

# 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"***

## **What think ye of Christ? Who is He?**

Below is a series of quotations, in chronological order starting from the time of Jesus' ministry, about Jesus by the famous (and the not so famous). Not all the providers of the quotes come from a strictly 'Christian' background or standpoint; some may not even accept Jesus as the divine Son of God; but all of the quotations do say something about the inherent worth, quality and uniqueness of our Lord and Saviour, and perhaps the diversity of backgrounds of those making the statements is itself an important commentary about the widespread appeal of Jesus the Christ.

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### **From the 1st millennium**

"This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." (A voice from heaven; Matt. 3:17)

**"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him." (Jesus disciples, 1st century, Mk 4:41)**

**"Truly this man was the Son of God" (The centurion at the cross; 1st century)**

"He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." (Paul, the apostle, 1st century, Col. 1:15,16)

**"God has revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ, who is his word issuing from the silence." (St. Ignatius of Antioch; died 110)**

"Jesus whom I know as my Redeemer cannot be less than God." (Clement of Alexandria; 150 - 215)

**"He who alone was free among the dead - because he was free to lay down his life and free to take it up again - was for us both victor and victim... and it is because he was the victim that he was also the victor." (St Augustine; 354-430)**

"Christ is the great hidden mystery, the blessed goal, the purpose for which everything was created." (St Maximus the Confessor, Byzantine theologian; 580-662)

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### **From the 2nd millennium**

**"O hidden strength! A man hanging on a cross lifts the weight of eternal death;**

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**a man fixed on wood frees the world from everlasting death. O hidden power!" (St. Anselm; 1033-1109)**

"When I was abandoned by everybody, in my greatest weakness, trembling and afraid of death, when I was persecuted by this wicked world, then I often felt most surely the divine power in this name, Jesus Christ... So, by God's grace, I will live and die for that name." (Martin Luther; 1483-1546)

**"Not only do we not know God except through Jesus Christ; we do not even know ourselves except through Jesus Christ." (Blaise Pascal; 1623-1662)**

"I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of people would die for him." (Napoleon Bonaparte; 1769-1821)

**"I believe there is no one deeper, lovelier, more sympathetic and more perfect than Jesus – not only is there no one else like him, there never could be anyone like him." (Fyodor Dostoevsky; 1821-1881)**

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### **From the 3rd millennium (to date)**

"I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very centre of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure of all history." (HG Wells; 1866-1946)

**"A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act." (Mahatma Gandhi; 1869-1948)**

"As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene...No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life." (Albert Einstein; 1879-1955)

**"Jesus Christ is to me the outstanding personality of all time, all history, both as Son of God and Son of Man. Everything he ever said or did has value for us today and that is something you can say of no other man, dead or alive. There is no easy middle ground to stroll upon. You either accept Jesus or reject him." (Sholem Asch, Jewish author; 1880-1957)**

"A man who was merely a man and said the kind of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." (C S Lewis; 1898-1963)

**"An unsurpassed master of the art of laying bare the inmost core of spiritual truth." (Geza Vermes, author; b1924)**

"After the fall of so many gods in this century, this person, broken at the hands of his opponents and constantly betrayed through the ages by his adherents, is obviously still for innumerable people the most moving figure in the long history of mankind." (Hans Kung, German theologian; b1928)

**"Jesus Christ was an extremist for love, truth and goodness." (Martin Luther King; 1929-1968)**

"Jesus was the first socialist, the first to seek a better life for mankind." (Mikhail Gorbachev; b1931)

(Adapted from website, [www.rejesus.co.uk](http://www.rejesus.co.uk))

# Practical Christianity

## *Are You a Christian Living Beyond Your Means?*

John Whitton, Wigan

### Introduction

As a Christian, should you be concerned about your 'environmental' credentials, in addition to those required for you to be a child of God? Does it matter if you don't recycle old newspapers, throw glass / tins and vegetable peelings into the dustbin rather than the recycling bin and the compost heap? Do you have a responsibility to conserve energy and be energy efficient, not just to reduce your energy bills but because you do not want to waste energy? Is the natural environment a relevant attribute that we should take into account when we are taking decisions as Christian men and women?

This short article focuses on the current energy dilemma facing modern society and asks the broader question '**should Christians be concerned about environmental issues?**' Although the article focuses on our energy habits, it can be applied to virtually any aspect of our environmental impact on the Earth. The article begins with an average day in the Whitton household.

### Saturday Morning, 9 a.m.

- 9.00a.m:** Wake up late after night out in Manchester with friends. Restaurant was full of people, quite a few of whom were smoking. Glad the air conditioning /ventilation was on. Take a look at electronic bedside clock. 9a.m. already! Notice bedroom a bit warm (thermostat set too high), gas central heating on since 7.30am. It is set to go off at 9.30 a.m. Lovely sunny day in May, turn heating off and open windows to let the heat out and cool air in.
- 9.10a.m:** Stagger downstairs, still bleary eyed. Claire up before me this morning and already has washing machine on. Say good morning to Claire and pat Tess (our dog) who is almost unconscious due to excessive sunbathing. Can hear BBC News 24 on lounge TV. Trouble in Middle East. Petrol price rise, again! To build more nuclear power stations in the UK, or not to build. Objection to windfarm construction in the Lake District. Housing shortage, more new construction required. Special report on ethical investments.
- 9.15am:** Shower, water piping hot. Get dressed. Back downstairs for breakfast. Clean teeth with electric toothbrush; have a shave with electric shaver.
- 9.25am:** Put porridge in microwave. Check to see if oats are organic. Switch on kettle for tea. Eat breakfast, can now function.
- 9.45am:** Watch video, recorded last night whilst out.
- 10.45am:** Put energy efficient light bulb in standard lamp that we leave on when we

go out. Peg washing out to dry. Draconian husband will not have an electric dryer in the house, uses too much energy.

**11.00am:** Go shopping with Claire, following a debate regarding which of the two cars to go in. Will be taking Tess for a walk, so take Claire's car (better ventilation for Tess on a hot day). Go to fruit and vegetable shop and healthfood shop; go to supermarket to buy everything else. Have discussion in supermarket about which washing machine liquid to buy, environmentally friendly option more expensive. Pay extra. Discuss going to farmers market next week to buy a month long supply of meat for freezer, olive oil, local cheese, local yoghurt etc.

**12.30pm:** Return home; unload shopping out of new 're-usable' shopping bags. Comment on how busy town was this morning. So much traffic, difficult to park.

**1.00pm:** Sit down to write this article, turn on computer. Think about my environmental impact so far today and how much energy I have used. A lot!!

## Energy, the stuff of life?

Like it or not, the lifestyle that the majority of UK citizens enjoy is controlled by energy and the extraction of natural resources (coal, gas, nuclear energy and subsequently electricity) and the availability of that energy. For example, the society in which we live, and the economy on which our lifestyle is based, is entirely dependent upon cheap and reliable sources of energy (energy is comparatively cheaper now than it has ever been).

Human development over the last few millennia has been characterised by the constant challenge to harness ever increasing amounts of energy in ever more useful ways to assist development. The use of ox and plough made agriculture possible. The use of firewood for cooking and the smelting of metal ores followed more recently by the use of coal in the UK set the scene for the industrial revolution. A century later, oil and natural gas followed by nuclear and other advanced energy technologies completed this conversion, transforming the western world into the society we know today<sup>1</sup>.



The food you eat and water you drink requires energy for it to be produced and treated for human consumption. The car you drive to work or the kids to school, the central heating that warms your house all require a source of energy to function. Without energy we would be hungry and cold. Even worse than this, the TV and iPod would not work!

## The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

Due to overwhelming evidence, the scientific community now agrees that there is a significant relationship between our reliance on fossil fuels and changes to our climate and natural ecosystems. Although the causes of climate change are complex, most scientific evidence points to the build up of industrial pollutants in the atmosphere, especially carbon in the form of Carbon Dioxide or 'CO<sub>2</sub>' (90% of man made CO<sub>2</sub> is from the burning of gas, oil and particularly coal). As a result of this, the atmosphere retains the Earth's heat. This is the so-called 'greenhouse effect'.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) was published in early April 2005 and comprises a global inventory of natural resources. At a cost of £13 million, it has taken 1300 scientists in 95 countries 4 years to complete<sup>2</sup>. The aim of the MA was to conduct a global inventory of the state of our ecosystems, quantify the effect that human activities are having on them and make suggestions for the future to assist key decision makers, such as National Governments<sup>3</sup>.

The news is not good. Unfortunately, the overwhelming conclusion of the MA is that, as a global population that relies on the natural world for survival, **we are living beyond our means**. The planet on which we live is struggling to support the demands that we place upon it and those demands increase year on year as the population grows, which it is doing at a staggering rate.

## I'm a Christian, Get Me Out Of Here.

"So what" I hear you say, "what are we to do"? After all, is it not the responsibility of national and international government to legislate for this sort of thing? Well, yes and no. Government addresses those issues that the majority of the electorate are concerned about such as education, hospitals and anti social behaviour. Issues that are certainly worthy of attention in the UK. But what about the global picture, and do you have any responsibility as a Christian?

The 2001 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) assessment report estimated that if CO<sub>2</sub> levels continue to rise (from the burning of fossil fuels) we will see a global rise in sea levels of between 9cm and 88cm by 2100. This is without the melting ice of Antarctica and Greenland, which over the next few centuries could add up to 10m to sea levels<sup>4</sup>. Large chunks of population will have no choice but to migrate from the coastlines of south and south-east Asia and Africa. Flood threatened people in Bangladesh are already moving to India. The hardship caused by this scenario can be imagined, we see it on our TV often enough as a result of war and famine. Only this time we can do something to help.

Trying to convince a sceptical electorate that climate change is happening now is difficult. Notice the absence of environmental issues during the recent UK election. A sign that these issues are not considered that important by the average voter. However, energy is about to become big news, particularly in the UK where a stark choice between the establishment of new energy sources or the prospect of energy as a bulk import will need to be made soon. Our insatiable thirst for energy continues.

## The role of mankind

God created the universe. Surely a Christian understanding of the environment clearly has to start with this fundamental premise. The creation belongs to God, not to humans. The human role is defined as a steward of creation, exercising dominion under God, whose rule is sovereign. As stewards, we are currently doing a rather dire job of looking after the Earth.

Following the flood that wiped out nearly all life on the planet, God made a covenant with Noah and with every living creature, that he would never again bring about such destruction to the earth (Gen. 9, vv9-11)<sup>5</sup>. The



nature of this covenant is that it emphasises the relationship between all of creation and God.

This covenant with all living things is echoed in Hosea: **“In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground.”** (Hosea 2:18)<sup>5</sup>

The Hebrew word for covenant, *berit*, shares a root with the word used in Genesis to describe divine creativity, *bara*. This root conveys the sense of binding. Through God’s gracious love, creation is bound by the everlasting covenant to God, and all creatures are bound to each other in a web of interrelationship. The creation was established in a divinely intended state of *shalom*, meaning peace, justice, harmony and integrity<sup>6</sup>. It is good and seen by God as good (Genesis 1:31)<sup>5</sup>.

In Jesus Christ, the covenant is renewed: **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”** (2 Corinthians 5:17)<sup>5</sup>.

At the beginning of John’s Gospel (John 1:3)<sup>5</sup> it is made plain that all things were made through him (i.e. Christ) and all things find their fulfilment in him. Through the incarnation, death and resurrection it can be learned that to be fully human is to be in communion with God and know him as the creator of humanity along with the rest of the created order.

Although Christians are on this earth only a little while, our actions (and those of others) do have a very real impact on a local and global scale. Just as Jesus has asked us to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mt 22:29)<sup>5</sup> a logical extension of this principal is to be concerned that our current energy and environmental habits are changing the life of a person, family, community, region in Bangladesh and other low lying places.

## **And Finally...**

I hope you now agree that, as Christian individuals, we need to contribute to a global effort to reduce the environmental and negative social impacts of our actions. The way to do this? Well, that is for you to find out. To recycle your domestic waste and turn of the light when you leave the room is a start. If you leave a light on when you are out of the house, fit an energy efficient bulb. This will save you money as well.

True, it may be inconvenient to make a little extra effort for the environment. But remember, the world in which we live was created by God. Let us bring God glory by being effective stewards of that which He has made for us.

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## **References**

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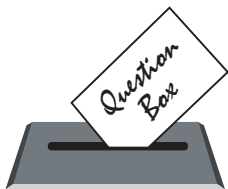
<sup>2</sup> *New Scientist*, (2 April 2005). *The World Can’t Go On Living Beyond Its Means*. Pp. 8 – 10. Reed Business Information Limited, England.

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<sup>4</sup> *New Scientist*, (7 May 2005). *Where Will They All Go When the Sea Rises?* Pp. 8 – 9. Reed Business Information Limited, England.

<sup>5</sup> The Bible. *New International Version (NIV)*. Hodder and Stoughton, London 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Mission and Public Affairs Council, (2005). *Sharing God’s Planet (a Christian vision for a sustainable future)*. Church House Publishing, London.



The two interesting questions that I would like to consider this month have been sent by the same person, and as you will see, the questions relate to the same theme.

QUESTIONS:  
“What is the purpose of Hell?” And, “Can you please define eternal punishment?”



Let us begin with the question concerning the purpose of Hell.

Before we think about its purpose, we need to think about the meaning of the word ‘Hell’ itself, because a little thought will help us to clear up some of those misconceptions and erroneous theories which, for centuries, have been sources of needless confusion and unnecessary anxiety – (unnecessary that it, if one is a Christian!)

The Words.

There are, in fact *three Biblical words*, the meanings of which are often confused because people tend to use them very loosely. Two of the words are **N.T. GREEK** words. The third is an **O.T. HEBREW** word. For instance, in the N.T. we have:-

1. ‘**GEHENNA**’, which occurs 12 times, and, in the A.V., is always translated ‘hell’, and,
2. ‘**HADES**’, which occurs 10 times, and which is also always translated ‘hell’.
3. The third word is the word ‘**SHEOL**’, found in the Old Testament, and which sometimes is *erroneously* said to be the word that corresponds to ‘**GEHENNA**’.

You clearly see the confusion that has been created about the meaning of this word when you understand that, in the Authorised Version, out of the 65 instances it occurs, 31 times it has been translated ‘*hell*’ and 31 times it has been translated ‘*the grave*’! Now, although the word ‘*Sheol*’ literally means ‘*The Place of the Dead*’, you do not need much intelligence to recognize that *Hell* and the *Grave* are *not* the same place! When a body is placed in the grave, it has *not* been consigned to Hell!

But, there is a history behind this inconsistent rendering of the word ‘*Sheol*’. Whilst the translators of the A.V. believed Hell to be the place of punishment for the wicked, they recoiled from the idea of saying that **good people** *also* go to Sheol, and so in passages that related to the death of **good** people, they decided to translate ‘*Sheol*’ as ‘*the grave*’!!

Old Testament Ideas.

However, in Hebrew theology – and, in O.T. teaching - Sheol is described as the place to which *all* the dead go – both good and bad. It is defined as ‘*the place of departed souls*’. In the account of King Saul’s visit to the medium at Endor, the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel is recorded as saying to Saul, “**Tomorrow, you and your sons shall be with me.**” (1st Sam. 28:19).

Even the Oxford Dictionary is close to the truth as far as the meaning of the word is concerned. It says that Sheol is: - ‘*The abode of the dead*’.

Furthermore, in the O.T., Sheol is described as a gloomy place, in which an individual is farther away from God than he was during his lifetime. We are told that, **'the living know that they will die, but the dead do not to know anything'**, (Eccles. 9:5), and, according to Psalm 115:17, **"The dead do not praise Yahveh, nor any who go down into silence."**

New Testament Teaching.

Of course, this is all very different from what the N.T. teaches, but we must bear in mind the fact that in O.T. times, the Hebrews had no clear doctrine concerning the future after death – either of good people or bad people. In early Hebrew times, they never even considered life after death as a possibility. That is why we hear the inconsolable Jacob say, in Gen. 37:35, when he believes that his beloved son Joseph has been killed by wild animals, **"I will go down into the grave to my son mourning"**.

And Job also, in chapter 14:vv 7-14 says, **"There is hope of a tree, if it is cut down that it will sprout again... but man dies and wastes away: yes, man gives up the ghost, and where is he?"** He continues, **"Oh! that thou wouldst hide me in the grave."** So far as the early Hebrew knew, it all ended in the grave - at death.

It was later that the truths of *continued existence* after death, and a *judgment* of the righteous and the wicked were gradually revealed through the later prophets. But, even then, the full truth was not brought to light until the Lord Jesus Himself **"brought life and immortality to light, through the Gospel."** (2nd Tim. 1; 10)

So, back to the word 'HELL'

The word 'GEHENNA', from which it originates, has a *historical origin*. In the Old Testament we read about a valley on the western side of the city of Jerusalem, which was known as 'The Valley of Hinnom'; that is, "Ge Henna". We know nothing about *Hinnom*, except that he owned that valley and must have lived very early in Old Testament times, probably even before the time of Joshua, because **"the valley of the SON of HINNOM"** is mentioned in Josh. 15: 8.

What we *can* say with certainty is that the 'Valley of Hinnom' was the valley in which, by N.T. times, there was a place known as '**Tophet**' that was used as the refuse dump for the city of Jerusalem. And not for refuse alone, but also for the bodies of criminals who had been executed and those of beggars who had died.

Jerusalem had its fair share of beggars who lived – and died – on its streets, and, in the early morning before the city came to life, it was the custom to send a cart around the city to pick up the corpses of any who had died overnight and take them and dump them in the *Valley of Hinnom* – at Tophet - where they were burned. It was here, in the valley, that fires burned constantly, in order to consume corpses and anything else that was thrown there.

Why was the valley used in this way?

It was used in this way because, in O.T. times, during a period when the Israelites were unfaithful to their God, they worshipped the idol, 'Moloch', and such idolatrous worship involved the offering of human sacrifices – particularly of children. Jer. 7: 31 records this evil practice.



The particular idol involved was a huge, hollow figure of brass or bronze, in which a fire was lit so that the idol became red hot. It had outstretched arms on which the human sacrifice was laid, and the screams of the victim were drowned by the beating of drums. In the Old Testament, '*Tophet*' is a word that means '*tablet*', or '*drum*'.

It was the good king JOSIAH who put an end to this evil practice, by scattering the bones of dead men in the valley, thus defiling it and making it permanently unfit for the purpose of worship. You may read about this in 2nd Kings. 23. From that time, GeHENNA had been used as a rubbish dump and a place of constant burning. This explains the words of Jesus, when He says, in Mark 9:48, "**The worm does not die and the fire is not quenched**". Remember, also, that it is Jesus Himself, alone, who speaks of GeHENNA in all of the 12 passages where the word occurs, and he uses it *symbolically* to speak of the punishment and suffering that awaits the wicked.

Remember, also, that Jesus is *not* saying that, after death, there is a place that *literally burns with fire and brimstone*, waiting for the wicked.

A few centuries ago, priests, preachers and parsons often put 'the fear of death' into their congregations, by telling them about the fires of the 'Hell' that awaited them, if they continued to be wicked. They even vividly described the *rattling of the chains and the smell of brimstone!* And, of course, Old Satan was always said to be there, with his *Pitchfork*, to make sure they all received a good roasting

The second question is: "Can you define Eternal Punishment?"

This is, I suggest, answered by the last passage mentioned, 2nd Thess. 1: 9-10. The N.T. clearly describes the destination of the wicked after the Judgment and their place of punishment, as '*eternal banishment from the presence of God*'. The wicked will be denied the fellowship and blessing of everlasting life – '*the life of the ages*' – and, there will be no need for fire and brimstone, for they will *know* that their banishment is something they have deserved because of their rejection of God's offer of forgiveness.

What will add to the pain of banishment will be the knowledge that it **could have been so very different**. No fire! No burning! But the pain and suffering of experiencing the loss of what might have been will be pain enough.

This means that the future of those who reject the Gospel and refuse to accept the Lordship of the Christ is *not annihilation* and *not extinction*. In other words, it is *not the cessation of being*. It is *exclusion from the Presence of God* and all the redeemed; those faithful souls who have accepted His offer of forgiveness.

The *alternative* to this enjoyment of the bliss of salvation should not be overlooked, because it is horrible to contemplate. Eternal punishment involves spending eternity in the presence of all those who have chosen to reject God's Grace and His love. In other words, the unforgiven.

This means the immoral, murders, liars, and all the vicious, cruel and evil in the history of the world.

Surely *that* is the most appalling punishment imaginable!

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# Foundations of the Faith

*A series of studies into the foundational truths  
of the Christian Faith*

## FREEDOM IN CHRIST

There are, no doubt, many people for whom the juxtaposition of 'freedom' and 'Christ' (or Christianity or any other form of religious belief) would represent an enormous contradiction, for one of the common perceptions of religion is that its overwhelming effect is to deny to its adherents the very freedom that our title implies. We must certainly exercise caution when we consider 'freedom in Christ' but the glorious reality is that Jesus Christ **has** liberated his followers in some very special ways.

### **"For freedom Christ has set us free"**

Paul delivered this message to the Churches in Galatia (a region roughly equating with modern-day Turkey). The gentile Christians who largely made up these Churches had received the Gospel through Paul's teaching but at the time of his writing they were having their simple faith in Christ Jesus undermined by Jewish Christians who were trying to insist on their adherence to the rites and customs of the traditional Jewish pattern; and many of the gentile Christians, more in ignorance rather than defiance of Paul's teaching, were being influenced by this insistence. In particular, the Jewish Christians were insisting that the gentile Christians should be observing the traditional Jewish rite of circumcision. Suddenly, the simple truth of the Gospel taught by Paul was being overwhelmed by the old-style Jewish laws and traditions, to the detriment of the Christian experience of the Galatians.

Paul's despair at this turn of events was based on the foundational truth (one that we do well to remember today), **that it is impossible to earn salvation** – either through adherence to the Jewish or any other law. The only basis for salvation then, and now, is through belief in God and faith in the redeeming work of Jesus, the Christ. Paul points out to them that faith had been established as the basis for salvation long before the Law was delivered and even goes on to explain that the Law was given, in all its intricacy and detail, for the very purpose of demonstrating that it was impossible to keep the Law and 'earn' salvation. (Ref: Galatians 2:15ff) The message of Paul, that they had to quickly turn away from the corruptive and salvation threatening notion of gaining salvation through adherence to traditional Jewish customs and re-establish their faith in Christ as the bedrock of their relationship with God, was stark.

### **Two Laws**

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome he identified two distinct 'laws' at work in the world (Romans 8:1ff):

- One 'law' he described as 'the law of sin and death', meaning that there is cause and effect between sin and spiritual death, by which is meant separation from God. Sin is any violation or falling short of any 'legal system' or moral code; that's why Paul could elsewhere assert that, **"all have sinned and fallen short**

**of the glory of God".** The law delivered by God to the nation of Israel through Moses could not be kept in all its detail and therefore could only lead to spiritual death – this is the message of Paul to the saints in Galatia. Today, under whatever moral or legal code we live, we will inevitably fall short of complete adherence.

- The second law that Paul identifies is 'the law of the Spirit (which is) life in Christ Jesus'. This law has cause and effect too, and the effect of this law is just as inevitable as the effect of the first. Those who have the Spirit, have, by definition, life in Christ. And the life that Christ brings forth is the very eternal life of God. That's why Paul could preface his description of these two laws by exulting, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." And writing to Timothy he proclaimed that Jesus Christ "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." **Here indeed is freedom – the Christian has been 'set free' from the law of sin and death.**

To the Churches in Galatia Paul says, **"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."** As Christian readers we should enjoy our freedom in Christ for it is the greatest of blessings, wholly predicated upon the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Non-Christian readers should equally reflect on the fact that there is no freedom from the law of sin and death without faith in Jesus and acceptance of the most precious gift offering – His saving grace, and the freedom that flows from it.

### **Baptism essential to salvation and freedom**

Now there is a clear requirement if we are to enjoy the freedom that Paul writes about. It is a prerequisite that we must be 'in Christ'. And we come to be in Christ through baptism. Galatians 3:26 records the words of Paul: **"..for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."** Paul then goes on to describe what this freedom means in terms that offer the sharpest possible contrast to both the misguided Jewish Christians of the day and the divisiveness of much of the religious and 'natural world today. In this new freedom in Christ, **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."** And in a final condemnation of the pressures that these young in the faith Christians were being put under and to bolster his previous teaching to them Paul unequivocally restates the position: **"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love."** It is a clarion call to all of us even now that we base our Christian lives, not on the predispositions of men who seek to enforce their own creed, but on the foundational truths of belief in God and faith in Christ Jesus.

### **Christian freedom put into practice**

At the start of this article I wrote that caution needs to be exercised when considering 'freedom in Christ'. When Christ came the ancient Jewish law and tradition was deemed to have served its purpose and was banished. Now, Christians living under 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' are required, living and walking by the Spirit, to demonstrate that love, joy, peace kindness faithfulness, self control etc are the dominant themes of our lives. (Gal 5: 22-24) We have been called to freedom so that through love we can be **"servants of one another"**, (Gal 5:13) and fulfill the law through **"loving our neighbour as ourselves"**. (5:14) In Christ Jesus, 'faith working through love' (5:6) is the key for those who in Christ are sons and heirs of God through faith.



## *The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (3)*

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

### **SAMARIA**

Samaria was a district in central Palestine, which lay between Galilee on the north and Judea on the south. Josephus' description of its limits is not too clear. The northern limit was apparently En-Gannim (Joshua 19:21; 21:29); the eastern limit, the Jordan; the western limit, Antipatris; and the southern limit, "the toparchy Acrabattene, some 6 or 7 miles south of Shechem." (The Westminster Dictionary) The Samaritans were a mixed race people. Jews had married foreigners from Mesopotamia and Syria, who had been imported by the Assyrians after they had conquered the ten northern tribes of Israel and had deported many of the inhabitants in 722/721 BC. Later, Nehemiah resisted the offer of help from the Samaritans to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Hostilities between the Jews and Samaritans grew when the latter built a separate temple on Mount Gerizim, under one Sanballat. (This temple was destroyed by the Jewish leader John Hyrcanus in 128 BC) The Samaritans and many Jews not only differed on the question of the holy mount, but also on the question of Holy Scripture. The former accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament.

The bitter hostilities between the Jews and the Samaritans at the time of Jesus are well known. Jesus addressed the problem in his famous parable of "the Good Samaritan." (Luke 10:25-37) Also, Jesus, unlike many Jews in His day, was willing to pass through the Samaritan district on His travels. The encounter with the woman at Jacob's well and the impact it had on the Samaritans (John 4:1-42) make fascinating reading. Jesus prepared the way for the preaching of the gospel in Samaria. (Acts 1:8; 8:4-25) Today, there are still Samaritans in Israel. They number about 500. I have seen pictures of their leaders sacrificing sheep at the time of the Passover.

### **OTHER TERRITORIES**

Luke was a great historian. He is very precise in his details. We read: "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness." (Luke 3:1-2) "Philip's tetrarchy is described in Luke 3:1 as 'the region of Ituraea and Traconitis.' Josephus fills in the details by telling us that it included Auranitis, Gaulanitis, Batanaea and the district around Paneas; in other words, his tetrarchy comprised a small area west of the upper Jordan, to the north of Lake Hulah, and a much larger area east of Jordan, between Lysanias's tetrarchy of Abilene to the north and the Decapolis federation to the south." (F.F. Bruce) (Dear reader, I suggest you consult the maps for guidance and clarification) Incidentally, a *tetrarch* originally meant "ruler of a quarter". The title lost its original meaning.

### **THE DIASPORA**

Jews, in the first century AD, were not confined to the "Holy Land". In fact, they were found all over the ancient world. Luke reveals many of the places they

inhabited. We read: **“And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.”** (Acts 2: 8-11)

There was a significant population of Jews in Egypt at that time. The ratio could be as high as one in eight. Two out of the five districts of Alexandria were Jewish. The city could well have had a population of 300,000. John Marlowe in his book *The Golden Age of Alexandria* has written: “They had more money, more leisure, and more peace than their brethren in Judea. By adopting Greek as their language, and by making comparative studies of Greek philosophy and Hebrew theology, they made Judaism an international religion and of the Jews an international race.” Alexandria was where the Hebrew Scriptures were first translated into Greek. The translation was called the *Septuagint* (“seventy”, the supposed number of translators). Philo (approx. 20 BC to AD 45) was a great Jewish scholar of Alexandria. He wrote in Greek and knew no Hebrew. His allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament were much influenced by Greek philosophy. The *Logos* was one of his favourite words. Later, this term appeared in John’s gospel. (1:1,14). There was constant friction between the Jews and non-Jews of Alexandria. Sometimes riots broke out. The Emperor Claudius’s response, for example, was to urge toleration and kindness from the Gentiles and non-agitation from the Jews.

The Syrian Jews were centred in Damascus. Saul of Tarsus once came to the city on a mission of persecution. He possessed letters from the high priest addressed to the synagogues in Damascus. His object was to find any of the Way, whether they were men or women, and bring them bound unto Jerusalem. (Acts 9:2) His conversion prevented many arrests. Josephus later claimed that 18,000 Jews died in the First Jewish-Roman War. This number could well be accurate. Syrian Antioch (third largest city in the Roman Empire) probably had a population then of 300,000, twelve per cent of whom were Jews.



There were also many Jews living in Asia Minor and Greece. It was Antiochus 111 who once authorised the removal of 2,000 Jewish families to Lydia and Phrygia from Mesopotamia in 200 BC. It is interesting to note that Paul in his missionary journeys encountered Jews in many cities of Asia Minor, including Pisidian Antioch, Iconium and Ephesus. In Greece, he met Jews in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth. Despite the influence of pagan cultures, the Jews fought hard to retain their own beliefs. They still do so in many parts of the world.

Mesopotamia was home to a significant number of Jews. Many failed to return to Palestine with Zerubbabel, Ezra and others after the exile in Babylonia in the early sixth century BC. The Parthians conquered the area in 140 BC and so the Jewish community fell under their influence. “During the reign of the weak Parthian king, Artabanus 111 (AD 16-44), two Jewish brothers in Nehardea, called Asinaeus and Anilaeus, succeeded in setting up a semi-independent Jewish state owing allegiance to him for about fifteen years. But when this state was put down, some 50,000 Jews were killed.” (Edwin Yamauchi)

The Jews established diplomatic relations with Rome in the days of Judas Maccabaeus. Pompey’s conquest of Judea in 63 BC enhanced the Jewish presence in

the capital of the Empire. It is estimated that by the beginning of the Christian era the Jews of Rome numbered between 40,000 and 60,000. Cicero once declared that the colony formed an influential element in Roman society. Luke tells us of a significant event in the history of the Jews in Rome. We read: **"After these things, Paul departed from Athens and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them."** (Acts 18:1-2) (This event was not unique. Tiberius in AD 19 had done the same thing following a financial scandal involving Jews.) Claudius' edict is usually connected with a statement by the Roman biographer and antiquarian Suetonius: "As the Jews were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus, he banished them from Rome." Many commentators are of the view that Suetonius was, in fact, referring to the Christ and was describing the dissension and disorder in the Jewish community at Rome resulting from the introduction of Christianity into one or more of the synagogues of the city. Albert Barnes has written: "A Roman historian might easily mistake the true state of the case; and while they were contending about Christ, he might suppose that it was under him, as a leader, that these tumults were excited." The important fact is that both Luke and Suetonius agree that the Jews were expelled from Rome during Claudius's reign.

All these Jews would either endorse or contribute annually to the upkeep of the Jerusalem Temple. The payment was half a shekel or two *denarii* paid on the first day of Adar (February-March) by each male Jew of twenty years and above. The Jerusalem Temple was the centre of their world. Think of their feelings when it was completely destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

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# WONDERFUL WOMANHOOD

## Women of the Bible 4

Ann Boland, Germany

### REBEKAH

The story of Rebekah begins in **Genesis 24**. Abraham wanted his son Isaac to marry, but he did not want to choose a **daughter of the Canaanites (Gen 24:3)**, so he sent his chief servant to his old country and relatives to choose a wife for Isaac. This is not the easiest task at the best of times, although nowadays parents in our society do not choose the husband or wife for their daughters and sons. One condition was granted to the servant: that he would not have to fulfill his obligation if the woman was unwilling to go back with him. The servant duly did what he was asked, and went to Aram Naharaim. You can imagine his dilemma – how was he to find the right woman for his master's son? We are often in the same position in that we have to make a decision that might change our own or someone else's lives. The servant did exactly the right thing – he prayed! Perhaps the simplest thing in the world, but he was successful. Rebekah came to the well and gave him water, and then watered his

camels. After discussions with her family, she agreed to accompany him back to Abraham and Isaac, and the marriage took place.

Rebekah and Isaac were blessed with twin sons (**Gen 25:23**), and they each had their favourite **Gen 25:28**, which resulted in Rebekah's longing to have Jacob as Isaac's heir. She helped Jacob deceive Isaac by pretending he was Esau, Isaac's favourite. (**Gen 27 : 2 – 30**) Now this may not seem very good to us today, but there are many things in the Bible that might strike us as odd, or inexplicable. However, in the prophecy God gave to Rebekah, He said that the older son would serve the younger son (**Gen 25:23**), and this is exactly what happened. Whether God was guiding Rebekah's actions or not, we don't know: "*ours is not to reason why*".

During this time, something happened that echoed the story of Abraham and Sarah. There was a famine in the land, and God had told Isaac not to go to Egypt, but to stay in the land. Isaac thought that if he told the people that Rebekah was his sister, they would not kill him, the very thing that Abraham had said of Sarah. "History repeats itself" is a phrase many people use today, and we can see why from this passage in **Gen 26: 7-16**. Again God blessed the family by giving them wealth. This may run somewhat contrary to our belief of telling the truth today, but God had his reasons for giving wealth to both Abraham and Isaac.

As we know, after Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob, Esau returned home from hunting, and, finding Jacob had tricked him out of his birthright (**Gen 26: 29 – 34**), and their father's blessing, he planned to kill Jacob. (**Gen 27: 41**) Again Rebekah helped Jacob by telling him to go to her brother, Laban. She obtained Isaac's blessing for Jacob by telling him she didn't want her son to marry any of the women around them, that is, the Hittite women. The story then follows Jacob, and not much more is mentioned about Rebekah or her death. We are only told that she was buried with Isaac and her parents-in-law. **Gen 49: 31**.

We are not given as much information about Rebekah as we were for Sarah, but what we have gives us a fair idea of what she was like. Beautiful (**Gen24:16, and 26:7**), she was willing to travel away from her family to a new land and strange people (**Gen24: 57 – 60**), and she was loved by her husband. (**Gen 24: 67**) The impression we get is that she was loved and respected by her husband and sons.

The lessons we can get from this are as relevant today as they were then – women are to be modest (**Gen 24:65**) and (**1 Timothy 2:9**), and they are to help others (as *all* Christians should – **I Thess. 5:14**). Rebekah didn't have to be shown the gold and silver to give water to the servant and his camels, nor did she hesitate to go with him **Gen 24:57**. The New Testament is full of examples of people who did not hesitate to do what they were asked: **Acts 8:36** – the eunuch wanted to be baptised; **Acts 10:20** – Peter went to preach to the Gentiles; **Acts 22:16** – Saul was urged to be baptised by Ananias.

So, although there was not much written about Rebekah, we can still find many lessons for us today.

## News and Information

### Motherwell, Scotland

With great joy, we welcome to our fellowship, Mrs Patricia Richmond, who was baptised on Sunday, 10th April, 2005.

Patricia is a mother of three, is registered blind and is from a Catholic background. She came to hear and believe the gospel through contact with our sister Barbara Hunter. We pray that her faith in Christ will grow stronger daily and that she will keep the faith, as a loving servant, unto the end.

William Purcell, secretary

## Coming Events

### Peterhead, Scotland Gospel Mission Wednesday 22nd June – Sunday 26th June.

Weekday meetings at 7.00 pm  
Saturday meeting at 6.00 pm.

*Speaker: Mike Ireland*

*A warm welcome awaits all.*

### Peterhead Annual Social Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd October 2005. Saturday

3.00pm Start followed by refreshments  
6.00pm Evening Service

### Sunday

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

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

*A warm welcome awaits all.*

### Stretford, Manchester

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

Each meeting at 7.00pm.

The talks will be followed by light refreshments and discussion.

#### September 17th –

*Speaker: Robert Marsden, Wigan*

#### October 22nd –

*Speaker: John Morgan, Hindley.*

#### November 19th –

*Speaker: Mark Hill, Loughborough.*

### Longshoot, Wigan

Fellowship Day:

#### Saturday, September 24th 2005

A day of fellowship, lessons and fun  
from 10.30 am

*Speaker: David Walker (Northampton)*

### Newtongrange, Scotland

The Annual Social is to be held on

#### Saturday 8th October 2005

commencing at 1.00 pm.

*Speaker: John Kneller, Tranent.*

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

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