

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

Editorial **The Joy of Salvation**

It is in the words of a penitent man who, in the knowledge of the depths that he has plumbed in his personal behaviour, and in the seeking of forgiveness for his wrongdoing, that we find some understanding of the extraordinary nature of our God. Psalm 51 records the words of David as he reflects in deep sorrow on his past actions of deception and betrayal and he has a simple but profound request of God: **"Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."**

We have reflected a number of times in this column on the very considerable challenges that we face in promoting the cause of Christ in an environment in which 'personal choice' is the modern credo and there is a decisive shift away from spiritual values as expressed in Christianity. One of the speakers at the recent European Lectureship held in Lancaster invited his audience to reflect on what it is that **they** find attractive about Christ. The very reasonable basis of this approach is that if **we** find things attractive there is a reasonable chance that others will too. And it's an interesting exercise because all too often we become caught up in trying to think of new and original ways to present the Gospel, grand schemes for evangelism and the like. But at some point in the past it wasn't a programme or a schematic that brought us to Christ; rather it was the fact that having been introduced to Him, we found something innately attractive in the message of hope and peace that Christ brought, something attractive, not in the common depictions of the physical appearance of Jesus, but in His unique sacrificial actions that brought a new and eternal dimension to our thinking.

It would be a difficult call to contend that Jesus deliberately brought a message that was unattractive to people or that God sent his Son with an agenda that was designed to be selective. For sure the message is hard and challenging and at times uncompromising in that it demands change from the person that embraces the message. I am convinced that one of the purposes of Jesus coming in the flesh was to give mankind a physical demonstration of what God is like and what he wants his people to be like. And whether the puritans amongst us like it or not Jesus also

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showed that he understood that we are not 'gods', but that we are human and fallible and prone to mistakes – and he shows us that to grow in love and grace and maturity through the knowledge of Him is the duty of all Christians. Jesus didn't deliberately try to turn people away from himself and his message; he didn't set out to try to make this Christian life so abominably difficult that only a few people of highly irregular fortitude were ever going to meet its demands.

No, Jesus wanted **everybody** to be saved. He didn't come with some intent to restrict the numbers in heaven to a certain pre-defined limit. His Father's house is not a place of a pre-determined number of rooms, which, once they are filled, prevents anyone else from entering. The message of Christ is not for a specific, narrow group but for Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor people, slaves and free men, men and women of all races and colours, young and old people. Peter said it very clearly: **"The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."** (2 Peter 3:9) In fact Jesus said pretty much the same thing himself: **"Come unto me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."** I repeat that Jesus wanted everybody to be saved.

And how did he demonstrate this? He healed people who were sick; he made blind people see and lame people walk; he fed people who were hungry; raised people from the dead; met with people whom other religious authorities ignored, vilified or rejected; he touched people with the horrible disease of leprosy. Could these possibly be the actions of one who was trying to make his message unattractive or unappealing? Rather we see the actions of someone who was preparing the ground to preach the message of grace and salvation through Jesus.

In fact it was one of the common themes of Jesus' teaching that He was ushering in a whole new and better regime. His 'Sermon on the Mount' was an astonishing reconstruction of the way that men and women should behave towards one another. Love your enemies and do good to those that hate you! The universality of his teaching was in direct contrast to the accepted teachers of the day, the Rabbis, who taught that there were a whole host of unforgiveable sins and instead he insisted that where there is repentance and a genuine desire to change there **is** forgiveness. Jesus didn't abruptly write off the cheats and the con-men – he told them to change; he didn't join in with the throng in condemnation of the prostitute – he told her she was forgiven and of the need to stop sinning; he didn't ignore the drunks – he told them that there was a better and more wholesome and fulfilling spirit to be filled with. And the whole time he was the perfect embodiment and example of his teaching.

So what do we find attractive about Christ and Christianity. And what do we expect that others might find equally find attractive. Well we certainly aren't going to get very far if we look to the 'splendour' of our buildings; it's unlikely (except maybe with a few exceptions) to be the quality of our singing that will inspire others; our social programmes may help us make a few contacts but they are unlikely to be a winning formula.

No the attraction of the Gospel is vested purely and simply in the person and the work of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ. It is the person of Christ, God in the flesh to whom we turned and to whom others will ultimately be attracted. And it is not a doctrine or a system that we preach, but a person. We have been attracted to Jesus and he has added us to his family, the Church. And therein is a mighty responsibility for us, because what people will also be attracted to, is the sight of God's people, His Church living in close and loving harmony and expressing, to the best of our ability, those qualities that Jesus demonstrated to us as we seek to become people who are like Him. **"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"** (Micah 6:8) It is the joy of our salvation.

WONDERFUL WOMAN

Women of the Bible 14

Ann Boland, Germany

Now we come to one of the most beautiful books about women in the Bible. We looked at Ruth, and now we will look at Esther. Her story is different from that of Ruth, in that she was chosen to be a queen. With riches and influence, it is all too easy to choose the wrong path, as we saw with Jezebel.

The story begins with a banquet given by King Xerxes. On the seventh day of feasting he commanded his queen, Vashti, to appear before him and his guests, so she could display her beauty (**Esther 1:11**). Whatever her reason, Vashti refused, causing the king to consult the experts in law and justice. They agreed that Vashti's behaviour would set an example to the other women in the kingdom, and that they would despise their husbands. So Vashti was banished from the king's presence, and the search began for a new queen. **Esther 2** describes the method by which the king would choose his new queen. We know that Esther won his favour, but also that Mordecai told her not to reveal her family background, presumably because the Jews were not tolerated in the kingdom.

The story is told of how Mordecai uncovered a plot to kill the king, which was foiled, and the deed recorded in the annals of the king. Chapter 3 is the beginning of the troubles for Mordecai. He refused to kneel down and pay Haman honour, even though the king had commanded it. Haman was obviously a "puffed up" man, as he resented this act of Mordecai's, and began a persecution of the Jews. Mordecai appealed to Esther, as she was able to gain access to the king's presence. However, the king had to summon one to his presence. Anyone entering without his summons would be put to death, unless he stretched out his gold sceptre to the one who entered. Mordecai's answer was that, even though she was queen, she would also be persecuted as a Jew. It must have taken a lot of courage to stand before the king, without his permission, but faith makes one strong. The king received Esther, who invited him and Haman to a banquet. This appealed to Haman, as we can see in **Esther 5:9 -14**. The only thing that marred his pleasure was that Mordecai did not honour him as he passed. The advice of his wife and friends was to have a gallows built, and that he should ask the king to hang Mordecai on it. What evil thoughts are brought with pride!

What really happened was the opposite of Haman's plans. The king read the annals, and discovered that Mordecai had not been rewarded for revealing the assassination plot. The twist in the tail came at Esther's feast. The king asked Haman what he would do for a man who was to be honoured by the king. Of course, Haman thought it was himself, and thought of the most "showy" things he could: a royal robe that had been worn by the king, a horse that the king had ridden, a royal crest on its head, and a prince to lead the horse and the honoured man through the streets of the city. We are reminded of **Matthew 19:13 many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first**. If we seek to put ourselves first, we will surely be last. We know who the king was referring to, and the man who led the horse was Haman. We can imagine what thoughts filled his head, while leading the horse through the city.

The conclusion of the story is that Esther revealed her origins, and Haman was hanged on the very gallows he had made for Mordecai.

Esther certainly had courage, but that courage was founded on a love for God. We can do no better than remember the words in **Philippians 4:13 I can do everything through Him who gives me strength**.

THE SEVEN LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES (5)

(Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell)



THYATIRA

The Turkish town of Akhisar occupies the site of ancient Thyatira. The location is south-east of Pergamum and 35 miles inland. Thyatira was once a Macedonian colony, but came under Roman rule in 133 BC.

The city was famous for its trade-guilds. 'Perhaps the one salient thing about Thyatira is the unusual prominence of trade-guilds in the few available sources. There are references to unions of clothiers, bakers, tanners, potters, linen-workers, wool-merchants, slave-traders, copper-smiths and dyers' (C. J. Hemer). Paul's first convert on European soil was, of course,

Lydia from Thyatira and she was "a seller of purple" (Acts 16:14a). 'True purple dye, which was obtained from the murex shell fish by the Phoenicians and others, was the only colour-fast dye known to the ancient world. Purple thus became the pre-eminent status symbol of royalty and of the wealthy' (Edwin Yamauchi). We note, for example, that the rich man in the account of the rich man and Lazarus "was clothed in purple and fine linen" (Luke 16:19) and Jesus was forced to wear a purple robe prior to His crucifixion (Mark 15:17, 20; John 19: 2, 5).

THE LETTER

We find the letter in Revelation 2:18-29. The description of Jesus (18) is a repeat of part of the description found in Revelation 1: 14,15a. Jesus' piercing eyes see everything and His feet "like fine brass" can destroy anything in His path. He knew everything about them - their love (*agape*), service (*diakonia*), faith (*pistis*), patience (*hupomone*) and works (*erga*) - "and the last to be more than the first" (19b). Truly, the works of every congregation should never be diminishing, but growing.

JEZEBEL

We recall immediately the Jezebel of the Old Testament, the daughter of Ethbaal, priest king of Tyre and Sidon and wife of Ahab, king of Israel. She was the most wicked of women, who domineered her weak husband. The Jezebel of Thyatira was equally wicked - a seductive prophetess, who encouraged immorality and idolatry under the cloak of religion. This was the same doctrine as the Nicolaitans (2:15).

She undoubtedly encouraged the saints to follow in the ways of the pagan guilds, whose ways included attendance at immoral feasts. Her spurious argument was this: to defeat Satan, you had to know "the depths of Satan" (24). The prize was by compromise! Nothing could be further from the truth! We serve a wonderful God. We read that He gave this wicked Jezebel the space or opportunity to repent, but sadly she did not (21). Her punishment was clear - illness for her, great tribulation for her followers and death for her natural children. (Some commentators see things differently here. Jezebel stands for a sect within the congregation. The adulterers are those who participate in the sins of the sect and the "children" are those who embrace its teaching and ways.)

WORKS

One thing that strikes me about this short epistle is the importance it places upon works for God. We read: "I know your works...and your patience and your works; and the last to be more than the first" (19); "...and I will give unto everyone of you according to your works" (23b); "And he who overcomes and keeps my works unto the end, to him I will give power over the nations..." (26).

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, we are saved by faith at work. No wonder James once wrote: "You

see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only...For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (2:24, 26). We should read the above words in their context and note James' references to Abraham and Rahab, both great examples of *obedient* servants.

HOLD FAST

Christians are encouraged to "hold fast" until the Master comes (25). They must strive never to lose what they already have. Satan wants them to lose everything, even their very souls. But he must be constantly resisted and overcome in the strength of the Holy Spirit. One day the followers of Christ will be victorious and they will share in Christ's dominion over the nations, which is the subject of prophecy (Psalm 2:8,9). The war between good and evil, God and Satan, light and darkness, has been going on since virtually the beginning of time. The casualties of this war cannot be numbered. They are enormous. The costs also cannot be calculated. The greatest cost of all, of course, was in the death of the Son of God - Jesus of Nazareth. But He triumphed over Satan, suffering and the grave and herein lies the hope of all His faithful followers.

THE MORNING STAR

We read: "And I will give him the morning star" (28). "Him" refers to one who overcomes and keeps God's works (26a). The "morning star" is Jesus Himself (Revelation 22:16). "As the morning star rules the heavens, so believers will rule with Christ: they will share in His royal splendour and dominion" (Nu.24:17; cf. Mt. 2:2). The star is always the symbol of royalty, being linked with the sceptre (Hendriksen).

SING LOUDER OR WARN OF DANGER?

At a religious service in the USA some years ago, an old man who had moved to America from Germany after the war, asked to be allowed to make a statement to the congregation.

He went to the front of the auditorium and, clearly very distressed, told the congregation that during the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews in Germany, he had been a member of a small church whose meeting place was near a railway line along which the trains passed as they took truck loads of Jewish men, women and children to the concentration camps where they were eventually killed.

He said that as they held their services in their meeting place, they heard the cries of the persecuted Jews as the train passed by and they knew that something terrible was happening. But they did nothing. They were afraid that if they protested at what was being done, Himmler's storm troopers would come and close the church down - and probably do something even worse. And so the church did nothing.

The old man said, "As the trains passed by, day after day, we heard them crying, and we just sang louder." And he fell to his knees and cried, "O God, forgive us!"

On September 10th last year, the national newspapers carried the story of an 11-year old girl named Tilly Smith, who went with her parents to Thailand on holiday.

Whilst they were on the beach in Phuket, she noticed the strange way in which the sea was bubbling up and saw that it seemed to be draining away from the beach and she recognised what this meant, because just two weeks before, at school in Surrey, England, her teacher had explained what happens when there is a Tsunami.

She immediately recognised the danger and warned her parents, and the family ran along the beach shouting to the holidaymakers and warning them to leave at once because they were in grave danger. The people listened to the warning, and, remarkably, that beach was one of the few on which no one was killed by the Boxing Day 2004 Tsunami.

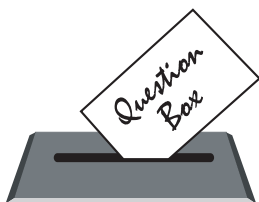
The 11-year old Tilly has since been awarded a 'Certificate of Merit' by the Marine Society for saving the lives of those people on Phuket beach.

What are we going to do with the soul-saving gospel?

We claim to know that our fellow men are in danger. We claim to believe they need to be saved from danger.

Shall we, like young Tilly Smith, warn them and tell them how to be saved? Or shall we stay in our meeting places **and just sing louder?**

This contribution was received anonymously by post. I can certainly vouch for the veracity of the Tilly Smith part of the piece - in fact several newspapers carried her story in the immediate aftermath of the Tsunami (the September date was when she received her award). I can't verify the first part of the story but take it on trust; whichever way, there is a clear and useful lesson. Editor



QUESTION:
Angels – what is their place
in the divine Purpose?
~ PART 2 ~



I concluded the first part of my reply to the question(s) raised on the subject of Angels by pointing out that the reason why the inspired writer of the letter to the Hebrews devoted so much attention to this subject was because, among those to whom the letter was sent, there were some who had evidently been influenced by others who, because they believed that angels possessed special powers, were claiming that the Lord Jesus Himself was some superior sort of angelic being. Such teaching clearly denies the Deity of Christ, and the purpose of the letter, therefore, was to establish the irreconcilable difference - this unbridgeable gulf - which exists between the nature of the Son of God and *all* created beings, including the angelic orders.

A Persistent Heresy.

I suggest that we should take a firm hold on what the first and second chapters of the Hebrew letter reveals. It is important that we should have it firmly fixed in our own minds, because even today there are religious groups that are guilty of teaching the same heresy whilst parading under the Christian banner. Here are a few examples.

- 1) The so-called "Jehovah's Witnesses" teach that Jesus was '*an angel named Michael, and was the first created being*'.
- 2) The doctrine taught by Mormonism's earliest leaders declared that: "*Adam is our god and the only god with whom we have to do*", and that '*When Adam came to Earth he brought one of his wives with him, and, on the plains of Bethlehem, the marriage was consummated and Jesus was born, the offspring of Adam and Mary*'.
- 3) Christadelphians also deny His pre-existence and teach that, prior to His birth in Bethlehem, He was merely an 'idea' or a 'thought', in the mind of God.

So this heresy is NOT DEAD, even yet.

The Son is not an Angelic being.

Not only does the writer of this letter shows that Jesus is not merely an angel, in the first two

chapters he sets out seven important differences between the Lord Jesus and the angelic orders.

1. He has, by inheritance, obtained 'a more excellent NAME' than the angels, ch.1:4, and, in v.5 the writer tells us what that name is: **"to which of the angels did God say, at any time, 'Thou art My Son?'" "I will be to Him a Father and He shall be to me a Son"**.
2. The 6th verse tells us that Angels are required to *worship* Him. God said, **"Let all the angels of God worship Him"**.
3. The function of angels is to serve, whilst *He* is destined to reign, v7. They are sent out as servants. The very word '*angelos*' means 'messenger'. But God says, of the Son; **"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever."** v.8.
4. Angels are *created* beings. In other words, they are 'creatures'. But the Lord Jesus, as the 'Word', who existed in the beginning with God, is Himself the Creator. In v.10 God addresses the Son in these words: **"In the beginning Thou hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands..."**
5. As created beings, the very existence of the angels is a *dependent* existence, whilst His existence is *un-derived* and *eternal*; **"Thou art the same and thy years will never end"**, v.12. In John 5:26, Jesus claims that He has **"life in Himself"**. And he further claims, **"I have the power to lay down my life and I have the power to take it up again"**, thus revealing that his death was a wholly voluntary death.
6. He is exalted far above the angels, at the right hand of the Father. v.13. **"To which of the angels has God ever said; 'Sit at my right hand.'"**
7. HE has *authority* far beyond anything granted to angels, ch.2: .5-8. God has **"crowned the Son with glory and honour and all things have been put under his feet."**

If we then summarise these statements, this is what we find. He is:

- Different in Nature - He is Eternal, possessing the nature of Deity.
- Different in Relationship - the Son.
- Different in Status - He is to be worshipped.
- Different in Dignity - He occupies the Throne.
- Different in Title - addressed by God as 'My Son'.
- Different in Power and Authority as 'Creator'.
- Different in Function - He is Destined to Reign.

And finally. if we look at ch.2:9, we see that, whilst He is, in every way *above* the Angels, He became, for a little time, *lower* than the Angels - but to accomplish a great purpose: **"That He, by the grace of God, might taste death for every one"**. In other words, **Jesus became Man, having a physical body, in order to suffer a physical death because as a Spiritual Being He could not have died. Or, as Paul puts it in Rom. 8:3, "God sent his son in the likeness (form) of sinful flesh, and for sin."**

So what is the conclusion?

The writer of this letter is saying to these Hebrew Christians: "Whatever else you make of the angels, and even considering their role in the grand redemptive purpose of God and the service they have rendered in the past, Jesus, the Son of God, *is not-* and *never was* - an angel. He has done what no angel could ever do. Though He is essentially HIGHER than angels, He stooped to the level of fallen man, and became a man, in order to raise you above the level of angels."

**Questions please to: Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby,
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What is the one baptism (in Ephesians 4:3)

(Allan Ashurst, Stretford)

There is one baptism.

Several baptisms are mentioned in the New Testament, for example:

- John's baptism in water for the remission of sins,
- Baptism in the holy Spirit by the Lord Jesus and
- Baptism in water into the name of Jesus Christ.
- But when Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians he stated there is one baptism.

Ephesians 4:3: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

This tells us that just as there is only one Lord, one faith and one God and Father of all, so there is only one baptism. Evidently by the time Paul wrote this letter there was only one baptism and other baptisms had been phased out.

Which was that one baptism at that time Paul wrote this letter?

First we need to understand that in the Bible the word "baptism" means: immersion (Romans 6:1-5 Colossians 2:12), for example immersion in water, **or** figuratively: an overwhelming, such as when the twelve Apostles were overwhelmed with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:26-2:14).

John's baptism in water had been superseded because in Acts 19:5 those who were immersed into John's baptism were re-immersed, this time into the name of Jesus (Acts 19:5). However the apostles and the early Church never ceased practising baptism in water. This then was the one "baptism." That it could not be baptism in the holy Spirit will be seen in the passages of scripture quoted below *.

Why baptise people in water? What does it signify?

Repentant believers sins are forgiven in baptism.

Before He ascended to heaven the Lord Jesus gave his parting instruction to the Apostles to baptise those who implicitly believe in Him:

Matthew 28:18-20: "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, all authority is given to me in heaven and in earth. Therefore you go, and make disciples of **all nations, baptising them** into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen."

This baptism is for **all nations**, both Jews and non-Jews.

[*Note: *This is baptism in water and not baptism in the Holy Spirit, because baptism in water was to be done by the Apostles whereas baptism the Holy Spirit was done only by the Lord Jesus (Matthew 3:11)]*

When repentant believers are baptised in water correctly they enter **into** a close relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit:

"baptising them **into** (Greek: *eis*) **the name of** the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"

Several days after the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven the Apostle Peter carried out the Lord's parting instructions. He commanded sorrowing believers to:

"Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of sins**, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38)

Believers in the Lord Jesus have to repent and be baptised for their sins to be forgiven. Like Saul of Tarsus, at baptism they are calling on the name of the Lord. (Acts 22:16). So Peter calls it a good conscience's plea to God based on the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. (1 Peter 3:21)

The baptised person will receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in their lives (see footnote). This promise is made to everyone who hears the Gospel - the good news that Jesus died on the cross for our sins to be forgiven, and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

"For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, **even as many as the Lord our God shall call.**" (Acts 2:39)

The message of the Gospel is God's way of calling us to turn to Him.

2 Thessalonians 2:14: "Unto which **he called you by our gospel**, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

They become members of the Lord Jesus' Church.

The Lord Jesus adds repentant believers to His Church when they are baptised for the forgiveness of their sins. (cp. Acts 2:40-41)

(Acts 2:47) "...the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved."

Baptism in water is burial and resurrection.

The repentant believer is buried with the Lord Jesus in baptism. They bury their old life. They rise with Jesus. They rise from baptism to a new life.

Reminding Roman and Colossian Christians how they became Christians Paul wrote:

Romans 6:3-4: "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Colossians 2:12: "... buried with Him in baptism, in which also you were risen with *Him* through the faith of the operation of God, who raised Him out of the dead."

[* Note: *This is baptism in water and not baptism in the Holy Spirit, because the baptism in Romans 6:1-5 and Colossians 2:12 is both a burial and a resurrection. The Apostles were overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit but they were not raised from out of the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the Holy Spirit typifies immersion in the sense of the person being overwhelmed but it does not typify resurrection, so the baptism in Romans 6:1-5 and Colossians 2:12 cannot be the baptism in the holy Spirit.*]

There is one faith.

In the one baptism, that is baptism in water, the repentant believer "puts on Christ".

Some say there was one way of salvation for the Jews [salvation by baptism in water for the forgiveness of sins] and another way for the non-Jews [salvation before baptism in water].

Paul reminded the Galatian Jews and non-Jew Christians that both Jew and non-Jew become Christians the same way:

Galatians 3:26-29: "For you are **all** the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, **because - as many of you as** have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. **There is neither Jew nor Greek**, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

We have to insist on adherence to that one faith which was given at the beginning.

Jude 1:3: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write to you of the **common** salvation, it was needful for me to write to you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for **the faith** which was **once** delivered to the saints."

"If it is new - it cannot be true."

There is - and has been from the beginning of the Church - just one way of salvation, common to both Jew and non-Jew. Those who introduce or teach any other way of salvation are to be rejected.

Galatians 1:8-9: "...but even if we or an angel from heaven, preaches any other gospel to you contrary to what we declared unto you, let him be rejected. As we have said before, so I also say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you contrary to what you received, let him be rejected."

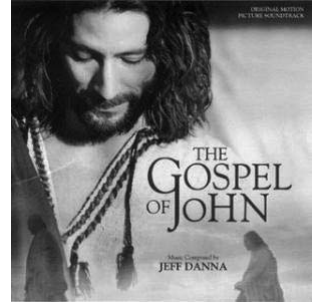
FOOTNOTE:

All true Christians have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This should not be confused with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. These were imparted by the laying on of the apostles' hands. The Samaritans, having been baptised, had received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:28) but it required the apostles to go from Jerusalem to lay hands on them so that they could have miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-18).

Understanding the Life of Jesus Jesus and 'The Feast of Tabernacles'.

(Robert Marsden, Wigan)

At first sight it could be concluded that Jesus' attendance at the Feast of Tabernacles, recorded in John Chapter 7, is an unremarkable event in his life. He didn't perform any great act of healing, no extraordinary miracle or sign was unveiled and no fanfare accompanied his presence (in fact John records that Jesus attended privately and, at least initially, in a manner designed not to attract attention to himself). And yet, as we have continuously seen in this series of studies, the way in which Jesus uses this traditional and important Jewish festival to present teaching about his nature and purpose is quite remarkable. But first we need to look at the background of the Feast of Tabernacles.



The Feast of Tabernacles

Chronologically, The Feast of Tabernacles is the 6th of the 7 most important Jewish festivals (with the seventh, by Jewish custom, held to be the eighth or extra day which immediately followed on from the seven days of Tabernacles itself. *"Tabernacles is the only feast to have an extra day. It has been suggested that the LORD is saying to his people at the end of the Feast, "Hasn't this been good? Lets spend another day together." The people will have gone back into their homes but the rejoicing continues on this crowning day, which celebrates the completion of renewal and invokes anticipation of the Messianic age."* ([//fp.thebeers.f9.co.uk](http://fp.thebeers.f9.co.uk)) It was one of the three festivals (in addition to Passover and Pentecost) when Jewish males were required to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It was held in the Jewish month of Tishri, which covers our September/October period – so it is one of the 4 autumn festivals. In 2006 for example the festival takes place over the seven days of October 7th to 13th. The festival is also referred to as the Feast (Festival) of Ingathering or the Feast (Festival) of Booths and these two latter names convey the main elements of the festival:

- Joy at the ingathering of the harvest
- Remembrance of the wilderness wanderings when the nation of Israel dwelt in temporary booths for shelter prior to accession to the Promised Land.

During Tabernacles, Jews are required to live in temporary dwellings (booths), in which they eat and sleep. These are simple constructions made of a wooden frame and covered with leaves and branches. Traditionally the roof should be open so that the dwellers can look up and see the stars. The booth is intended to signify the temporary nature of the dwelling in the wilderness prior to entering into the Promised Land (see Lev. 23:39-43). Others see a reference to the temporary nature of the physical body as referred to by Paul (2 Cor. 5). The eighth (extra) day of the celebration, the day when they return to their normal homes signifies the permanence of the accession to Canaan.

It is widely held amongst Jews that this is the most important of all the Jewish festivals. Much regard is given to the prophecy of Zechariah 14 in the belief that God has decreed that the festival should be celebrated until the coming of the Messiah and the start of the 1000-year reign. Many Jews refer to the feast as the 'In-Gathering', not only in reference to the harvest, but more philosophically with reference to the restoration of the nation State of Israel and the

return of Jews to Jerusalem as part of the process of in-gathering that is leading (in their tradition) to the coming of the Messiah.

Tabernacles is the only festival that is commanded to be an unmitigated joyous celebration and both in Old Testament times and today where the festival is celebrated it is accompanied by much singing, dancing, music and light. (This is in great contrast to Yom Kippur that is observed with solemnity and fasting just 5 days before the start of Tabernacles).

"The feast of Tabernacles, the harvest festival of the Jewish Church, was the most popular and important festival after the Captivity. At Jerusalem it was a gala day. It was to the autumn pilgrims, who arrived on the 14th (of the month Tisri, the feast beginning on the 15th) day, like entrance into a silvan city. Roofs and courtyards, streets and squares, roads and gardens, were green with boughs of citron and myrtle palm and willow. The booths recalled the pilgrimage through the wilderness. The ingathering of fruits prophesied of the spiritual harvest." (Valling's Jesus Christ, p. 133)

Two elements of the festival perhaps stand out in terms of the teaching of Jesus in the Temple at Tabernacles that John records. First, it became traditional that on each of the seven days of the festival the Priest would bring gold pitchers of water from the Pool of Siloam to the temple and pour out the water over the altar. This was to signify Israel's gratitude for the rain that produced the harvest and to provide an occasion for prayer for rain for the forthcoming rainy season (ref: Isaiah 12: 1-3). Water also signified the water that was brought from the rock at Horeb by Moses.

Second, at the end of the first day of the celebration, worshippers would gather in the Temple compound, in the Court of the Women, where a great illumination took place. This involves four great candelabras being filled with oil and young men constantly climbing ladders to top up the oil. This caused a great illumination and dancing and music accompanied this part of the festival.

*"At the end of the first day of Tabernacles, the worshippers congregated in the Court of Women where a great illumination took place. Four huge golden lamps or candelabras, each with four golden bowls were filled with oil by four youths of priestly descent. They had to use four ladders for this task. According to the saying, "There was not a court in Jerusalem that was not lit up by it". Around the lamps a sacred dance was conducted by **hassidim** (saints) and prominent leaders with flaming torches in their hands. This was accompanied by Levites playing harps, lutes, cymbals, trumpets and "instruments without number" standing on the fifteen steps leading up from the Court of Women to the Court of Israel, according to the "songs of Degrees" in Psalms.*

The symbolism of this event looked back and forward.

*In the past God led Israel in the wilderness with the pillar of fire and His **Shekeinah** had dwelt in the Tabernacle and the first Temple (but not in the second Temple).*

In the future Messiah, would be the light of YHVH arising on the people."
(//fp.thebeers.f9.co.uk)

Jesus Teaching

In the second chapter of John, Jesus is reported as having gone to the Temple at the time of the Passover Feast and reacted strongly to the commercial activity that was taking place, referring tellingly to the desecration of "my Father's house". Now Jesus once more takes his message directly into the heart of the Jewish community, and again uses one of their great festivals, when representatives from Jewish communities from a wide area were in Jerusalem,

to give himself a platform for delivering his teaching. And that teaching once again stresses Jesus' own relationship to the Father and His (the Father's) work.

Prior to the time of festival, Jesus had clearly spent some time in Galilee, probably spending some time with his family around Nazareth. He had declined to travel to Jerusalem with his brothers, preferring to remain in Galilee for a few days before travelling. Jesus deliberately kept his presence in Jerusalem low profile, until "about the middle of the feast" Jesus suddenly goes up to the Temple and teaches. And the significant theme, in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles when the Jews look forward to the coming Messiah, is that He, Jesus, the one who is amongst them at that very time, is the one who has come from God and has come with the authority of God. In effect it is another statement of Jesus' Sonship and deity, anathema to the disbelieving majority of Jews. It is certainly another bold and audacious move by Jesus, doubtless designed to achieve maximum effect, that served to increase the already febrile discussion that was taking place about the His true nature and status.

Jesus the Water of Life

We mentioned above the tradition of the daily gathering and pouring of the water from the Pool of Siloam. The seventh and last day of the feast is referred to as 'the last great day' and the Great Hosanna. This was the climax of the feast and the crowd joyously gathered waving huge palm leaves. The priest would recite the Hallel (Psalm 118) and at every line the crowd would shout 'Hallelujah'. It has been said of this celebration that, "He that has not seen *Simchat bet ha Sho'ebhah* has not seen joy in this life."

Yet it was on this great last day, at the end of a week when the daily pouring of water has signified the life of the harvest and the water of life that sprang from the rock at Horeb in the wilderness (and life giving water was a theme of the readings from scripture during the feast), on this day of great Messianic expectation for the Jews, that Jesus goes back to the Temple and says, "**If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'**" (John 7:37.38) What is Jesus saying but: '**I am the Messiah**'. And what debate is stirred up amongst the people and the Jewish hierarchy such that even the officers sent to arrest Jesus go back to the chief priests and Pharisees, without having taken Jesus, saying, "No man ever spoke like this man."

Jesus the Light of the World

Although John's Gospel interposes the incident of the woman taken in the act of adultery into the text at the start of chapter 8 (erroneously placed there according to many commentators), it is the very next day, the 'extra day' of the festival that Jesus goes back to the Temple and teaches again with another astonishing claim. The lighting of the Temple, the great illumination, has been a major event during the feast and the cause of immense joy and celebration. Now Jesus tells them, "**I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.**" (John 8:12) And once again before the Pharisees, Jesus states his authority for this statement because: "**the Father who sent me bears witness to me**".

These events mark another ratchet in the revelation of Jesus. He has now taken his message in person into the heart of the Jewish establishment and amongst the people at one of their great festivals. He has used some of the most significant features of the week's celebration to stamp his claims to Messiahship. Stop looking back to history; stop looking forward for the fulfilment of Messianic prophecy; because the Messiah is here, amongst you today, prophecy is fulfilled – the water of life, the light of the world is with you. Hear and believe because this is the real cause for celebration and joy!

A Shiny, Red Apple..... the Face of a Babe..... (Randy Milam, USA)

A h.... Perfection!

The Biblical concept of perfection is a condition of wholeness or completeness.

The prophecies concerning the Messiah all alluded to a perfect Saviour yet to come... a Saviour who would provide a "perfect" avenue of salvation for the world, an avenue of wholeness or completeness. Jesus, himself the fulfilment of the prophecies, is undeniably accepted as the only "perfect" human to be borne of woman and walk this imperfect world as a normal human being is expected to.

Consider your own ideas of perfection, for a moment:

- ...A nice red, juicy apple? Maybe. A nice, shiny, red apple is often used as the definitive object of perfection.
- ...A wedding band? Maybe. Ministers, with ring in hand, stand before bride and groom and speak of the perfection of the institution of marriage.
- ...The angelic smile of an infant? Maybe. What parent has ever beheld their child, as the wee one smiled into their own eyes, and not said a silent prayer of thanks to the Lord for the perfection of birth and life?

How about a tree?A tree ???A tree !!!

What could be more perfect than a tree, whether dressed with ornaments and coloured lights at Christmastime, or with the leaves of summer; whether having a perfect shape, or bowed, bent and broken. Our world and life as we know it could not exist without trees.

An acorn falls to the ground and soon a tiny sprig appears sending, at once, its roots into the soil and limbs into the air, each providing nurture for the new sapling. The sapling grows and matures eventually bearing fruit that bears more acorns that fall to the ground - and then the cycle starts all over again. This eternal cycle, all by itself, represents wholeness, completeness or perfection. But a tree is so much more.

A tree, in the warm months, with all its "arms" reaching Heavenward, presents countless leaves on its outstretched limbs. The foliage provides solutions for a multitude of needs, each leaf being a minute factory combining the sap from the roots with the vitamins conveyed by the warm rays of sunshine to make food to support the growth of the tree and allowing it to continue in its endless growth cycle. Count the birds of the air that nest among the twigs and leaves of trees. They are numberless...and depend on trees for their protection and security.

Roots! A tree cannot exist without a sound and healthy root system! Yet roots also provide many benefits to mankind.

An added bonus comes from the ability of the tree, via the root system, to hold soil in place on banks and slopes to help prevent erosion. Many a mudslide has occurred on slopes that had no trees present to “hold on” to the soil when heavy rains sought to wash it away.

How about shade, you ask??? How many picnics or back yard cook-outs have you attended that were not enhanced by the luxurious shade provided by the limbs and foliage of the stately elm or other similar shade tree? Most such cook-outs would not occur if not for the sun-protecting foliage that shade trees provide. It is the shade from trees that turns a sun-bleached “out-back” area into a bona fide back yard living room, one that is easily adaptable for all sorts of family activities. We just couldn’t get along without our shade trees!!!

Turn in your New Testament (which is most-likely printed on paper supplied by a tree) to Matthew’s account of the crucifixion recorded in the 27th chapter, or one of the parallel passages in the other gospels depicting the Saviour’s death on the cross. It is an old, old story, which you know well. As a Bible teacher, you’ve taught of the events surrounding the crucifixion and you’ve undoubtedly heard the Grand Old Story retold hundreds of times in sermons and as Prefaces to the Lord’s Supper each first day of the week.

But what do you know of the cross itself??? Did you know that the form of execution provided by a cross was one of the most heinous ways of causing death ever devised? Did you know that the pain caused by the stress to the respiratory and pulmonary systems, as induced by hanging from a cross, is amongst the most agonizing ever devised? Did you ever think that the cross that robbed the Saviour of His life was made from.....a tree?

For a desperate and dying world, the Father and Creator of all things chose a cross — fashioned from a tree — to be the instrument of death for “**...His only begotten Son.**”

The Saviour of all mankind, sinless and depicted as “**...a Lamb going to the slaughter**” who “**...opened not his mouth**” in his own defense, the “**Author and finisher of our faith,**” the One who set the standards for love, mercy, humility, forgiveness and longsuffering, though himself found blameless, was destined to be executed by being nailed to pieces hewn from... a common, ordinary tree.

God’s only Son freely gave his life in such a majestic gesture as atonement for the sins of the high and the mighty as well as the lowest of the low and presented himself to be pitilessly nailed to a cross — roughly hewn pieces of timber from something as common and humble as a tree!

A lowly tree was deemed the only item **worthy** of the dying moments of the Prince of Heaven...a tree that has already been shown to be a **perfect creation** in its own right was perfect enough to convey the spirit of the Saviour to His rightful home in Heaven to dwell with his Father and His angels. What could be more perfect than that?

The next time you see a juicy, red apple, take a moment to reflect upon the “**perfect**” tree that produced it — as well as the perfect salvation brought about by the Saviour’s death upon it !!!

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Donations to the Fund have helped Ghanaian brethren to be even more effective in spreading the Gospel, and lives have been saved through medical aid. We earnestly plead that this excellent work will continue.

As well as strengthening existing congregations, brethren are travelling further afield to establish new churches. One elderly brother, whose age now makes this difficult for him, is being assisted in this work by a younger brother. We have given the younger man a bicycle as well to help him in his travels. Another brother who travels to strengthen infant churches and establish new ones has been given funding for bibles, hymnbooks and benches. This is not only for these churches, but also for bible study groups with non-Christians.

A church, which is concentrating its evangelism in a predominantly pagan area, is also having bible study with non-Christians. In areas such as this where there is no school we have helped the church to construct a school building. As we've mentioned before, buildings in rural areas can be constructed economically with mud instead of traditional bricks, and educated brethren undertake to teach the Scriptures as well as secular subjects. In this way children receive a good grounding in biblical understanding, as well as normal elementary education. This also reduces the poverty-trap, as they will be more suited for employment in later years.

In one recently established church a young girl has been involved in an accident and is very ill in hospital, both legs being affected. As in all such cases when brethren are unable to pay hospital fees, we are paying her medical costs. We are supplying bibles hymn books and benches for this infant church.

Our Ghanaian brethren are very anxious to establish Christian beliefs and behaviour in their community and you, the donors, are having a part in this. The results are very encouraging – please let it continue.

Those wishing to help, please make cheques payable to: **Dennyloanhead Church of**

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

Baptism at Stretford

Stretford, Manchester

The Lord has blessed us again. Rejoice with us and with the angels in heaven for the baptism into Christ of Teresa Mondil at Longshoot, Wigan on Sunday, 13th August 2006.

Sister Teresa has had a deep love for the Lord for a long time and has studied the Bible to know more about Jesus. Coming to understand the significance of baptism, she decided to be united with her Lord in the watery grave and rise to a new life in Him. We are confident she will be used by God to be a blessing to others.

Gretchen and Allan have known Teresa and family for over 30 years. She was born in Bangladesh and grew up in "Mother Teresa's Home" in Calcutta. Her family and many friends came to witness her baptism. We pray that she will be blest in her new life in Christ.

We are grateful to the brethren at Longshoot for their hospitality and love.

Allan Ashurst, for church in Stretford

Obituary Bro. Charles Grant

Wallacestone, Scotland

It is with deep regret that we record the death of Bro. Charles Grant, eldest son of Bro. James and Sis. Isa Grant at the age of 48 after a long illness.

Bro. Grant passed away on Saturday 19th August at home with all his family around him. We would extend our condolences to his wife and daughter at this sad time. He was laid to rest on Thursday, 24th August, Bro. Ian Davidson officiating at both services, assisted by Bro. John Kneller. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

The family would like to thank all brethren and friends for their support and sympathy cards at this harrowing time.

James Grant, Secretary.

Obituary Sir Daisy Leadbetter

Kirkcaldy.

On Thursday 14th September the oldest member of our congregation, Daisy Leadbetter [nee Fernie], went home to be with her Lord. She was in her 100th year and had been a faithful member of the church in Kirkcaldy for 82 years. She was the last surviving member of her generation in her family, and may well have been a direct descendent of one of the first elders of the congregation who was appointed in 1798.

Daisy was not a person who liked to be in the limelight, she preferred to work away quietly behind the scenes. She was very fair in her dealings and caring for her physical and spiritual family. Daisy was well known in the congregation for her hand knitted bed socks and most of the members received at least one pair at some time during their lives. She is survived by her daughter Betty and her family, for whom we solicit your prayers.

Our thanksgiving service for her life was held at the local crematorium and was conducted by the writer. Till we meet at Jesus feet.

Robert Hughes, Secretary

Can anyone help?

I would like to run a series in the SS that traces the history of early Christianity from the time of the ministry of Jesus through to the Council of Nicea – approximately the first 300 years of Christianity. I would like this series to cover such things as:

- The influence of the Roman Empire;
- The influence of Judaism on early Christianity;
- The clash of Greek and Jewish cultures in the development of the Church;
- The diaspora and Hellenist Jews;
- The spread of Christianity;
- The Jerusalem Council;
- Peter's mission to the Jews;
- Paul's mission to the Gentiles;
- The Jewish – Roman conflicts and the effects of the fall of Jerusalem;
- Christian persecution;
- What happened after 100 AD?
- How the canon of scripture was formed;
- Other contemporary religions (inc Gnosticism);
- The merging of religious and secular authority in Rome;
- The Council of Nicea etc, etc.

I know that my own knowledge of many of these issues, which put the New Testament into its real context, has been very thin until recently and I believe there is a wonderful opportunity for someone to distil the key events of this vital part of our Christian heritage. Is there anyone who will take up the challenge (or knows someone who might)? If so please contact me to discuss further (contact details below). **Editor**

No responses yet – is anyone up for the challenge or aware of anyone who might be?

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