

# The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

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## SIGN OF THE TIMES

In a letter received this morning, a good brother criticises my March article (Hebrews, Israelites and Jews) on the grounds that I am wilfully ignorant of the situation in Jerusalem today. He quotes Encyclopedia Britannica and Collier's Encyclopedia which refer to Jerusalem being entirely under Jewish control, and says (and I am quoting the most complimentary part of his long letter): Quote "*I trust you will understand that what they (the Encyclopedias) are saying is that Israel is now in full control of the ENTIRE city of Jerusalem, and has been since 1967. The Editor of the "S.S." however, who knows so much about the Hebrews, Israelites and Jews, professes to know NOTHING about facts which he could read from the daily newspapers, and has NOTHING to say about present day FACTS relating to the city of Jerusalem and the SIGNIFICANCE of these FACTS, because they DO NOT suit his preconceived notions about the SIGNS OF THE TIMES, and the NEAR COMING of Christ to JUDGE the CHURCH, and the world. This brand of wilful ignorance ("2 Peter 3:5) declares such a writer is NOT PREPARED for that event. With YOUR RECORD you have nothing to look forward to when that occurs, yet you have the audacity to cite Matt. 12:7 in your editorial in Feb."* Unquote. (Capitals are his). Readers will realise from this that being the editor of even a small paper like the S.S. is not all "beer and skittles", and one soon becomes increasingly *persona-non-grata* with a great number of readers. Be that as it may, most readers will realise that the article "Hebrews, Israelites and Jews" was never intended to deal with Jerusalem today, or with "The Signs of the Times", or with the early return of Christ. However, I can assure my good brother that I shall, in this article, offer a few comments on "The Signs Of The Times" and in future articles (God willing) say a few words on the other subjects he mentions.

My critic refers to my "*preconceived notions about the Signs of the Times*" but in view of the fact that I have never ever mentioned the subject before, or even thought seriously about it, I cannot imagine what those "preconceived notions" might be.

### A SIGN FROM HEAVEN

By all means let us look at this phrase "The Signs Of The Times". The context of the term "Signs Of The Times" is in the conversation Jesus had with some Pharisees and Sadducees who (very unusually) combined forces to demand a sign from Jesus. They wanted more than just miracles: they wanted a sign from heaven: i.e. a sign straight from God which would endorse Christ as Messiah, and they implied that if this sign were forthcoming they might well believe Him. After all, God had, in O.T. times, shown Himself quite prepared to endorse Moses by (to take just one example) feeding the Israelites with manna for forty years. Yes, Jesus had fed the 5,000 with only a few loaves, but God, *through Moses*, had fed the entire nation of Israel with bread for forty

years. (See John 6:30, 31). Samuel also had received a sign from heaven when God endorsed His words by sending such thunder, and rain, that the people trembled. (1 Sam. 12:16-18). Another instance would be the occasion when Isaiah carried God's message to King Hezekiah and to endorse it God gave a sign from heaven: viz. **"And this shall be a sign unto thee from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing that He hath spoken. Behold I will bring again the shadow of the degrees which is gone down in the sun-dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down."** (Isa. 38:7 and 8). And so God had been quite prepared to halt even the progress of the sun to back up the words of Isaiah. Why then should God not be quite prepared to give the world a sign in this case, if this Man really was God's son. If we are to be charitable to the Pharisees and Sadducees we might imagine that these were the thoughts which prompted their request for a sign. But Jesus knew their hearts and was well aware that their request was simply another attempt at tempting Him, and declaring their complete disbelief in Him. Jesus was not, of course, going to be put to any such test, and assured these doubters that they would receive no other sign than that pre-figured in the case of Jonah, and pointing to His three-days-and-nights in the grip of the tomb. His rising from the dead on the third day would be a sign from heaven which would transcend by far, any signs seen hitherto. And it was at this point that Jesus remarked upon their seeming ability to read the signs of a commonplace thing like the weather, yet apparently unable to notice the unfolding of momentous things of God. **"He answered and said unto them, when it is evening, ye say that it will be fair weather for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather today for the sky is red and lowering. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign and there shall no sign be given unto it but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And He left them and departed."** (Matt. 16:2-4).

It should be mentioned that verses two and three of the above passage are omitted from many modern translations on the grounds that *"they are not found in some of the most ancient manuscripts."* (If all verses "not found in some of the most ancient manuscripts" were omitted our Bibles would be a great deal thinner). However, the KJV carries verses 2 and 3 and on a very sound basis I would suggest, for Luke also includes the verses; certainly in sense. Luke says, **"Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it that ye do not discern this time"** (12:56).

#### WHAT SIGNS? WHAT TIMES?

To what **"signs"** did Jesus refer; and to what **"times"**?

It seems obvious that the "times" were N.T. times: i.e. the times surrounding the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. The "times" *had no relevance to our present day* (2000 years further on) but to the time of Christ. Certain signs were visible in Christ's day, capable of being read and interpreted by those Biblically astute. All manner of prophecies were coming to the boil (over three hundred of them); John the forerunner of the Christ had made an appearance; all kinds of miraculous phenomena abounded; the virgin birth, the guiding star, the visits of angels and angelic hosts, earthquakes and signs in the heavens, the mighty works of Jesus and so on, and so on. There were a great many signs in **"those times"** for those who were spiritually perceptive to see. When John The Baptist sent messengers to Jesus to ask if He was the Messiah, or should they look for another, Jesus replied, **"Go and show John again the things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."** These, then, are some of the "signs of the times" proving that Jesus was "the One to come"; a fact which poor John (languishing in prison) had temporarily lost sight of, but which the Pharisees and Sadducees had never been able to see.

As Jesus had pointed out, they could see the signs of good, or bad, weather in prospect, but in spite of their comprehensive knowledge of the scriptures, were apparently quite unable to read the spiritual signs of the Saviour in their midst. Thus "the signs" were those just described. The "times" referred to *the time-span of the signs*: i.e. the times surrounding the life of Christ. Luke, I believe, confirms this when, (in the passage previously mentioned) he quotes Jesus as saying, "Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it that ye do not discern THIS TIME", (or, as rendered by the NIV. "How is it that you don't know how to interpret this PRESENT TIME).

#### A GENERAL CONCENSUS

However, just in case any reader should feel that these views are "the preconceived notions" of the editor, I offer readers the following opinions gleaned from a variety of sources, which verify perhaps, the generally accepted understanding of "The Signs Of The Times".

**Bible Commentary, by E. M. Zerr.** "The signs of the times were as clearly portrayed in the scriptures as were weather signs in the sky, yet they pretended there was nothing on record to indicate the work and purpose of Jesus."

**Comm. on Matthew, by J. W. McGarvey.** "The times of the Messiah and the miraculous evidences which He had given that they were at hand. These were as plainly to be seen as the clouds at sunset, or sunrise, but the Pharisees and Sadducees failed to see them in their significance".

**Johnson's Peoples New Testament:** "They could read the weather but were blind to the events (signs of the times) that showed the fulfilment of prophecy, the end of the Jewish dispensation, and the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom".

**Albert Barnes:** "The meaning of Christ's answer is that there are certain indications by which you judge the weather. You have the redness of the sky by which you judge. So there are sufficient indications on which you should judge Me and these Times. My miracles and the state of things in Judea, are indication by which you should judge of these times".

**Comm. on Matthew by H. Leo Boles.** "Jesus simply said to them that they were men of average sagacity in judging the weather signs in the sky, hence they should judge with equal sagacity the signs in the moral heavens - the signs which appeared with respect to His coming. When men ignore such signs as they had done, it was no use to give them other signs".

**Prof. Wm. Barclay:** "What Jesus is saying is that God's sign is Jesus Himself, and His message. It is as if He said to them 'in Me you are confronted with God Himself and with the Truth of God. What more could you possibly need? But you are so blind you cannot see it'."

**The Teacher's New Testament:** The signs of the times refers to the meaning of Christ's preaching and miracles.

Obviously, much more of the same could have been included, but perhaps those random examples confirm that the phrase "Signs of the Times" *as used by Jesus* was confined in a way already described and had no relevance to what is going on in Israel today or in the city of Jerusalem. Clearly there are those who would like to bring that phrase into the present day and infer from it that there are signs for us to see today, and we are living in "times" when such signs are around. The question to be asked is "What signs are we to look for today and why?". That seems a fair question and I invite any brother to furnish an answer to the question (with appropriate scriptural backing, of course) and if the article is of reasonable length I will be happy to print it for consideration by readers.

#### WHAT SIGNS?

Jesus, very aware of how the Pharisees and Sadducees, had abysmally failed to read

the signs given by God in Palestine, indicative of Christ's deity and Messiahship, took considerable pains to make sure that His own disciples would be aware of the signs given, presaging the end of the Jewish religion, and destruction of Jerusalem itself He assured them that the path leading up to those momentous events would be strewn with signs. There would, He said, be wars and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, false prophets, and even false Christs, etc. and the disciples should flee the Holy City when the time came. (see Matt. 24). However, on the question of the final return of Christ and the destruction of the world, no signs of any kind would be given. Jesus said, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as the days were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark. And knew not until the flood came, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matt. 24:38, 39).

The people in Noah's day were engaged in every-day pursuits when the flood came upon them and they had no warning whatsoever. Jesus says it will be *likewise* when He returns: i.e. no warnings or signs. The apostle Peter (2 Peter 3) reiterates this statement and applies his charge of "wilful ignorance" to those who fail to understand that "the heavens and the earth which are NOW are reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgement . . . But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also AND THE WORKS THEREIN shall be burned up" (v10). And again the reference to "a thief in the night" dramatically portrays the fact that no previous warnings or signs will be given. Thieves don't use calling cards. For those still in doubt, Paul agrees with Peter and says (referring to "Times and Seasons") "But of the times and seasons brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night." (1 Thess. 5:1, 2).

And so whereas there were signs portending the destruction of Jerusalem, there will be absolutely **no signs** regarding the final coming of the Lord and the end of the world. Peter assures us the earth and all the works therein shall be burned up, and that would seem to mean that *Jerusalem* will suffer the same fate as London, New York or Moscow.

### CONCLUSION

My critic is right when he says that I have nothing much to say about present day facts relating to Jerusalem, or the significance of these facts. If someone had been tracking the events in Jerusalem in, say, the 5th Century, where would it have got them? Similarly, if someone had been studying the events in Jerusalem in, say, the 10th or 15th Century, what would have been accomplished? Nothing much, I suggest, and the same would apply to any century: even this twentieth. It is not uncommon to hear people refer to "the signs of the times," but they do so with reference to everyday affairs. In a *medical* context the "signs of the times" are that people are living longer and generally overweight: in a *social* context the signs are that moral standards are plunging and we are a nation of gamblers: in an *educational* context children watch too much TV and neglect the 3 R's: in a *political* sense the signs are that Russia is a spent force and Serbia wants to enlarge its borders: and so we could go on. The only sign of the times in a *religious* context is that churches are empty and there is a general malaise in the Christian world. These are the only signs that I can see but, as always, I shall be most grateful to be shown otherwise. Some talk of the "Times Of The Gentiles" as something we should look out for, and perhaps we can (DV) glance at that in the next issue.

## WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN

William Jennings Bryan was the prosecuting lawyer in the famous "monkey" trial in Dayton, Tennessee of July, 1925, in which a teacher was on trial for teaching evolution in the public schools. On one occasion Bryan said in regard to the story of Jonah and the whale, that if God had said that Jonah swallowed the whale he would believe it. As someone has said: "God said it, that settles it, I believe it!" Let us believe whatever God has said, "For the word of the Lord is right" (Psa. 33:4a).

Repeatedly in the Bible we read of incidents where Satan is working to persuade mankind to disbelieve and disobey God. For example, the Jewish council commanded the apostles not to teach any more in the name of Jesus; but the apostles did not give into threats, but boldly answered: "**We ought to obey God rather than men**" (Acts 5:29). Today, the devil continues his evil efforts through the children of disobedience. This is one reason we need to heed such warnings as: "**Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals**" (1 Cor. 15:33). Moreover, Paul, in his writing to the Ephesians, declares: "**And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Whereas in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience**" (Eph. 2:1-2). He makes it very plain that Satan works through the children of disobedience. Let us consider now some things which men say that are contrary to the word of God, and therefore represent the efforts of Satan to entice mankind to disobey God.

### IMPOSSIBLE TO AGREE ON THE BIBLE

**Man says**, "It is impossible to understand the Bible," and "It is impossible for everyone to see the Bible alike." Nothing could be further from the truth or do more to keep men from the truth than this idea. God says the opposite: "**Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is**" (Eph. 5:17). Furthermore, the fact that the Lord expects us to understand His word alike is avowed in such Bible statements as, "**let us walk by the same rule . . .**" (Phil. 3:16). How else could we all believe and teach the same thing in the Lord's Church, as Paul enjoined upon the Corinthians by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, "**Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement**" (1 Cor. 1:10). It has been said before and should be said again, and again that if we understand the Bible at all, then we understand it alike.

### NO RIGHTS IN THE BODY

**Man says**, "It's a woman's right to do as she pleases with her own body." This statement is often made in defence of abortion. Although we have a choice as to what we do with our bodies, we never have a "right" to disobey God in, or with, our bodies. Paul states: ". . . **Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body . . . therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's**" (1 Cor. 6:13b, 20b). Hence, whenever one disobeys God in his body, he dishonours the Creator Who gave him his body. Moreover, the killing of the unborn is murder, because the child in the mother's womb constitutes a living soul. David and Paul each, by referring himself as "me", considered themselves as human beings while in the mother's womb (cf. Psa. 51:5; Gal. 1:15). Jehovah said to Jeremiah, ". . . **Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee**" (Jer. 1:5). While in the mother's womb John the Baptist was referred to as a "babe" (Luke 1:41, 44), and as Jesus was designated as a "child" (Matt. 1:23). God says that He hates ". . . hands that shed

**innocent blood**" (Prov. 6:16-17). If anything could be more innocent than a little unborn child (what could it be? To Christ all human life is sacred. Every person is precious to Him Who ". . . by the grace of God tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). Thus anything we do "with" or "in" our bodies that transgresses God's will is a sin. For that reason, let us present our bodies ". . . a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

### OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN

**Man says, "Baptism is unnecessary."** Satan began lying to man in the earliest stages of his existence upon earth. In fact, the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). After God had said that **"Thou shalt surely die"** (Gen. 2:17), for eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Satan came in to the garden and contradicted God. He said, **"Ye shall not surely die"** (Gen. 3:4). Jesus Christ commanded, **"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"** (Mark 16:16). Now Satan has come along through his false teachers and said, "You don't have to be baptized to be saved." Being the cunning deceiver that he is, he is able to make his lies sound reasonable. He tells man that God wouldn't send a person to eternal destruction simply because he did not go into the water, because after all it's not the water that saves, but God. According to human reason, going into water is unnecessary. However, we must remember that human reason does not equal the mind of God. As Isaiah said, **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord"** (Isaiah 55:8). Thus, we need to look into God's word to find His mind and His will. Consider, that if man can get to heaven without baptism, then he can get to heaven without Christ, because baptism puts one into Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Then, he can be saved without forgiveness of sins, because in baptism sins are washed away or remitted (Acts 2:38, 3:19, 22:16). Then he can get to heaven without the Lord's body or Church, because baptism puts one into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 1:22-23; Acts 2:38, 41, 47). If one can reach heaven without baptism, then he can get to heaven without obeying the commandments of God, because baptism is a commandment of God (Acts 10:48); and he can get to heaven outside the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, because baptism is into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). It is very plain to see that our soul's salvation depends upon obeying God rather men!

**Man says, "One church is as good as another," or "The Church is unimportant."** None of the devil's lies could be more devastating upon mankind than this one. Perhaps nothing has done more to destroy men's souls in the modern day than unbelief about one Church, and religious division among professed believers in Christ. Now, Satan is the enemy of Christ, and Christ loves the Church so much that **"He gave himself for it"** (Eph. 5:25). Then it stands to reason that his primary efforts would be targeted against the body for which the Lord gave Himself. He has used his false teachers to portray the body of Christ as insignificant, and to create doctrines and organisations which are contrary to saving truth. The Scripture sets forth that only the New Testament Church constitutes the true body of Christ. In the very beginning of the Lord's Church we read of those who heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel (Acts 2:37-41). They were consequently added by the Lord *to His Church* (Acts 2:47). We read in Matthew 16:18 of Christ's promise to build **His Church**, and in Acts 20:28 of the high price which He paid for it - *His blood*. No denomination of men can equal that which God has established. It is true that those who make up the body of Christ do err and fall short of God's glory from time to time. However, that does not minimise the perfect Church which God has created, nor the perfect plan by which it was instituted. To reduce the Lord's Church to a denomination is to reproach God who planned, purposed, and built it. Could anyone ever doubt that the heartbreak of our Lord over the injury of His

spiritual body is just as great as the agony which He suffered on the cross in His physical body? Let us never be ashamed of the Church of Christ, and never be afraid to give our all to it. In Ephesians we read how that the Church was the eternal plan and purpose of God, and how that He is glorified in it. **"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus the Lord . . . Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen"** (Eph. 3:10-11, 21). No church on earth, not Roman Catholic, not Protestant, nor any other denomination, can make that claim. Only the one which read about in the New Testament.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the examples given in this article were taken from both the moral and the religious realm. We can think of many other instances in which Satan seeks to thwart the purposes of God. Whatever situation we may be faced with, may we have the love and courage that the apostles had and declare with resolute determination: **"We ought to obey God rather than men."** Furthermore, let us weigh everything we hear, whether in the world at large, the religious realm or among the Lord's people, by the word of God. The Holy Spirit through Luke commends the Bereans, **". . . in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so."** (Acts 17:11). When we follow this course and determine what God has declared on any matter, let us hold to it, obey it, teach it to others, and be willing to die for it! Then we will be able to look forward to heaven. Christ promised; **". . . Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"** (Rev. 2:10).

DANNY DOUGLAS, Wales.

## NO TIME FOR GOD

**"And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith of Christ, And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, Felix trembled, and answered: Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee"** (Acts 24:24, 25).

Our text is the story of a man who had no time for God . . . the tragic story of so many people of today. People are busier today than ever before, doing things that do not need doing; worrying about things that never happen. Ours is the sped-up age. And in the rush, our sense of values has become twisted. We take time for things of no significance; we neglect things of eternal importance.

### THE CRIME OF CROWDING GOD OUT

People who would not think of committing other crimes are guilty of the greatest crime of all . . . that of crowding God out of their lives. This crime cost the soul of the rich man of Luke 16. No charge is made that he lived an immoral life. There is no hint that he made his riches in a dishonest way. He simply had no time for the things of God in his life. **". . . and in hell he lifted up his eyes in torment"** (Luke 16:23). Another rich man had time to tear down his barns, and build greater ones to store all his earthly goods. But he had no time to think on things eternal. And God called him a fool (Luke 12:20).

It is sad to see a person whose sense of values is so twisted. It is like a parent that might take good care of a pet to the neglect of our own children. It is a crime that our bodies show more care than our souls; that we are more interested in making a living than in making a life; that we are more interested in treasures that rot, than in those of

eternal value (Matt. 6:19-21).

And it is a sin to neglect. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

### GREATEST SIN OF OUR DAY . . . INGRATITUDE

The great sin of the people of our generation is not immorality, or crime, or even that we curse God. These are all the *results* of the underlying sin of ingratitude. Notice these significant words of the apostle Paul: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves . . . *unthankful* . . ." (2 Tim. 3:1, 2). We use God's bountiful blessings and offer nothing in return. Make no mistake, "Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above . . ." (James 1:17). We flock to God's beaches, enjoy His sun, breathe His air, till His soil . . . His blessings are connected with all we do. Our health, our families, our children are all the result of the blessings of God. Friend, are you thankful for these things?

Jesus died for *our* sins! "He was wounded for *our* transgressions, He was bruised for *our* iniquities . . ." (Isa. 53:5). Are you thankful for that sacrifice of the Son of God?

Margaret Slattery was a social worker in New York. One day as she was watching a group of boys playing baseball in a park, she noticed a young lad, crippled, and in a wheelchair. He also was watching the game, and his little muscles strained with each boy as he came to bat. His little body moved from side to side in the wheelchair, as he strained to "help" the runners to first base. Miss Slattery began conversation with the boy, and soon found that for a great amount of money the boy could have an operation that could restore him to normal health. She contacted several business men she knew. They were eager to help. The boy got his operation, and in the course of time he was normal again. But rather than showing gratitude for this blessing, the lad's life became criminal, and in subsequent years he was sentenced to die for a great crime he had committed. How very much like the way many of us have treated the blessings of God.

### THE REAL REASON PEOPLE HAVE NO TIME FOR GOD

In our lesson text we see the reason Felix had no time for God. We read that Paul preached on "**righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come.**" The words cut deep as this Governor thought of facing God in his sins . . . he *trembled*. He knew changes would have to be made in his life . . . and he was *unwilling to pay the price*. Many people have said to God, "**Go thy way for this time.**" Many are waiting for that "**convenient season**" that never comes - because it will never become convenient to do what we do not want to do. What Felix really meant was, "I'm never going to let the gospel get that close to me again." Neighbours, Christianity will cost you your all. And many are unwilling to pay the price.

### THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER

The truth is, dear reader, you have no time to be without God. Time (the stuff of which life is made) is too precious to waste. You say you are too busy? Just what is it you are busy doing? How really full is your schedule with things of vital importance? How much needless work and worry is there?

Do you have time to breathe, to eat, to sleep? But you say, "I have to do these things to live!" And you must take time for God, to live successfully, and to live eternally.

Many faithful Christians were once like you. They had busy schedules, too. But they *took* time for God. And what did they find? They found it was an investment in their own lives. Christianity affected their family life, their work, and their problems. They became better accountants, salesmen, clerks, painters, executives and labourers. Instead of imposing burdens on them, Christianity relieved them of burdens, and brought a fulness and satisfaction to life they had not known before.



As the cemetery is full of people who had no time to go to see their doctor, so will Hell be full of people who had no time for their God.

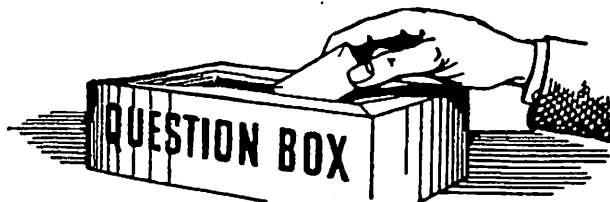
### YOUR LIFE'S STORY

One day a plot of ground and a stone marker will tell the story of your passing. What will be your biography? Just that you lived, you worried, you got old, and you died? Or will it be that you lived, you found God, and finding Him you found the purpose of Life itself? You spent years in His happy service, and left this life to be with Him for ever?

Our plea is that you take time for God. Be obedient to the gospel of Christ. Don't be Judas to Him, Who was Jesus to you!

*"Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"* (2 Cor. 6:2).

M. PHILLIPS.




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Conducted by  
Frank Worgan

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**Question:** *"How are we to reconcile the seemingly contradictory statements in the following passages: Mal. 4:5, Matt. 11:14, Luke 1:17, with John 1:21-22?"*

I think it would be useful to quote the passages to which our questioner refers and I am pleased to see that he underlines the word 'seemingly', because it reveals that whatever difficulty these verses present, our brother realizes that the contradiction is more apparent than real. These are the quotations:

**Mal. 4:5.** *"Behold I will send you Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes . . ."*

**Matt. 11:14.** *"If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come"* (The words of the Lord Jesus concerning John the Baptizer).

**Luke 1:17.** *"He (John) will go before him (the Messiah) in the spirit and power of Elijah"*. (The words of the angel of the Lord to John's parents).

**John 1:21-22.** *"What then? Are you Elijah?" "I am not"*. (The question put to John by the Jews, and his reply).

In offering an answer to the question I would like to change the order in which the New Testament passages are listed; which means commencing with:

**The Context: John 1:21-22**

The passage in John ch. 1 is the passage which seems to create the difficulty. It will help, therefore, to think about the series of questions put to John by the delegation sent to him by the priests and Levites in Jerusalem.

1. Their first question was, *"Who are you?"* v. 19.

Now, it is obvious that they were not asking about *his ancestry or parentage*, because, since his father was Zechariah the priest this would be well known. It is true that Zechariah was already an old man when John was born (**Luke 1:18**), and at the commencement of his own ministry John would be at least 30 years old.

But even if Zechariah had died - which is by no means certain - we may be sure that it is unlikely that the priests did not know of his relationship to John. After all, the miraculous circumstances surrounding John's birth had created a sensation, as we read in **Luke 1**, and the event itself was common knowledge.

John obviously understood what the priestly delegation was asking. They wanted to

know if *he claimed to be the Messiah*, even though they did not use that name.

His reply was a resounding and emphatic, "*I am not the Christ.*"

2. Then came a second question. If he did not claim to be the Messiah, *precisely what role did he claim to be fulfilling?* Notice that this question was not "*Who then?*" but "*What then?*" In other words, "*So! Do you think that you are fulfilling the role of the prophet Elijah?*" John realised the implication of this question also, and again immediately answered in the negative.

3. Then came a third question; "*Are you that prophet?*" - which is a reference to **Deut. 18:15**, where Moses prophesied that God would raise up a prophet like himself to whom the people must listen. Yet again, John answered "*No*". It is interesting to notice, also, that, in response to these three questions, John's answers became progressively shorter. His replies were, "*I am not the Christ*" v20. "*I am not*" v21. "*No*" v21.

He did not offer elaborate explanations or make extravagant claims, but merely responded with denials.

This may account for the obvious exasperation revealed by his inquisitors in v22.

#### John's Explanation-

But, when he eventually explained his mission, it is unlikely that these priestly messengers were made either much happier or much wiser! John said, "*I am a voice (not, 'the' voice) crying in the wilderness.*" His humility revealed itself. No great personality! No claim to greatness or importance, here! Just a voice!

This can only mean that John rejected any suggestion that he might be Elijah *in the literal and physical sense of Jewish expectation.*

#### Jewish Expectations

There is no doubt that no Old Testament prophet exerted such a tremendous fascination upon the Jewish mind as did Elijah. They certainly looked for the ancient prophet to *return* to earth - (remember the miraculous manner of Elijah's departure, described in **2 Kings 2:1**) - as the prelude to the coming of their Messiah, and they expected a quite literal fulfilment of the familiar promise found in **Mal. 4:5**.

Indeed, this was a popular item of Jewish doctrine in the days of the Lord Himself.

The 'Mishna', which is the section of the Jewish Talmud setting out the teaching of Judaism, declares that at His coming, Elijah's mission would be the establishing of order in readiness for the appearance of the Messiah. There is even a Jewish doctrine which claims that the Messiah would remain hidden until Elijah pointed Him out and anointed Him.

Furthermore, even today, orthodox Jews firmly cling to their belief in the re-appearance of Elijah. It is seen whenever a Jewish family celebrates the Passover meal, called the 'Seder'. An empty chair is placed at the table, in expectation of Elijah's coming.

#### The Key to John's Identity: Luke 1:17

But the answer to the question of John's identity and mission must be sought in the statement made by the angel of the Lord, who was sent to announce the gift of a son to the aged Zechariah and Elizabeth.

The heavenly messenger declared that John would go before the Messiah *'in the spirit and power of Elijah'* **Luke 1:17**. This establishes clearly and emphatically that John was not to be thought of as Elijah *in the physical sense*, nor should his birth be regarded as a *bodily* re-appearance of the ancient prophet, or that there would be any *physical* resemblance between the two men.

There was, in fact, a *re-appearance* of Elijah! It occurred on the Mount of Transfiguration, as recorded in **Matt. 17:3**. However, by that time Herod had executed John (**Matt. 14:1-12**). Yet, when we read the account of the Transfiguration it becomes

quite clear that the three disciples who witnessed it, Peter, James and John, did not think that they were observing a re-appearance of John the Baptizer, whom they must have seen during his ministry and whom they would certainly have recognised.

Somehow - and please do not ask me *how!* - they were able to identify both Moses and Elijah, whom they could never have seen before.

Would it not seem strange, if, having moved Elijah from the earth miraculously (2 Kings 2:11), God then brought him back to suffer a cruel death at the hands of such a wicked man as Herod?

**The Lord's Own Comment: Matt. 11:17**

Here we have a definitive statement made by the Lord Himself, after John, who was in prison at the time, sent his disciples with a question which some of those who heard it mistakenly took to imply that John had begun to have doubts about the identity and mission of Jesus.

Defending John against such base suspicions, the Lord pointed out that, not only was John more than an ordinary prophet, he was, in fact, the one whose coming was predicted by the prophet Malachi, and who was to proclaim the approach of the King Messiah.

In the verse in Malachi, God calls this future herald '*My messenger*' - (which is interesting, because the Hebrew name 'Malachi' means '*Messenger of Jah*').

In speaking about John and figuratively calling him '*Elijah who is to come*', the Lord knew that he was contradicting the popular and firmly held belief in the physical return of Elijah.

This is why he prefaced his words in v.14, with '*if you are willing to accept it*'.

And the proof that he was not saying that John was Elijah, physically returned to earth is seen in his use of a formula which shows that he was speaking in a figurative sense.

That form of words, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*", is one which he frequently used at the end of a parable, and when using parabolic illustrations.

We conclude, therefore, that the Lord was, in effect, saying:

*"Those among you who are able - and prepared - to receive the truth, will no longer look for a future return of Elijah. You will recognise that, in John, the prophecy of Malachi has already been fulfilled, for John came to do the work of which the prophet spoke."*

(Questions to: Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way, Houston Renfrewshire, Scotland. PA6 7NZ.)

## THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

*"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 2:5)

It seems that the popular conception of the mind or spirit of Christ is to be mild and gentle, possess a sweet disposition, have an amiable temper, and be somewhat religious, even though the laws of God are not strictly obeyed.

Everyone, of course, should be interested in knowing what the spirit of Christ really is, and in possessing it; and since the phrase is so frequently employed, we probably can spend our time in no better way just now than in a careful and prayerful study of this question. In pursuing our study, we shall learn that: **The Spirit of Christ is Manifested in His Life and Teaching.**

Jesus began His public ministry by walking approximately sixty-five miles to submit to John's baptism; and His first recorded expression as He was preparing to begin His public ministry among men, was: "**Suffer it now: for thus it cometh us to fulfill all righteousness**" (Matt. 3:15).

He had previously said as a boy of twelve: **"Know ye not that I must be in My Father's house,"** or, **"about My Father's business,"** as the marginal reading has it (Luke 2:49).

Whilst in the midst of His great temptation, following His baptism, He gave evidence of His spirit by saying: **"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"** (Matt. 4:4).

He opened His great sermon on the mount with this significant statement: **"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."** And the remarkable way in which He closed that sermon (Matt. 7:21-27), leaves no doubt regarding the quality of His spirit.

He told His disciples that He was more interested in doing the Will of God than in eating His daily food. His words are, **"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to accomplish His work"** (John 4:34).

Jesus declared that He always did the will of His Father (cf. John 5:30; 8:29), and God said of Him: **"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him"** (Matt. 17:5). Peter declared, **"Moses indeed said, 'A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me; to Him shall ye hearken in all things whatsoever He shall speak unto you; and it shall be, that every soul that shall not hearken to that prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people'"** (Acts 3:22,23).

#### THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IS ONE OF SELF-DENIAL

**"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross"** (Phil. 2:5-8).

It is not surprising then, to hear Christ say: **"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head"** (Matt. 8:20).

Jesus will permit no man to follow Him who does not manifest the spirit of self-denial: **"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me"** (Matt. 16:24).

#### THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IS KIND AND FORGIVING

Because the spirit of Christ is kind and forgiving, many have assumed that He looks with allowance upon departures from the Divine plan. But if any one will only read the record, he will soon see that such is not the case. He was kind to the erring, but He never forgave until the sinner was penitent and desired the Lord's mercy. Read such passages as John 8:1-11; Luke 18:10-14; Matt. 9:10-13.

#### THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST HAS NO SYMPATHY FOR PRESUMPTION

As already indicated, Christ is sympathetic toward human weakness and infirmity, but there is not a single case on record in which He excused the slightest departure from the Divine order.

**"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all"** (James 2:10). It requires just as great authority to change a law, or set it aside, as the passage just quoted indicates, as it does to enact a law in the first place (cf. James 4:12).

Such departures from the Lord's plan result in division.

#### THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IS MANIFESTED IN THE CHARACTERS HE LOVED

The characters whom Christ loved are not those whom the world regarded as the most amiable, but those who were the most devoted to the will of God. The apostle John was one whom Jesus loved, and that disciple is known as the apostle of love; but

when one comes to read his writings as they are found in the New Testament, he will soon see that no other writer used the word "liar" more than he, when it came to applying the term to those not in sympathy with or true to the Lord and His cause. "And hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His Commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him; but whoso keepeth His word, in Him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in Him; he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked" (1 John 2:3-6).

The spirit of Christ is pre-eminently the spirit of faithful, rigid, zealous, and exclusive obedience to God in all His appointments, while at the same time, just as faithfully refraining from everything not taught by Him.

L. THOMAS

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

June 6	Isaiah 58	Luke 13:22-14:6
June 13	Proverbs 25:1-22	Luke 14:7-35
June 20	Proverbs 4	Luke 15
June 27	1 Kings 3:1-15	Luke 16:1-18

### PARABLE

Jesus was the master teacher. No one, before or since, spoke as He spoke (John 7:46). Also, He taught as one having authority and not as the scribes. (Matthew 7:29; Mark 1:22). In my time, I have heard a lot of great speakers. (If pushed, I would place a particular lady of the aristocracy at the top of my list.) But they all pale into insignificance compared with the Lord Jesus. He was unique because He was, is, the Son of God. I should have liked to sit at His feet and listen to the wonderful words of life pour from His lips. However, I have the next best thing: some of His unique teaching faithfully recorded by certain of His disciples. This is why I love to study the four gospel records by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Jesus is especially noted for *His parables*. "To folk of all kinds, simple and learned, the educated Westerner and people in New Guinea just emerging from the Stone Age, the parables are a vehicle of truth, moral and spiritual, for they reveal not only the path of virtue

but also the truth as it is in Jesus . . . All who come asking, 'Sir, we should like to see Jesus' (John 12:21) may meet Him in the stories He told" (Edward A. Armstrong). "A comparison of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith with Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God has been made by Eberhard Jungel. It is in the parables of Jesus especially, he insists, that the kingdom of God comes to expression, and the hearers' response to the parables is their response to the kingdom of God . . . During the ministry, Jesus' action and attitude supplied the parables with a living commentary sufficient to convey their meaning to those who responded in faith . . ." (F. F. Bruce). "The parabolic form of teaching was not new. The Jews were familiar with the *mashal* and with the method of instruction which began with the question 'What is the thing like?' Nothing distinctly approaching its depth and power, its felicitous brevity and manifold applications, can be produced either from the Old Testament, or from the entire literature of humanity either before or since His life on earth" (Frederic W. Farrer). "Our Saviour's parables are distinguished above all others for clearness, purity, chasteness, importance of instruction and simplicity. They are taken mostly from the affairs of common life and intelligible, therefore, to all men. They contain much of Himself - His doctrine, life, design in coming, and

claims, and are therefore of importance to all men . . ." (Albert Barnes).

We have a number of parables in this portion of Scripture: The Parable of the Great Banquet (14:15-24); The Parable of the Lost Sheep (15:1-7); The Parable of the Lost Coin (15:8-10); The Parable of the Prodigal Son (15:11-32); The Parable of the Unjust Steward (16:1-15). Among them we have three lost things: a sheep, a coin and a son. How, exactly, did each manage to get lost? This is an important question. Certainly, we can say in the case of the son that he got lost deliberately. But despite the fact he turned his back on his father, the father continued to love him and forgave him on his return. Actually, this parable should be titled: The Parable of the Loving Father. The father, of course, is God Himself. "In this imitable composition, the amazing mercy of God is painted with captivating beauty; and in all three parables, the joys occasioned among heavenly beings by the conversion of a single sinner, are represented . . ." (James Macknight).

Personally, I never tire of reading the parables of the Master. They are simple, yet profound. Numerous books have been written on them. I should know because I have a number of them on my book-shelves. But no writings of men can enhance the content of each parable. Our duty is to study them as often as we can and to determine their scope or main design. Surely God will bless us in our prayerful endeavour.

### JERUSALEM

Jerusalem is arguably the most famous city in the world. I was watching a video the other day about its history and memories of a visit in 1990 came flooding back. In His day, Jesus wept for the city because He foresaw its destruction by the Romans. The temple, the centre of Jewish worship, would have a new temple, consisting of living stones. I am so glad I am part of this new

spiritual edifice, which will never be destroyed.

Jesus declared: **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"** (13:34, N.I.V.). To me this is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. His feelings for the city were so strong that we are later told by Luke that the Master wept over it (19:41, 42). He could foresee also the terrible suffering of the people. And what suffering! **"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be"** (Matthew 24:21).

I know a lot of people who believe that when Jesus returns He will set up His throne in Jerusalem and reign for a thousand years. Personally, I do not see it that way. Paul wrote: **"For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all"** (Galatians 4:25-26). John in his Revelation wrote: **"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"** (21:2). So there is the earthly Jerusalem and there is the heavenly Jerusalem. The former is a great city, but has many of the problems all twentieth century cities have. The latter is something else! **"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal . . ."** (Revelation 21:10, 11). This was the city Abraham looked for all his life (Hebrews 11:10).

### JESUS AT A PHARISEE'S HOUSE

Jesus is the humblest person who has ever lived in this world. He is the perfect example to everyone. If every person possessed the Spirit of Christ then just think how different a world it would be. The Master said: "For whosoever exalts himself shall be abased; and he who humbles himself shall be exalted" (14:11). These words, of course, should be carefully studied within their context. "And He put forth a parable to those who were bidden, when He marked how they chose out the chief rooms . . ." (14:7).

Jesus went on to encourage his host to invite the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind to his feasts in the future. In other words, to invite those who could never repay him. God would bless him now and repay him in the next life (14:12-14). In his outstanding book, *Economics Today*, Donald Hay wrote: "The Gospel of Luke contains more of Jesus' teaching about wealth and possessions than the other gospels . . . Two complementary themes stand out. The first concerns the spiritual dangers of riches . . . The second theme is perhaps more startling. Jesus tells His disciples to find freedom in giving."

IAN S. DAVIDSON,  
Motherwell.

### TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Name the two men mainly involved in the making of the tabernacle.
2. Who anointed David?
3. This prophet encouraged the builders of the second temple.
4. This prophet was a sister to Moses.
5. He rescued his captive nephew after the battle of Siddim.
6. This queen thought she had destroyed all the royal seed.
7. This man was Herod's chamberlain.

8. He accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey.
9. Paul spent seven days in this city where Eutychus lived.
10. Who will guard the gates of the New Jerusalem?

## OBITUARY

It was with much sorrow that we learned of the passing of Brother Earl B. Severson, at Barnabay General Hospital, in Canada on 29th March, 1999, in his 92nd year. Brother Severson, in earlier years, was a not-infrequent visitor to these shores, and with his dear wife Rene (who, sadly, passed on in Dec. 1996) liked to visit places of interest, both north and south of the border. This writer had the pleasure of conducting some of those trips, but could never keep pace with the extensive knowledge of British history they had, and fell very far short in trying to answer their questions. Earl was a schoolmaster by profession and this was always very evident in the quality of his Biblical discourses; enjoyed many a time by the small congregation at Haddington. Brother Severson was also a great friend of the *Scripture Standard* and from time to time would contribute an article. Rene and Earl also loved England and spent a lot of time there, especially at Dawlish. I am sure all those at Dawlish and Haddington, (and indeed anywhere else) who knew and loved Earl, would want me to convey to the family our sincere condolences in their great loss. Many here have many happy memories of him (and Rene) and it was always a real pleasure and a privilege to be in their company.

(Ed.)

### CHANGE OF SECRETARY

The church at Peterhead would like to intimate a change of Secretary: from

Bro. William Strachan to:  
 Bro. Alex. J. Wedderburn  
 3 Orchard Grove, Peterhead  
 Aberdeenshire. AB42 2WD

## COMING EVENTS

**ARGLYE STREET,  
 HINDLEY**

SATURDAY, 5th JUNE, 1999

7.30 p.m.

SUNDAY, 6th JUNE, 1999

10.30 a.m. and 6.00 p.m.

Speaker: Frank Worgan (Renfrew)

**PETERHEAD CHURCH**

17th - 30th MAY, 1999

HARDING STUDENTS

1st week: Children's Meeting  
 (Dwight Smith)

2nd week: Gospel Mission (23rd - 30th)

Sunday 6 p.m.

Mon. to Sat. 7 p.m.

Speaker: Bro. Bruce McLarty

No Meetings on Friday

21st or 28th

*Details of October Meetings later.*

## GHANA APPEAL

In the past month we have heard about the growth of the new church in Manso, Western Region, which now numbers 31. The congregation at

Bodada, Volta region are now constructing a meeting place and I have received photographs of the progress. In the past month I have received Bibles, books, clothes and glasses which need to be sent out as soon as possible. My appeal this month is for money to post these items which probably weigh in total over 50kg. Split between 20 different villages.

We once again thank everyone who is helping in this appeal. Please make cheques payable to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana appeal)" and send to Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife, KY12 0DU. Tel. (01383) 728624.

P.S. Thank you IMB for the cheque received on 15/4/99 receipt No. 1145.

10. Twelve angels (Revelation 21:12).
9. Troas (Acts 20:6 & 9).
8. Silas (Acts 15:40).
7. Blasius (Acts 12:20).
6. Athaliah (2 Kings 11:1).
5. Abraham (Genesis 14:14-16).
4. Mitham (Exodus 15:20).
3. Haggai (Haggai 2:4).
2. Samuel (1 Samuel 16:13).
1. Bezaleel and Aholiab (Exodus 36:1).

## ANSWERS

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