As the quality of one's life improves he has a radiating influence. He has a boldness which cannot be contained. He will preach the gospel to others. Andrew found Simon and brought him to Jesus. Philip found Nathanael and told him about Jesus (See John 1:41-45). If we genuinely love the souls of others, we will evangelize! May we preach the gospel privately and publicly! May we use the printed page! May we use every honourable way to preach the gospel, until the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea!

Q. Dunn

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jan. 7	Psalm 55:1-14	John 18:1-24
Jan. 14	Daniel 7:1-14	John 18:25-40
Jan. 21	Deut. 21:15-23	John 19:1-22
Jan. 28	Psalm 34:8-22	John 19:23-42

JESUS ARRESTED

Judas betrayed Jesus. We read: "So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priest and

Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons" (18:3, N.I.V.). Jesus did not resist arrest. However, Peter had other ideas and it was he who drew a sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest (12:10). We read in Luke's gospel: "And Jesus touched his ear and healed him" (23:51). I have often wondered how this man reacted to this miracle and the events that followed.

Jesus was brought before Annas and then Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Although Caiaphas was the officiating high priest at

the time, Annas appeared to share his high-priestly power. Annas himself had retained the high priesthood from A.D. 6 to 15 and it is interesting to note that five of his sons, one son-in-law and one grandson became high priests at various times after him. Annas was an evil character, as can be seen in the examination of Jesus. The supposed trial of our Lord was a complete mockery of justice.

JESUS BEFORE PILATE

Pontius Pilatus had become governor of Palestine in A.D. 26. He remained in office until A.D. 35, by which time the Jews were glad to see the back of him because he was such an unpopular ruler. Pilate has gone down in history as the man who condemned Jesus to death. All along he must have known he was dealing with an innocent man, but in the end he caved in to blackmailing threats of Jews, simply to keep his job. It takes courage to do the right thing under threat. Tragically, Pilate failed the test. What are his feelings now?

Jesus' words to Pilate reveal a great deal. **"My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence . . . You say that I am a king. To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears my voice"** (18:36-37). So Jesus clearly states that He is a king, not of an earthly kingdom, but of a spiritual kingdom. He also declares that He is all about truth. There is truth and falsehood, light and darkness, good and evil, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. To be of the former things is to be of Jesus. It's that simple! To be of Jesus means that one fights the good fight of faith against falsehood, darkness, evil and Satan. And please remember, those who are with Jesus are on the winning side in the great war of the ages.

We read: **"Pilate said unto Him,**

What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews and said unto them. I find in Him no fault at all" (18:38). Of course, the great tragedy for Pilate was that The Truth was standing right in front of him and he did not recognise this. After all, it was Jesus Himself who said: **"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me"** (John 14:6). Truth ultimately lies in a personality. Truth is Jesus. Truth is God.

JESUS' CRUCIFIXION

In the end, the wicked Jewish leaders got their way. Pilate authorised Jesus' crucifixion. But all through the ridiculous proceedings, he was reluctant to do so. We read: **". . . do you not know that I have power to crucify you and have power to release you? Jesus answered, You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above: therefore he that delivered me unto you has the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release Him . . ."** (19:11-12).

Crucifixion was a barbaric form of capital punishment. A. C. Bouquet has written: "It was not only rough and cruel, but it involved a lingering torture, since the victim was left naked and exposed to the pitiless rays of the eastern sun and the attacks of insects, suspended by nails driven through his hands and feet. Small wonder that kindly women sometimes subscribed to provide doped drinks to be given to criminals before the execution began. It is to be heard of first among the Phoenicians and was an oriental form of execution, but it was adopted by the Romans, and by the first century had become the way of dealing with those convicted of crimes of violence." Barabbas immediately comes to mind here. But Barabbas, the insurrectionist, was released (Matthew 27:26) and Jesus, the innocent one, crucified.

Every time I read the crucifixion of our Lord, the words of Paul to the Phillipians immediately come to mind: **"And being**

found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient to death - *even* death on a cross!" (2:8, N.I.V.). The willingness of Jesus to suffer and die such an ignominious and tortuous death staggers all true believers. The measure of God's love in this sacrifice is truly immeasurable. A hymn writer put it this way:

Inscribed upon the cross we see,
In shining letters, 'God is love';
He bears our sins upon the tree,
He brings us mercy from above.

The cross! it takes our guilt away,
It holds the fainting spirit up;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day,
And sweetens every bitter cup.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF JESUS

The title that Pilate put on the cross was: **JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS**. The chief priests tried to get it changed to: "**He said, I am the king of the Jews**". But Pilate would have none of it. I am certain that this was his way of getting back at them.

Most people because they read: "**The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was a high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away**" (19:31). But the seventh day was not the only sabbath day to the Jews. David King in his debate with the sceptic Charles Bradlaugh pointed out "If you turn at your leisure to the first part of the 23rd chapter of Leviticus, you will find Special Sabbaths which are not Seventh-day Sabbaths, but connected with the Passover, and falling on the fifteenth day of the first month, and also on the seventh day of that convocation, whatever day in the week that might be. Now, the Saviour was crucified at the Passover season and, therefore, there were of necessity other

Sabbaths than the Seventh-day Sabbath at that time. Now, what Mr. Bradlaugh has to show in order to make good his case, is, that one of these Special Sabbaths could not have followed the day of Christ's crucifixion". Bradlaugh scoffed at the Bible because it says that Jesus would be "**three days and three nights in the heart of the earth**" (Matthew 12:40). But Bradlaugh, like a lot of other folk, was wrong in assuming that Jesus died and was buried on the sixth day of the week (or Good Friday, as Christendom calls it). The Bible nowhere says that.

The legs of Jesus were not broken by the soldiers because he had already died. We read: "**But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water**" (19:34). This action paved the way for the fulfilment of Zechariah 12:10 and also provided incontrovertible evidence that our Lord had really died.

Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus took care of the body of Jesus. It was buried in "**a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid**" (19:41). A man was once resurrected when his body touched the bones of Elisha in the sepulchre of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20-21). But Jesus' resurrection was different and unique.

Ian S. Davidson,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

- 1) Who built the first city?
- 2) What was the tenth plague God sent upon Egypt?
- 3) Who was Joseph's wife?
- 4) How many curtains did the tabernacle have?
- 5) How many proverbs did King Solomon speak?
- 6) How long did Zimri, king of Israel,

reign?

- 7) In which city did Paul have to leave Trophimus because he was sick?
- 8) Whom did Peter raise from the dead?
- 9) Which island had a harbour called Fair Havens?
- 10) Which angel visited Zechariah?

OBITUARY

WALLACESTONE: It was with deep regret that the church at Wallacestone records the passing of Sister Helen Read in her 102nd year. Sister Read fell asleep in Jesus on Tuesday the 17th October and was laid to rest on Saturday the 21st, the writer officiating. While unable for some years to meet with her brethren because of the frailty of the flesh, it was always a privilege to visit with her, because you always came away cheered in the spirit because of her faith and dignity. The Lord reward her for her faithfulness and example of patience.

James Grant,
Secretary.

MOTHERWELL, Scotland: The Church in Motherwell chronicles the death of two beloved sisters, who had been unable to worship with us for many years because of ill-health. Sister Annie Todd died in June 1995 at Hartwood Hospital, Lanarkshire and Sister Hannah Whyte died on the 21st of September 1995 at Troon, Ayrshire. Their faith is remembered by many of the saints who know them. We thank God for all the nursing staff who gave them much tender and loving care in their final years.

William Purcell,
Secretary.

COMING EVENTS

(A note for your diary)

TRANENT ANNUAL SOCIAL
16th March, 1996
at Loch Centre.

KIRKCALDY SOCIAL

20th April, 1996

KIRKCALDY LADIES DAY

18th May, 1996

GHANA APPEAL

I feel privileged to write again on behalf of our Ghanian brethren, whose zeal for the Lord is causing the increase of His Kingdom there. When I consider the difficulties overcome and the progress made I feel humbled.

Our sister suffering from skin disease is the wife of the brother with the affliction of swollen feet and both conditions are painful. Although the skin infection appears to be under control it is still not cured and, while his swollen feet gives our brother considerable pain, he enthusiastically serves the Lord as best he can. I remember one occasion when, on going to visit his home, I found that he had gone by himself to clear the ground where the meeting house was to be built. It is now at an advanced stage of construction, but requires more funds for completion. I could recount many other examples if space permitted.

Another meeting house is on the point of completion and, while new congregations have the same need, it is necessary to complete those under construction first. New congregations are being established continually.

I count it a privilege to have been associated with these faithful brothers and sisters and have been greatly blessed through being with them. They, along with us, are part of God's holy family, and citizens of His Kingdom.

I most sincerely thank all who have contributed to this work. As the number of congregations grows the funds are continually being stretched.

Any one wishing to assist in this work, please contact Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife. KY12 0DU.

Tel. 01383 728624. Cheques should be made out to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)".

Bill Cook.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

This is the story about four people, everybody, somebody, anybody and nobody.

It happened that there was an important job to be done and everybody was asked to do it. Anybody could have done it, but nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was everybody's job. Everybody thought anybody could do it but nobody realised that everybody would not do it. Well it ended up with everybody blaming somebody but actually nobody asked anybody . . .

A confusing story or is it? Perhaps if truthful we can see ourselves in the tale without much searching. Today the Church needs workers more than ever before, not just one but many. It is time to wake up and go: go thoughtfully forward, to seek and search out the lost. It is true that the workers are few, but if we work together and Evangelise outwards, then we become workers good and true. Could

it be the case we have been too inward looking these past years. An honest answer might be an emphatic "YES" in some cases. We need to come alive to self, to reality, to the cause. It is up to all of us to make a more concerted effort. Do not just keep faith, share it, spread it, live it to the full. Brethren there is an important task to be done: go to it. God depends on you.

A. P. Sharp (Sec),
Newtongrange.

Let us be content to solve our problems, one by one, asking nothing of to-morrow except "*Thy will be done*".

Helen Steiner Rice.

- (1) Cain (Genesis 4:17).
- (2) Death of the firstborn (Exodus 11:5).
- (3) Asenath (Genesis 41:45).
- (4) Ten (Exodus 26:1).
- (5) Three thousand (1 Kings 4:32).
- (6) Seven days (1 Kings 16:15).
- (7) Milletus (2 Timothy 4:20).
- (8) Dorcas or Tabitha (Acts 7:40).
- (9) Crete (Acts 27:7-8).
- (10) Gabriel (Luke 1:19).

ANSWERS

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