

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

Vol. 70 No. 8

AUGUST, 2003

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

Editorial **Aliens, beware!**

My brother, Andrew, will often recall an occasion when he was on a summer holiday with his family in Europe. This day they had made their way by cable car to a mountain peak in Switzerland known as the First. It is truly a majestic spot situated high in the Swiss Alps overlooking the town of Grindelwald and its glorious valley. By way of contrast the imposing north face of the

Eiger and the rugged peaks of the Jungfrau mountain stand just across the valley. Andrew and his family recall that as they sat and took in this scene a group of Americans started to sing that singularly evocative hymn, "How Great Thou Art", and you can imagine that it must have been one of those occasions when the spine tingles and the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. For now, a fleeting moment when the harmony and beauty of God's creation are in clear focus.

THIS WORLD IS NOT MY HOME

It's pretty depressing for a time after those experiences when you have to leave them behind and head for home. Or, maybe that's the problem. Perhaps what our heart is telling us is that what we have experienced on those occasions, is in reality a glimpse of 'home' and what we have to do when that experience is over is return to a place where we simply do not feel 'at home' despite the familiarity of the surroundings in the towns, cities or villages that we live in.

I have to confess that for the most part I enjoy life but when I really analyse what I enjoy it becomes ever more apparent that it boils down to three things: a deepening appreciation of the overwhelming love of God and Jesus the Christ for their people; the companionship of good people (and I include in that the

Contents: 1-Editorial; 3-A Paeon of Praise; 5-Word Study; 7-A Puzzling Parable; 9-Question Box; 11-Foundations of the Faith; 13-Biblical Archaeology 8; 15-News & Information.

most precious gifts of loving families, spiritual and natural); and, where it can still be found, the unspoiled beauty of God's physical creation. When these come together, for a time the spirit can soar.

As a teenager I used to be quite perturbed when dad (by no means an old man at that time), amongst others, would in prayer implore the Lord to 'come quickly'. I would be thinking now slow down a bit here dad because I've still got quite a bit of living to do yet before that happens! And secretly I'd be hoping that God wouldn't take too much notice. Now of course I understand the sentiments so much better because I think the closer we grow to God the less comfortable we feel with much of what we see happening around us. (As an aside though I am always now conscious of the fact that younger people, who legitimately have their plans and ambitions, might not fully appreciate the sentiment). The contrast between God's design for His creation, and man's aspirations for himself, becomes so much starker.

The truth is that we feel uncomfortable in the world precisely because we recognize that it is not home. As Christians we are in a decisive minority; as we grow in spiritual maturity our focus progressively moves away from the material towards the spiritual; we try to be faithful to God's pattern rather than to the pattern of men; we become more aware of the treasures of heaven rather than worldly riches. All of those are part of the process of transformation that the Christian undergoes. There's a hymn in one of the books that is commonly used that starts, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through" and concludes with the line, "And I don't feel at home in this world any more." Whilst we might enjoy aspects of our life it's little wonder that at times we feel far from comfortable because quite simply we don't belong here. **"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and his pride in possessions – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever."** (1 John 2:15, NIV)

As Jesus prepared his disciples for his parting he reflected on the fact that he had been rejected by many and explained why they would suffer similarly. **"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, therefore the world hates you."** (John 15: 18,19) It seems to be a natural reaction to reject what is not understood and no doubt the reason why so many reject the Gospel (and sometimes those who preach it) is because it is perceived as threatening the pattern of life that has become familiar and comfortable to the majority.

A COUNTRY OF OUR OWN

After referring to the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham (who looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose maker and builder is God), the writer of the Hebrew letter records, **"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead**

they were looking for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”
(Hebrews 11:13 – 16, NIV)

As Paul languished in prison and penned his remarkable letter of love to the saints in Christ Jesus who were at Philippi, he nevertheless found occasion to rejoice in his sufferings. He rejoiced in the proclamation of Christ and in the love of the saints towards him. Even bound by chains his conviction in the truth of the Gospel was complete. He knew where he would be better off and what a statement he makes, **“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”** (Phil 1:21) Paul was asserting that even though he was not where he wanted to be, (**“My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better”** v 23), he was nevertheless sustained by his Lord and his brethren. And despite his longing for home he still had the passion to see his work on earth through.

No, the world is not a comfortable place for the Christian though on occasions, when momentarily the influence of Satan is absent, we might catch a glimpse of the glories that await us. We aren't at home; rather we are foreigners passing through an alien land. But better things are prepared. **“But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.”** (Phil. 3: 20,21) In the meantime, just as Paul exhorted those whom he loved and longed for, we too must “press on toward the goal” and “stand firm in the Lord”.

A PRIESTLY PENITENTIAL PAEAN OF PRAISE

(Ernest Makin, Wigan)

An understanding of the majestic awesomeness of God, His continuous mercy and His inexhaustible grace on behalf of sinful humanity lead us to an appreciation of our own unworthiness and our inability to overcome the consequences and power of sin by our own efforts. Like Paul of Tarsus, when we realise our ‘wretchedness’, defeated by sin, miserable and distressed by our spiritual frailty, we then “ **thank God - through Jesus the Christ, our Lord.**” (Romans 7:24). We rejoice and show jubilation that because of the ‘murder’ (crucifixion) of the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, we are delivered from this ‘body of death’ and His resurrection points the way to ultimate victory over death and the free gift of eternal life on the basis of our faith in Jesus.

Nehemiah 8.vv1-3 describe Ezra, the scribe, reading to the people from the Book of the Law, which he had brought to Jerusalem thirteen years previously. He read for a long time with the post exilic crowd standing, in deference to the scriptures, before him. What had previously been the preserve of the Jewish cognoscenti was now being made available to the ‘common man’. This reading provoked a remarkable reaction from the people, Neh.8.vv8-9. The reading resulted in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (booths or tents), see Leviticus 23:33-44. Public worship had started on the first day of the seventh month, and, more than three weeks later, i.e. on the

twenty-fourth day of the seventh month, the people were still worshipping. The people in 'holy convocation' were fasting, in sackcloth and with dust on their heads. This penitential national confession erupted in joy and jubilation and ultimate commitment to a God who had been neglected by His chosen people in exile. The descendants of Abraham filled the streets with their prayers, sung praises, rejoicing and jubilation while the city of David was still in ruins, the walls demolished and the temple razed. Nehemiah 9 recounts this jubilation in perhaps one of the greatest psalms/poems in the Old Testament. In content, poetic form and emotional passion it vies with the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32; Moses' song of the sea in Exodus 15; the song of the judge, Deborah, in Judges 5 and the song of the bow of David in 2 Samuel 1.

The Jews had already experienced one exodus. For four hundred and thirty years they had first flourished and then suffered in Egypt. After a confrontation between God, using Moses and Aaron against the Pharaoh, see Exodus 4.v1 to 14.v42, about one million of them migrated from Egypt. After forty years and two attempts, and in spite of their complaining disobedience, rebellion and retreat, they claimed the 'promised land'. God had built His nation of choice. God is faithful and just to accomplish by 'signs and wonders' the fulfillment of His promises.

Disobedience led to the destruction of Jerusalem and captivity in Babylon. For decades they were held captive until c538 B.C. at which time Cyrus, the King of the Medo Persian Empire, dictated that captive peoples must return to their homelands. In total about sixty thousand Jews led by Zerubbabel in 538 B.C., Ezra in 458 B.C and Nehemiah in 445 B.C., made the perilous journey of about one thousand miles back to their homeland. The homecoming was to a country devastated, in ruins with no social, economic nor administrative bases and worst of all lacking the spiritual base that God demanded from His chosen nation. This restoration took one hundred years and three journeys. Fear, discouragement and apathy aggravated by local opposition of non Jewish nations turned a project of a few months into work that required a century to complete. God, again as with the exodus from Egypt, demonstrated that He will preserve the 'faithful remnant'. There is here a resounding statement that God will remain constant, faithful and just to a faithful people. God will provide a 'home' for them and He provides in any age a redemption in which He offers Himself to those who believe and are obedient to His commands.

Having briefly set the historical scene of Nehemiah 9 the next short article will outline the content of that remarkable chapter. Time, inclination and editorial policy permitting we will return to Nehemiah 9 and draw parallels with His chosen people of the new covenant on whose hearts is written the law of the Lord. In the meantime dear reader study and ponder the munificence of the grace, mercy, love and righteousness of our God, which at the time of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah sparked a great revival of faith and commitment in, and to, a God who:

**"HAS CALLED US" (His new creation) " INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH HIS SON,
JESUS THE CHRIST, OUR LORD IS FAITHFUL",**

and,

**"WHO IS HIGH ABOVE ALL NATIONS; HIS GLORY ABOVE THE HEAVENS.
WHO IS LIKE OUR GOD, WHO DWELLS ON HIGH, WHO HUMBLING HIMSELF
TO BEHOLD THE THINGS THAT ARE IN THE HEAVENS AND IN THE EARTH?"**

Word Study **World**

Ian Davidson (Motherwell)

W.E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* reveals that one of the Greek words translated "world" (*kosmos*) is actually used seven different ways by the New Testament writers. For the purpose of this article I am interested in number five: "The present condition of human affairs, in alienation from and opposition to God." Incidentally, such English words as cosmology, cosmopolitan and cosmetic are derived from *kosmos*. Etymology can be a real eye-opener.

PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE

Where is *kosmos* used in the above sense in the Word? Please note the following: "The world cannot hate you; but me it hates, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." (John 7:7). "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." (1Corinthians 2:12). "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world..." (Galatians 4:3). "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Galatians 6:14). "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." (Colossians 2: 8). "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27). "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world hears them." (1 John 4:5). "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness." (1 John 5:19).

FURTHER DEFINITIONS

How have other writers defined the "world" as it is used in the above passages and elsewhere. I have noted the following from my personal studies: "Pagan society with its false values, its false standards and its false gods." "The world system, wicked and alienated from God, yet cultured, educated, powerful, outwardly moral at times, the system of which Satan is the head, the fallen angels and the demons are his servants, and all mankind other than the saved, are his subjects." "Humanity as alienated from God, and acting in opposition to Him and to His revelation." "All the floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral or immoral atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale." "Human society insofar as it is organised on wrong principles, characterised by base desires, false values and egoism." "The world is the domain of false gods, perverted passions and wicked walks." These should be sufficient for our purpose.

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

Fellow believers, we are all in this world, but we must not be of the world. The ship is all right in the ocean as long as the ocean is not in the ship. But when the ocean is in the ship, it is sunk! The Christian is all right in the world as long as the world is not in the Christian. But if the world conquers the Christian then he or she is doomed. It is that simple. We must, therefore, resist the temptations of the world at all costs. Of course, we cannot do this in our own strength. We need the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives to overcome all things, including Satan himself. And remember, one of the titles of Satan is "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). I always take great comfort from the words of the apostle John when he wrote to believers: "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Some saints believe that the way to win the battle with the world is to go and hide away somewhere. This, I believe, is a great mistake. The only way we can win the world for Christ is to be in it and to influence it by our lives and by the preaching of the gospel. After all, Jesus said we were "the salt of the earth." (Matthew 5:13). If the salt is never released from its container then what good can it do? No, Christians cannot help but live among the "worldly"; and in an immoral and wicked society, followers of the Lord should set an example to all. As someone once said: "When in Rome, don't do as the Romans do, but do as the Romans ought to do."

We live in difficult times, but it has always been thus. Do not think that the early Christians had it easier in their world. They did not. They were, of course, surrounded by paganism. Actually, in Britain today, and in most other places, Christians also live in a pagan world. The false values, false standards and false gods are everywhere. Today, what we call the "Western World" is in moral, spiritual and religious decline. I have just read again many of the books of the late Francis Schaeffer. In the late 1960's and 70's especially, he opened my eyes to what was going on in the modern world like no other. For example, in his book '*How Should We Then Live?*' he writes: "As the more Christian-dominated consensus weakened, the majority of people adopted two impoverished values: *personal peace* and *affluence*. Personal peace means just to be left alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the world or across the city – to live one's life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed... Affluence means an overwhelming and ever-increasing prosperity – a life made up of things, things, and more things – a success judged by an ever-higher level of material abundance." He went on to say: "Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) in his '*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*' (1776-1788) said that the following five attributes marked Rome at its end: first, a mounting love of show and luxury; second, a widening gap between the very rich and the very poor (this could be among countries in the family, as well as in a single nation); third, an obsession with sex; fourth, freakishness in the arts, masquerading as originality, and enthusiasms pretending to be creativity; fifth, an increased desire to live off the state. It all sounds so familiar."

How then can we overcome the world? John wrote: "For whosoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4).

A Puzzling Parable

(Rose M Payne, Kentishtown)

Commentators have trouble with Luke chapter 16:1-13, for it appears to praise a wasteful steward for looking after his own interests. The application in verse 9 is not very clear either. It seems contrary to the other moral teaching of the Scriptures. The only lesson most people get from this passage is that we should work at least as hard at spreading the Gospel as worldly people do at making money. But a parable usually has a deeper meaning, so the following explanation is suggested.

"There was a rich man, who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods." (verse 1)

The rich man here may stand for God, as in some other parables. The steward could represent the Jews, who were entrusted with the spiritual riches in the word of God, but had not always been faithful stewards.

"And he called him, and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'" (v. 2)

The Jews were shortly to lose their stewardship, both spiritually, when the Gospel of Christ was proclaimed, and physically, with the fall of Jerusalem. There were already many Jews living among the Gentiles in order to carry on business, and eventually most of them would be dispersed.

"And the steward said to himself, 'What shall I do since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.'" (v. 3)

If the Jews were wise, they could still do something to secure their future.

"So summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.' Then said he to another, 'And how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said unto him, 'Take your bill and write eighty.'" (v. 5 - 7)

The debtors may represent the Gentiles, who are in debt to God because of sin. One explanation put forward in commentaries is that the steward only deducted hidden usury from the debtors' bills. The Law of Moses did not allow Jews to take usury from their brethren, but they might do so from Gentiles. However in this parable the debtors themselves stated what they owed.

The Jews, represented by the steward, could reduce the debts, or burdens of sin, of the Gentiles. This could be done by teaching them the Law of Moses and making proselytes of them, and afterwards preaching the kingdom of God to them. Many

synagogues had rich and influential converts, (Acts 15:21) some of whom were later won to Christianity.

“The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness; for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.” (v. 8)

The rich man in the parable had lost money by his steward’s smart action, but possibly gained a reputation for generosity. God would commend the Jews for teaching the Gentiles. But sometimes the Jews had the wrong motives and would use the proselytes to obtain worldly influence, notably in Acts 13:50 when they stirred them up against the Christians.

“And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteousness mammon; so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations.” (v. 9)

The mammon of unrighteousness, otherwise translated as worldly wealth, seems a harsh term for money and perhaps implies that it was made in ways that strict Jews would object to. But even this could be used to make friends and influence Gentiles for good. There was an end coming when money would no longer be available to them, but these friends would already be in everlasting habitations, and able to welcome their benefactors.

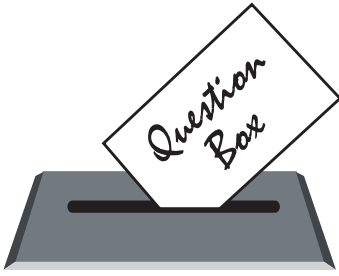
This could refer to the time when the Gospel had been preached, and many proselytes who had benefited from the teaching of the synagogue had become Christians. They were then in a position to assist converted Jews (see Romans 15:25-27 where Gentiles are described as debtors), and receive them into Christian churches in many countries.

“He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?” (vs. 10 - 12)

This is fairly straightforward. In order to use their opportunities, the Jewish nation needed to gain a reputation for being honest and faithful in their day-to-day business dealings. This was in the Jews’ own best worldly interests. After that they would be able to obtain spiritual influence.

“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (v. 13)

Similar words also appear in Matt. 6:24, where they are followed by the more familiar teaching to **“take no thought for the morrow”**, which almost appears to be a contradiction of the above parable. The combined message seems to be, do not worry about your daily necessities for your heavenly Father will take care of those. Do not aim to make money, for it will fail you in the end, and distract you from pursuing the true riches. But if you do have some worldly wealth, do not despise it but use it with wisdom and energy to promote the kingdom of God.



"What exactly does Paul mean when he describes God's plan for the fullness of time as being, 'to unite all things in him (Christ,) things in heaven and things on earth.'" Is this unity of heavenly and earthly 'things' only finally consummated at Christ's second coming?"

I am assuming that these questions have arisen from a study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians and, in particular, from chapter 1 verse 10, which, in the 'Authorised Version', reads: **"That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him..."**

As you might expect, different versions offer different renderings of the verse. For example, the 'Revised Standard Version' differs in two respects:

1. It speaks of **'the fullness of time'**, rather than **'times'**.
2. It tells us that God's purpose is to **'unite all things in him'**, rather than, to **'gather together in one all things in Christ.'**

'Times', - not 'time'

Two of the Greek words for *'time'* that occur quite frequently in our New Testament are *'chronos'* and *'kairos'*, and it is important to understand the difference between them.

The word *'chronos'* describes *'a succession of moments'*, one moment following another. It is the word from which we derive the word *'chronometer'*, and *'chronometers'*, as you know, are very accurate - (and usually very expensive) - keepers of time, or *'time-pieces'*, as their owners prefer to call them.

The other word, *'kairos'*, is the word for *'season'*, *'age'* or *'period'*. It denotes a *'dispensation'* - a period of time during which God dealt with men in a particular way. This is the word used in this verse, where we read of *'the fullness of the times'*, and it is a most significant word, as I hope we shall be able to see.

Paul tells us that even before either the world or time existed, God, who exists outside of time and is omniscient, had formed a *'purpose'* - an *'intention'*. Fore-knowing what would happen in the world and fore-seeing the entry of sin into the world, man's disobedience, sin's destructive effect on the entire creation, and the need for redemption and restoration, God planned to make salvation and restoration possible, and after a succession - *not* of *'moments'*, but of *'ages'*, *'dispensations'* or *'periods of time'*, He decided that His plan should become effective, and the disharmony and chaos caused by the violation of His law, should be healed, through the coming of the Messiah, the Christ.

This is what Paul means when, in Gal. 4:4, he tells us that, **"When the time had fully come, God sent forth His son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, so that we might receive the adoption of sons"**. Notice the opening phrase, *'when the time had fully come'*. Here the word *'time'* is the other word - *'chronos'*. It means *'when the right moment arrived'*.

Here again, Paul is stating that, at the precise and proper *instant* in human history, God's own Son came into the world and the 'plan' that He had 'purposed' became a reality.

The 'Uniting' of all things.

The words I underlined earlier – ('unite' and 'gather *together*') – also need to be understood aright, because it is possible to read too much into them. They are the rendering of just one word in the Greek N.T. – the word '*anakephalaiosasthai*', which literally means, '*to bring to a conclusion*'. (Break it up as: '*ana kephalaio sasthai*').

This means, that the time arrived when God determined that the purpose He had conceived and the plan He had prepared, should become effective – be brought to a conclusion and should progress towards fulfilment. In the Old Testament scriptures God's redemptive intention was first *revealed in promise*, in Gen. 3:15, after the first human sin, and later *announced in prophecy* when He spoke through such men as Isaiah, in passages too numerous to be listed here.

The plan began to be realized when Jesus was born, and when Jesus died on the cross as God's own Lamb, rising from the dead after three days, the grounds for mankind's redemption were laid and the offer of salvation could be made. That purpose is still being worked out, as the Gospel of salvation through Christ is preached and souls are '**delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son**' (Col. 1:13)

"The whole creation groans"

But we must also remember that God's 'purpose' extends beyond the salvation of Mankind, because sin affected and continues to affect, the whole of creation, (Rom.8:22), and will only be fully consummated when sin and its effects are eradicated and all things and everyone come to willing submission to the sovereignty of God Himself.

As the result of His 'obedience unto death', God exalted the Lord Jesus, (Phil.2: 9-11) and gave to Him the Name at which every knee on earth and in Heaven must eventually bow. But, as Heb. 10: 12-13 teaches, He now sits at the right hand of the Father, awaiting the time when '*his enemies be made his footstool*'. This will occur when the present Christian Dispensation ends and the day of Grace comes to a close.

1st Cor. 15:24-28, (which should be read again, although I am sure these verses are familiar to most of us), make it clear that the restoration of God's sovereignty over all things has yet to be seen. Only after the resurrection of the dead at Christ's return, when the '*last enemy*' will have been destroyed, will the Lord Jesus, who is reigning at this present time, hand over the kingdom to the Father, so that He Himself, will be 'all in all'.

The words of John, in 1st John 3:2, should be a great encouragement and inspiration to us. **"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure".**

Questions please to: **Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP**



Foundations of the Faith

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

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SIN

Within the scope of a relatively short article it is impossible to deal with every nuance of what the Bible says about sin and it might be useful for readers to refer again to Ian Davidson's Word Study on the subject in the June edition for additional information.

There are no exemptions from and no exceptions to the infiltration of sin for any individual (except, of course, Jesus himself). Included within Paul's detailed analysis of the causes and scope of, and remedy for, sin contained in the early chapters of the Roman letter, are statements that leave no room for doubt. **"For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus..."** (Romans 3:23). **"What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin..."** (Romans 3:9ff) These truths, unpalatable as they are to many people, underpin every person's need for the redeeming work of salvation performed by Jesus on the Cross.

Perhaps John gives the simplest definition of sin. **"Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness."** (1 John 3:4) The essential characteristic of sin is the rejection of the law, or will, of God and the substitution of the will of self.

THE ORIGIN OF SIN

There is not too much that we can say about the origins of sin without descending into the realms of speculation. However one principle that can and must be stated with absolute certainty is that sin does not emanate from God and it is a perversion of the nature of God to claim otherwise. Many argue that if God created everything, and sin exists, then God must have created sin. However Paul records that **"sin came into the world through one man,"** that of course being Adam. (Romans 5:12) Mankind, not sin, was God's creation. The right to choose between obedience to God, or disobedience in full knowledge of the consequences (Gen 2:16,17), was granted to man. The fact that man chose to be seduced by the lies and deceptions of Satan, (Gen 3:4,5) himself more than likely a disobedient, fallen angel from an earlier heavenly angelic host, is entirely his own responsibility.

Sin, the transgression of the law, always has been and always will be the result of man's conscious decision to be disobedient to the will of God, however minutely or comprehensively that will is known. Our responsibility for our actions cannot be passed off. Far more important than conjecture on the origins of sin is the glorious truth that God, who knows no sin, came in the flesh to bear the burden of sin for mankind. **"He (Jesus) is the expiation (covering) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."** (1 John 2:2)

ORIGINAL SIN

There are many people, who, taking the view that we are all born into a sinful world insist that new born children should be baptized (by which they mean sprinkled with water) to cleanse them and that the individual concerned will later in life, confirm the action previously taken on their behalf.

Whilst there is no doubt that we are born into a sinful world, it is our own disobedience that separates us from God. The Greek word for sin, HAMARTIA, indicates 'a principle or source of action, or an inward element producing acts.' This means that it is a person's actions, seen as contrary to God's commandments, that makes a person a sinner.

Any sort of law brings knowledge, that is, it sets out the boundaries of what is and is not allowable. According to Paul in Romans 7, "sin finds opportunity in the commandment". And when we succumb to the blandishments of disobedience to the commands of God, we become culpable in and responsible for the actions that we take. And it is at that point of conscious, knowledgeable disobedience that each individual must take a similarly personal and conscious decision to seek out God's remedy for sin.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

What then are the consequences of sin? No reader should take lightly what God has, in love, revealed to us about the consequences of sin. Remember that God's will is that none should perish but that all should come to repentance. Let us tell those who will hear that God is not a malicious God who delights in condemning people. Rather, **"God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is *condemned already*, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."** (John 3:17,18)

- Sin separates us from God. Isaiah 59:2 tells the nation of Israel "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear." Nothing has changed. Failure to deal with sin means eternal separation from God.
- Separation from God, the source of life, will always produce death. Spiritual death is separation from God. Romans 6:23, **"For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."**
- Let us repeat that sin is no respecter of status, position, education, power or anything else. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There are no exceptions.
- The world is under the dominion of sin though most often this is not accepted or understood. We must work hard to persuade people that the fact that they are largely 'good' people living acceptable lives, is simply not the issue. The need is for all people to **"yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."** (Romans 6:13,14)

Biblical Archaeology 8

Ian Davidson (Motherwell)

PERSONAL THOUGHTS

I first became interested in archaeology after I had visited the British Museum for the first time in the late 1960's. The British Museum is arguably the greatest museum in the world. The Western Asiatic antiquities were of particular interest to me and I spent days, for example, in the Assyrian Saloon, the Nimrud Gallery, the Lachish Room, the Nineveh Gallery, the Sumerian and Babylonian Room, the Ancient Palestine Room, etc. Then I turned my attention to the Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities and I was hooked for life. Here was clear proof that the Bible dealt with real places in the real world. Talented people had dedicated their lives to understanding the ancient world better through archaeological excavation. I tried to find out more about such people as Paul Emile Botta, Jean-Francois Champollion, John Garstang, Austen Henry Layard, Hormuzd Rassam, Henry Rawlinson, Claudius Rich, Edward Robinson, A.H.Sayce, George Smith, Sir Charles Marston, Sir Charles Woolley, Sir William Flinders Petrie, W.F.Albright, and many others.

I later visited the Louvre in Paris. A bank colleague obtained for me 'The Illustrated Guide of the Egyptian Museum', Cairo, and a friend, working in Ankara, Turkey, sent me a book on 'The Anatolian Civilisations Museum' in Ankara. I studied Roman history and local history under Ed Archer of Lanark. These evening classes involved visits to archaeological sites in Britain. Ed was a marvellous enthusiast and I learnt a great deal from him. I subscribe to the American publication: *Biblical Archaeology Review*, which keeps me up to date with the many excavations going on in the, so-called, Holy Land. I continue to read widely and have taken a special interest in the Persian period of Jewish history. The writings of Edwin M.Yamauchi, Professor of History at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, have been especially helpful. In 1990, I delivered three talks in Motherwell on the 'Background of the Old Testament Scriptures'. Preparation involved my studying numerous archaeological books available in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow – one of the finest reference libraries in all of Europe. Later, I presented slide shows on the Bible, which, I think, many enjoyed. Then I undertook a most thorough research venture on the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul. Archaeology came into this in a big way and, at times, I felt I was with the great servant of Christ as he travelled widely throughout the Roman world. He, of course, ended his days in Rome and I, therefore, just had to make a visit to the eternal city to see its famous sites. The Forum and the Colosseum were particularly impressive. While there, I tried to contact my favourite Roman writer – Michael Grant – but, sadly, was unsuccessful. During our stay in Rome, Mary and I took the trip south one day to visit Pompeii, one of the ancient Roman cities destroyed by an eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD. Memories of a visit thirty years previously came flooding back.

Another ancient site I enjoyed seeing was that of Carthage in Tunisia. Of course, Rome and Carthage were the combatants in the famous Punic wars (3rd and 2nd centuries BC). The name Hannibal immediately springs to mind. Personally, I think it is important to study all aspects of Roman history because, of course, the Roman world features strongly in the N.T. Scriptures. The apostle Paul himself was a Roman citizen, a fact that should never be overlooked.

GEOGRAPHY

Geography was always my main subject at school. When I was young, I was never without an atlas. I studied them constantly. Once, two sisters in the church in Kilbirnie, Ayrshire gifted me 'The Reader's Digest Great World Atlas', which I still use. I like this atlas because it contains quotations from the Bible. Its map on "Palestine in the Time of Jesus," shows all the familiar sites. As I read off the names, I think of all the excavation work that has still to be

done on them. Future generations will undoubtedly learn much more than we. Perhaps, some of the greatest discoveries have still to be made. If they are on par with the Dead Sea Scrolls then I should like to be around when they happen.

The influence of geography on history has been immense. H.H. Rowley has written: "For geography exercises a powerful influence on history, and much in the Bible, and especially in the Old Testament, cannot be understood fully, save in its geographical setting." The small country of Palestine lay at the western extremity of the so-called "Fertile Crescent" and "formed a bridge between the ancient empires of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor and that other cradle of Near Eastern civilisation, Egypt." (Rowley). Of course, Palestine eventually contained God's people, and we read about Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, etc in the Bible mainly because of their connections with the Jews. I wish to point out that, geographically, Palestine was divided into four regions: the coastal plain; the highland ridge; the Jordan valley; and the high plateau to the east of the Jordan. Altogether, the country was not very large. Dan to Beersheba is 150 miles and its greatest width not more than about half as much. Its history far outweighs its size. But what a history!

MODERN DEBATES

Today, great debates are going on in Biblical Archaeology. They are all to do with the familiar liberal/conservative conflict. The conservatives are known as "maximalists" and the liberals as "minimalists". The debates are about nothing less than the historicity of the Bible. The minimalists are centred mainly in Sheffield, England and Copenhagen, Denmark. They "deny, in a nutshell, that the Old Testament is a historical document and claim that it is basically a work of theological fiction, composed not in the Iron Age (12th-6th centuries B.C.E.) but in the Persian or Hellenistic period (fourth-third centuries B.C.E.). It contains, they argue, little or no reliable information about the period it ostensibly describes." (Ilan Sharon). One has to be careful with those described as "maximalists" because, as far as I can see, they do not all hold to the view of the Bible that I hold. I believe that all of it is historically accurate from Genesis to Revelation (including Genesis chapters 1-11). One writer to keep an eye on in these debates is William G. Dever, an American, who has now retired from the University of Arizona. He attended Milligan College at one time. I heard him lecture in Jerusalem and found his material controversial to say the least. He regards himself as an opponent of the minimalists.

Please note that many archaeologists, especially of the Jewish faith, now use B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) rather than the better known B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (Anno Domini). I personally do not like this modern development.

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

I wish to conclude this series by quoting some of my favourite writers on Biblical Archaeology. "To one who believes in the historical mission of Palestine, its archaeology possesses a value which raises it far above the level of the artefacts with which it must constantly deal, into a region where history and theology share a common faith in the eternal realities of existence." (W.F.Albright).

"The study of the physical remains and of the innumerable inscriptions from the Near-Eastern world is itself a complex and many-sided task. Yet, as that world is the Bible's world, the attempt is a necessary venture in order to see the books of the Bible in their ancient context." (K.A. Kitchen). "The greatest figure in the archaeology of Roman Asia Minor was Sir William Mitchell Ramsay (d. 1939). When he first set foot in Turkey in 1880, Ramsay was committed to the then dominant views of the Tübingen School. But the results of his own researches in Asia Minor convinced him of the essential trustworthiness of the New Testament. Ramsay effectively challenged the radical Tübingen School's dismissal of the Acts of the Apostles as a late and unreliable composition." (Edwin Yamauchi, *The Archaeology of New Testament Cities in Western Asia Minor*).

News Report Simply Christians

Simply Christians began many years ago in Stretford, Manchester to try to help the Muslim families we know so well and Christians wanting to tell them about Jesus, how he loves them and all from every nation.

Allan began to write tracts, on a wide variety of subjects as questions needed answers, for Muslims, for non-believers, for those of other faiths and denominations. Then came the correspondence courses. 'Understanding the Bible' is one of the most requested of all. Recently we've had lots of questions raised by church members and ex-Muslims.

The internet has opened up the world! We now have approximately 750 addresses from almost 80 countries! This means sending CD's, packs of tracts to both Muslims and others, correspondence courses and Bibles and adding to the web site. We are getting requests from Russia – more than twenty last week alone. It's a good thing we are both retired. So far all the information has been sent free. Postage is a big item and the printing of the tracts, 5000 at a time, is done by a printer who is very helpful in our work. We are very thankful for the offer of help from Rose Payne of Reading. She has already done lots of work for many churches and we appreciate her willingness to use a system on the computer that will make it much easier for us to keep our records up to date. At the moment it is very time consuming.

Visiting is an essential part of our efforts to reach those who are eager to know a loving God.

Throughout the years the brethren have supported us most generously and made everything we've done possible and we are grateful to all of you who have encouraged us in many ways. We are now finding it difficult to supply the needs of so many. Any small donations would mean that we could enlarge the scope of our ability to help the seekers. There is much to do.

We want to thank our faithful trustees – they bring us real joy.

May God bless you all richly. Please pray for us, that we do His work to His glory. In Jesus,

Allan & Gretchen Ashurst.

Please send donations (cheques payable to Simply Christians) to:
**Simply Christians,
c/o 60, Kenwood Road, Stretford,
Manchester. M32 8PT.**

Coming Events

Stretford, Manchester Gospel Meetings

**Saturday, 20th September 2003
at 7.00pm**

Speaker:
Ernest Makin, Wigan

**Saturday, 25th October 2003
at 7.00 pm**

Speaker:
John Morgan, Hindley

**Saturday, 22nd November 2003
at 7.00 pm**

Speaker:
Vince O'Donovan, Brandon

There will be refreshments and discussion at 8.00 pm on each of the above occasions.

Ernest Makin and Vince O'Donovan will also speak on following Lord's Days, 21st September and 23rd November respectively at 11.00 am.

A warm welcome is extended to all

Newtongrange, Scotland

Social to be held on **Saturday, 4th October 2003 at 4.00 pm**. A warm welcome is extended to all. The speaker will be announced at a later date.

Glenrothes, Scotland

Gospel meeting on **Saturday, 13th September 2003** with Russell Hill, Morley as speaker.

Kentishtown, London

132nd Anniversary meetings will be held on **Saturday 4th October 2003** when

Ian Davidson, Motherwell will speak at 3.00pm and 6.00pm. We would appreciate your support at these meetings.

Ian will also speak at our services at 11 am and 6.30 pm on **Sunday, 5th October**.

Longshoot, Wigan

May 2004

Bi-annual Fellowship Weekend is to be held over weekend of **Friday, April 30th to Monday, May 3rd 2004**. A full programme of events will be announced in due course. But you can be assured of a weekend of excellent teaching and fellowship.

THE TRUTH

One should never be ashamed to own he has been wrong, which is but saying in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday.

"Faith on a full stomach may be simple contentment, but if you have it when you're hungry, then it is genuine."

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER COPY – POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM. £10.00

OVERSEAS BY SURFACE MAIL. £10.00 (\$16.00US or \$20.00Can)

OVERSEAS BY AIR MAIL. £14.00 (\$22.00US or \$28.00Can)

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO "SCRIPTURE STANDARD"

DISTRIBUTION AGENT & TREASURER:

JOHN K. KNELLER, 4 Glassel Park Road, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0NY.

E-mail: john@kkneller.freeseve.co.uk

Tel: 01875 853212 to whom change of address should be sent.

EDITOR: ROBERT MARSDEN, 4 The Copse, Orrell Road, Orrell, Wigan, England, WN5 8HL. Tel: 01942 212320 E-mail: bob.rock@virgin.net