
HOLY
BIBLE
The Story of the Bible



Printed for
LOGOS PUBLICATIONS
Box 220, Findon, South Australia 5023
by
Eureka Quality Printers, Kidman Park, South Australia
2001

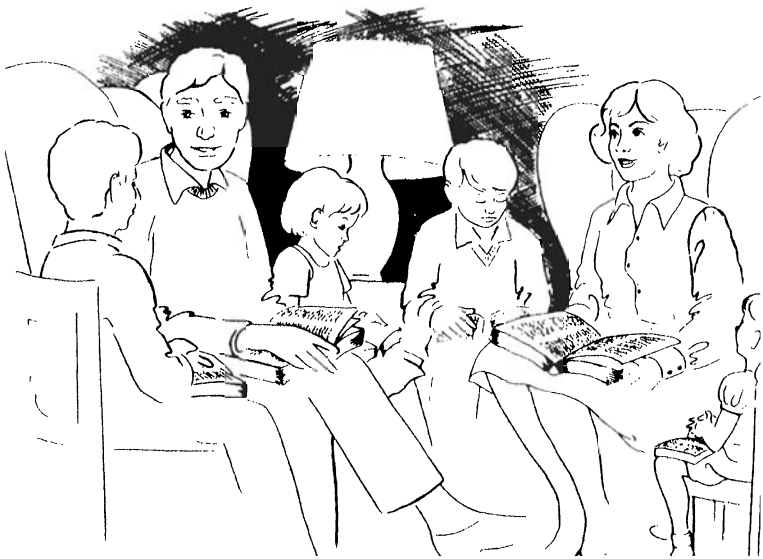
The Story of the Bible



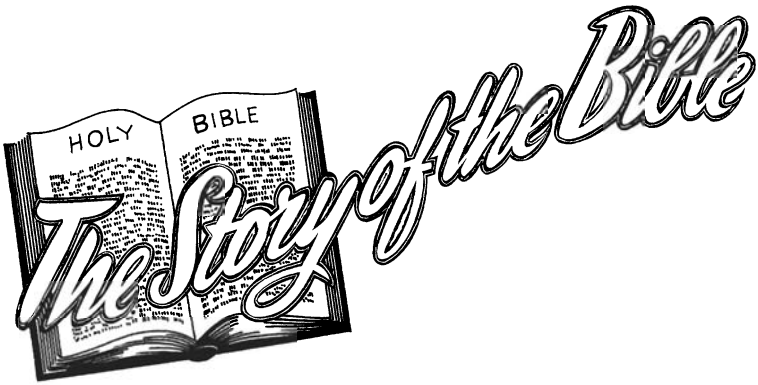
A detailed exposition of the Bible discussed within the family circle

by H. P. Mansfield

Edited by Graeham E. Mansfield



The children of the Phillips family gather with
their parents for a daily reading of the Bible
— an important part of their lives.
Then they discuss together the remarkable events
recorded in
the greatest Book in all the world.



From the Restoration of Judah to the Advent of the Messiah

THIS fifth volume of our *Story of the Bible* continues the dramatic narrative of the divine purpose with Israel as the exiles suffering captivity in Babylon are released from their oppression and permitted to return and rebuild Jerusalem. The excitement of the people arriving at their homeland, and commencing to restore the temple from its ruins, are captured in the record of Joshua, Zerubbabel and those who followed them. It was a "day of small things," for the work was given into the hands of a few during "troublous times" (Dan. 10:25), and yet therein is to be seen a cameo of future glory, and the spirit of encouragement for those who love Zion and seek for the restoration of the things of God.

The period of the restoration in Jerusalem prepared the scene for the advent of the Son of God — born in humble circumstances, but destined to change the world by his wonderful work, his personal instruction, and his grand sacrifice. Of him, the apostle John wrote: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard,

which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; [For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us]" (1Jn. 1:1-2).

There is no greater record in the Bible than that of the man born to be king, whose greatest desire was to honour his Father, and who gave his life for the salvation of those of faith. And yet, as we walk with him through *The Story of the Bible,* and listen to his wonderful parables and teachings, we will also hear the voice of condemnation, ridicule and contempt. It is sad that people so often refuse to recognise the beauty of godliness, and prefer to seek their personal satisfaction apart from the things of Truth.

In the Lord Jesus, we have a man of whom even his enemies declared: "Never spake man like this man." His influence continues to move men and women down through the ages after he ascended to heaven, and has been absent from the earth for two millennia — for even our present calendar is a constant reminder of his ministry amongst mankind.

The story is a dramatic one, and as we unfold it in this volume we hope that it will excite the reader, so that it might impact upon our lives, and cause us to respond more thoroughly to the example of this greatest of men before us. In his last prayer on behalf of his people, uttered just outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem on the eve of his trial and crucifixion, he declared: "This is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (Jn. 17:3).

With this desire we place this volume alongside the preceding four, and continue our *Story of the Bible.*

— Graeham E. Mansfield.

Contents

[1] THE WORK OF RESTORATION IN THE LAND 9
1. Jerusalem in Distress 14
2. Nehemiah's Activities in Jerusalem 18
3. Opposition and Problems 23
4. The City Wall is Completed 34
5. Religious Revival in Jerusalem 37
6. During Nehemiah's Absence 51
7. Nehemiah's Dramatic Return 58

[2] BETWEEN MALACHI AND MATTHEW 69
1. Changed Conditions in the Land 71
2. Uprise of the Maccabees 79

[3] JUDEA AT THE BIRTH OF THE MASTER 87
1. Confusion and Distress in the Nation 88
2. The Forerunner is Born 94
3. The Saviour is Born 108
4. The Infant Jesus 117
5. The Flight into Egypt 127

[4] CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH 131
1. Growing up in Nazareth 140
2. The Lord's First Passover 149
3. Jesus Grows to Manhood 163

[5] THE EARLY MINISTRY OF THE MASTER 169
1. The Ministry of John Baptist 170
2. The Fast in the Wilderness 185
3. The Temptation in the Wilderness 189
4. The First Followers 197
5. The First Miracle: Water into Wine 204
6. A Short Visit to Capernaum 213

[6] THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF THE LORD 215
1. Christ's Dramatic Cleansing of the Temple 218
2. Miracles at Jerusalem 226
3. Nicodemus Seeks Jesus 228
4. Conversion of Nicodemus 236
5. John's Unselfish Testimony 238
6. Samaria Hears the Word 241
7. John Baptist is Imprisoned 251

[7] PREACHING IN GALILEE 259
1. Important Work in Galilee 260
2. The Second Sign: Healing the Nobleman's Son 261
3. Nazareth Rejects Jesus 269
4. Jesus Removes to Capernaum 276

5. A Dramatic Day of Miracles 280
6. Renewing Strength for the Work Ahead 286
7. The Discourse on the Mount 290
8. Teaching Peter True Discipleship 300
9. A Leper and a Palsied Healed 302
10. The Call of Matthew the Business Man 312
[8] MIRACLES IN JERUSALEM 321
1. An Impotent Man is Given Strength 326
2. An Argument About Sabbath Keeping 338
3. A Dramatic Sabbath-Day Healing 343
[9] PREACHING IN THE NORTH 349
1. A Preaching Tour in Galilee 350
2. The Discourse on the Plain 357
3. A Roman Centurion Seeks Help of Jesus 364
4. The Raising of the Widow's Son 370
5. The Powerful Lesson of John Baptist's Imprisonment 373
6. The Discourteous Pharisee and the Forgiven Sinner 384
7. Women Helpers of Jesus 391
8. Jesus Cures a Blind and Dumb Man 393
9. Jesus' Relations Try to Restrain Him 401
[10] PARABLES AND TEACHINGS 405
1. The Parable of the Sower 406
2. The Parable of the Tares 414
3. The Parable of the Good Seed 420
4. The Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven 423
5. Parables for the Disciples 426

THE EVENTS IN THE GOSPELS
Birth and Youth 196
Childhood and Youth 203
Preparation for the Ministry 224
Jesus' Early Ministry 279

SKETCH MAPS OF THE LORD'S MINISTRY
Birth of the Saviour 148
The Opening Ministry 214
The First Activities of Jesus 217
Around Jerusalem 237
The Lord Baptises his Followers 240
Returning to the North 268
Preaching around Galilee 275
General Galilean Ministry 289
Activities in the North 311
Preaching in the North 404

The Work of Restoration in the Land



ACCORDING *to the chronology suggested by Mr. Phillips on page 334 of volume 4, the events recorded in the Book of Nehemiah follow historically those in the Book of Esther. The sequence of events would then be as follows: The regathering under Zerubbabel; the first visit and reform of Ezra; the return of Ezra to Babylon; the elevation of Esther; the deliverance of Purim; followed by the work of Nehemiah some thirteen years after Ezra's visit.*

In this case, then, Nehemiah would have appeared on the scene at the very time when he was most needed. A man of action was required to consolidate and extend the work of Ezra, for since his absence, his enemies had been busy. After he had returned to Babylon, his opponents in Judah set about to undo some of the work he had accomplished, so that reform was again needed in the newly established nation under Persian control. Nehemiah set about the task with vigor and faith. He secured from the king a commission to restore Jerusalem, and in the Land, he also organised the defence of the capital, and ruthlessly suppressed those who were trying to undo the work of Ezra. It has been well said that the difference between these two leaders was that whereas Ezra tore out his own hair when faced with the apostasy of the people (Ezra 9:3), Nehemiah "tore out the hair" of others (Neh. 13:25)! Being a much younger man than Ezra, Nehemiah would have approached these matters with a more energetic attitude. Besides, Nehemiah had to deal in this forceful fashion to impress the lesson that man cannot continue to break God's laws with impunity. The covenant established at his first coming had been callously broken, so judgment was to follow swiftly and effectively (Rom. 11:22; 2Thes. 1:7-9).

Nehemiah: A Man of Prayer and Action

HIS BOOK:

In the Hebrew Bible, Nehemiah forms part of the Book of Ezra. Certainly there are evidences that indicate that a single hand was responsible for its compilation. Their styles are very similar. As the Book of Ezra is mainly composed of extracts from official documents, or from the diaries and records of men whose activities are therein recorded, so also is the Book of Nehemiah. And as the Book of Ezra is naturally divided into two parts: the former outlining the return under Zerubbabel, the latter the work of Ezra, so the Book of Nehemiah can be divided into two parts, as follows:

RECONSTRUCTING THE WALL — CHAPTERS 1-6

Enquiry into the state of Jerusalem.....1:1-3
Pleading God's Help 1:4-11
Nehemiah's Expedition to the Land 2:9-16
Nehemiah's Exhortation to the People 2:17-20
Rebuilding of the City Walls is Commenced 3:1-32
The Rebuilding of the Wall is Obstructed 4:7-14
The Rebuilding is Successfully Completed 6:15-19

RE-INSTRUCTING THE PEOPLE — CHAPTERS 7-13

Re-registration of the Remnant .....ch. 7
Re-introduction of the Law .....ch. 8
Re-consecration of the People .....chs. 9-10
Re-population of the City .....ch. 11
Re-dedication of the Walls .....ch. 12
Re-extirpation of Abuses .....ch. 13

HIS CHARACTER

Ezra and Nehemiah both stand as models of great reformers. They clearly set before themselves the tasks to be accomplished and the evils to be remedied, and in the performance of their objectives allowed nothing to turn them aside. They asked of their countrymen to bear no burden, to make no sacrifice greater than those which they themselves were prepared to accept. They filled others with enthusiasm because they themselves were enthusiastic. They both foreshadowed, in different ways, the greatest reformer of all, the Lord Jesus. When we read of the intensity bordering on violence, of Nehemiah in cleansing the temple, we see foreshadowed that spark of divine zeal which was manifested by the Lord (John 2:17). Nehemiah was

noble, generous, courageous and upright; but with his stern integrity, he blended spiritual-mindedness, great humility and kindness, with a princely hospitality. As a statesman he was thoughtful, prudent and wise, combining all this with promptitude of decision in action. In dealing with either friend or foe he was completely free from favor or fear, aiming only to do what was right in the sight of God. He walked before God with singleness of eye, relying upon Him for guidance and help, seeking from Him approbation and reward.

Nehemiah was pre-eminently a man of prayer. The affliction of the city of Jerusalem moved him to petition God in four months' weeping and prayer (Neh. 1:6). It culminated in the request to the king, which was preceded by prayer (Neh. 2:4). In building the wall he was mocked, derided, insulted and threatened; but he answered it all by prayer (Neh. 4:9). His enemies tried to ensnare him; he sought help in prayer (Neh. 6:9, 14). He returned from Persia troubled, frustrated, opposed on every side — but prayers only flowed faster from his lips (Neh. 13:22, 29, 31).

To him Yahweh is "great and terrible" but abounding in mercy (Neh.1:5; 4:14). He implicitly believed in His providence; knew God could move the heart of the king (Neh. 2:8); grant wisdom (Neh. 2:12); defeat the schemes of the enemy (Neh. 4:15); revive the hearts of the people (Neh. 12:43); bestow prosperity (Neh. 2:20), give victory (Neh. 4:20). Implicitly trusting in this, the will of God became the motive of his life (Neh. 5:15; 9; 10:29; 13:27).

He was a true patriot. He had an intense love for Israel, and deeply mourned the ruins of its eternal city. He suffered and sympathised with the people, and vigorously opposed the highest and lowest of the land when the need arose, without respect of persons. A single-eyed, unselfish regard for the nation's best interests motivated him in all matters, from beginning to end, whether it be the defences of the city, the poverty of a section of the community, the worldliness of some of Judah, or the subtle infiltration of the enemy.

His activity and energy were remarkable. Yet with all his vigor he was prudent. He took wise precautions (Neh. 2:9). He knew when to be silent and keep his designs secret until an acceptable time (ch. 2:12-16). He prayed to God as a man of faith, but he also set a watch as a man of action (ch. 4:9). He was no simpleton, but clearly saw through Sanballat's attempts to ensnare him and so refused to be caught (ch. 6:11).

Ancient sketch of Nehemiah and his "Diary"



He showed outstanding moral and physical courage, taking his place with the common soldier and laborer, accepting duties for which he, as the royal favorite, courtier, and cupbearer, was far from qualified. He knew fear (ch. 2:2), but refused to be intimidated by it (ch. 2:19; 5:7). He was liberal and generous, ruling the province without exacting revenue he could legitimately claim (ch. 5:14-15), and at heavy cost to himself, helping others (ch. 5:17).

He drew on others to assist him, working shoulder to shoulder with Ezra in the important and difficult task of establishing the nation upon sound grounds of truth and rectitude.

The result was a thorough reform. Judaism was strengthened to meet and repel the challenges it had to face from then on until the appearance of Messiah. Thus through the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah a foundation was established essential to the ministry of the greatest character of all time: The Lord Jesus Christ.

It is thought by some that Malachi prophesied during the period of Nehemiah, for his prophecy implies that the temple is built, and the nation well established. It may be that Malachi helped in the work of Ezra and Nehemiah as Haggai and Zechariah assisted Zerubbabel and Joshua.

Thus the record reveals Nehemiah in the following light:

As a born LEADER (Neh 2:18).

As a man of PRAYER (chs. 1:5-11; 2:4; 4:4-5; 5:19, etc.).

As man of OPPORTUNITY (ch. 2:1-5, 7).

As a man of ACTION (chs. 2:12-16; 4:6; 5:6-7).

As a man of LIBERALITY and KINDNESS (ch. 5:14-18).

As a man of FAITH (ch. 4:20).

As a man of COURAGE (ch. 4:14).

As a man who was CLEAR-SIGHTED (ch. 6:2), PLAIN-SPEAKING (ch. 6:3), FIRM-DEALING (ch. 13:25, 28), GOD-HONOURING (chs. 7:5; 4:5).

Chapter One

JERUSALEM IN DISTRESS

EIGHT years had passed since Esther's successful intervention on behalf of her people. She was now firmly established as queen in Persia, and Jews were everywhere high in favor. Among their number was one called Nehemiah (whose name means, *The Consolation of Yahweh*), who had risen to the honoured position of one of the king's cupbearers. This was a very responsible position, and one in which the monarch placed much trust. Cupbearers had to protect the safety of the king, as sometimes poison was administered through the wine offered.

Nehemiah had a kinsman called Hanani. Hanani had visited Jerusalem in order that he might see how the people were faring, and, having recently returned to Persia again, was anxious to tell Nehemiah of his experiences.

He had a very sad story to tell the king's cupbearer. He had seen many evidences of apathy and frustration in the beloved city. "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire," he told Nehemiah.

This destruction had probably been wrought by the enemies of Judah. They had been very active. Twenty years earlier, they had attacked the Jews, and compelled them to cease their labors (Ezra 4:23). Since then, opportunity had been given them again to attack (Est. 3:8-11), and apparently this had been so successful that the ruins of the raids then undertaken were still in evidence (Est. 9:15-16).

He Determines to Help the People

Nehemiah was greatly distressed by the report of Hanani. So greatly did he love Jerusalem, so deeply did he feel its humiliation, that he could not restrain his emotion. He sat down and wept, mourning the miseries of his people. For almost four months* he thought deeply and earnestly upon the problem, preparing his mind to seek God, that He might overshadow the affairs of Judah for good.

He could not understand how the people could remain indifferent to the reproach and affliction of the beloved city, how they could permit Jerusalem to remain in the state of disrepair in which it was found.

* Nehemiah had heard the report in the month Chisleu (Neh. 1:1), but it was not until the month Nisan (ch. 2:1), four months later, that he acted in the way that he describes in his book.

Clearly, a man of ability and vigor was needed on the spot to reorganise the nation, and bring about a spiritual revival among the people. He determined to dedicate himself to the task.

He recognised the difficulties that would face him, and realised that all his labors would be in vain without the blessing of Yahweh (Psa. 127). Therefore, before he made any definite move, he prepared his heart to seek God, and poured out his mind in an earnest prayer for help in the work to which he had set his hand.

Nehemiah's Prayer This prayer of Nehemiah is the first of many recorded in his book, and uttered by this man of prayer and action. It can provide a model for prayer that can help us when we are oppressed with a problem such as that which faced Nehemiah. It is filled with references to the Law (note the marginal references in the Oxford AV Bible), indicating that Nehemiah, like Ezra, was very familiar with the Scriptures, and that he gained his inspiration for prayer from the Word of God itself.

His prayer was like an answer to the Voice of God that he heard sounding from the Word. It expresses the following points:

1. The character of God upon which his requests were based, v. 5.
2. A humble petition that Yahweh would help the people in their plight, v. 6.
3. A confession of sins, v. 7.
4. A remembrance of God's promises of mercy, vv. 8-9.
5. The relation of the people to God for whom he prayed, v. 10.
6. An impassioned plea for help, v. 11.

In his final plea for help, Nehemiah spoke to God of his determination to approach the king, asking for his assistance on behalf of his people. He prayed: "O Lord, I beseech thee, let now Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servant, and the prayer of Thy servants, who delight to revere (see *Rotherham*) Thy Name: and prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!"

"For", concludes Nehemiah in explanation, "I was the king's cupbearer."

God Creates the Opportunity — Nehemiah Acts Four months had passed since Nehemiah had received the report from Hanani (cp. Neh. 1:1 with 2:1). Once again it was Nehemiah's duty to act as cupbearer to the king. He probably alternated with others in this important position, and now appeared on duty for the first time since receiving the sad news of Jerusalem.

He was downcast and pre-occupied when at last he stood again in the presence of the Persian monarch. The king looked upon the sad

countenance of his cupbearer with concern. He had a great regard for him, and enquired the cause of his grave appearance. "Why is your countenance sad, seeing you are not sick?" the king asked. "It must be caused by sorrow of heart."

This remark of the king caused Nehemiah to fear. It was considered a serious offence to appear sad in the presence of the king, so serious indeed, that it was punishable by death (Est. 4:2), because it was felt that such an attitude brought disgrace upon the ruler. Perhaps the king's tone of voice suggested that he considered Nehemiah might be hiding some act of treachery.

But Nehemiah replied: "Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" Nehemiah wanted to reassure the king that it was not a matter of treachery, and that the monarch's life was not in jeopardy; instead, it was a matter of personal concern about the condition of the city of Jerusalem.

To this the king replied: "For what dost thou make request?"

In this situation, God had opened up a wonderful way of opportunity for Nehemiah, and this energetic man of God was not slow to seize it. But he did not overlook God. He acted upon two



Aerial view of the ruins of Susa (Shushan), the royal city of Persia

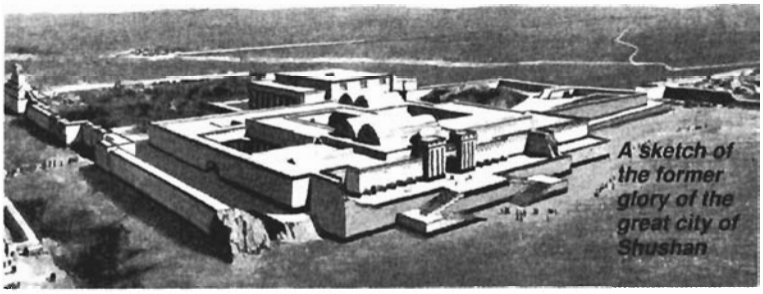
points of advice: one which had already been recorded in Scripture before the days of Nehemiah, and the other which has since been set down. They are: "In all thy ways acknowledge Yahweh, and He shall direct thy paths" (Pro. 3:6); and "In every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6).

This Nehemiah did. Before he answered the king, whilst he was attending upon him as his cupbearer, he uttered a short, silent prayer to God, that He might bless the petition he was about to make. Then he replied: "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, that you would send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it!"

Sitting next to the king was the queen.* From her, Nehemiah received encouragement, for she was in a position to support his cause, and suggest that his petition be granted. Now, pressed by his beloved servant, and the beautiful queen, the king granted the petition, requiring however, that a limit be put on the time that Nehemiah would be absent, and that he then return to Persia.

To this the joyful Nehemiah readily agreed. Thereupon he made further requests. If he were to return at the time suggested by the king, he must have assistance in accomplishing the tasks before him. He therefore asked that letters of authority be given to him to give to the governors beyond the river requesting that they assist him in his labors, and that the king's minister might allocate him sufficient material to build "up the gates of the fortress which pertains to the house, and for the wall of the city," as well as his own palace (Neh. 2:8 — see Rotherham).

All this the king granted to his beloved servant.



A sketch of the former glory of the great city of Shushan

* This must have been Esther. The words in parenthesis: "The queen also sitting by him" are most unusual, for little is said of queens in Scripture unless they were implementing some policy, and certainly a Persian queen would normally be of no consequence to the divine record. However, if we identify Artaxerxes of Neh. 2:1 with the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, then it is obvious why reference is made to the queen: it was Esther; and she was supporting the proposition of Nehemiah.

Chapter Two

NEHEMIAH'S ACTIVITIES IN JERUSALEM

ARMED with the king's authority, Nehemiah lost no time. Fortified with a Persian escort (Neh. 2:9), he set off on his mission. Arriving in the land, he presented to the surrounding rulers the credentials which set forth his power. He was received with sullen resentment by the enemies of the Jews, and whilst they did not dare to openly oppose Nehemiah at that time, he could sense their opposition. He recorded his impressions in a diary that he kept at the time: "When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days" (Neh. 2:10-11).

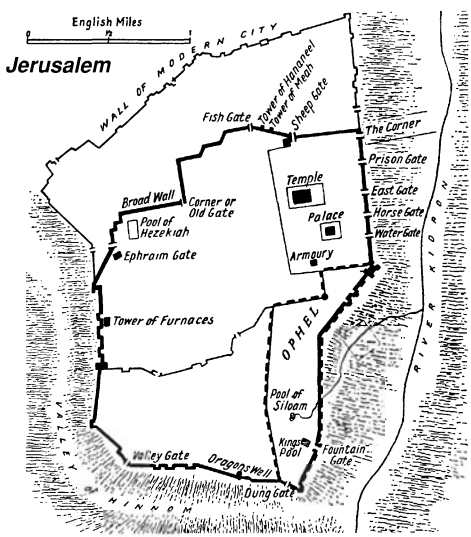
So an uneasy quiet settled on the land as the people awaited the next move of Nehemiah.

He Considers the Task Before Him

For a time Nehemiah kept his own counsel. He told nobody what he proposed to do until he had considered the task before him, and had carefully worked out how to go about it. He waited three days so that he might be able to assess better the full situation. Then, one night, with a few trusty companions he had brought with him, and riding upon his beast, he reviewed the state of the walls of the beloved city.

He saw how true were Hanani's words, that the ruinous state of Jerusalem was a reproach to all the people of the Jews.

In the dead of night, so nobody could see him, he descended into the deep valley of Hinnom with his few companions, and threaded his way in and out among the huge masses of rubble and ruin that lay everywhere. He loved the city, even in its broken-down state, and recorded in his personal diary each



of the sites where the history of the past had been enacted.

There was the *Spring of the Dragon,* and the *Dung Gate* where the refuse of the city was conveyed to the valley of Hinnom — but the wall was in ruins and the gates blackened with fire. There was the *Gate of the Fountain,* the *King's Pool* with which Hezekiah had so much to do — but it was cluttered up with huge masses of broken masonry, so that the animal upon which he rode could no longer make its way. Alighting from the beast, Nehemiah now picked his way over the rubbish and ruin, stumbling along in the dead of night, making notes of all that he saw as he did so.

So he returned, tired out and dusty from his labors, to set down on paper all that he had seen, and work out how best to repair the wall and make good the defence of the city.

As yet he had said nothing to the rulers of the Jews. He desired that they themselves should voluntarily seek to assist in the work rather than that he should exercise any compulsion upon them. So he kept all his plans to himself until they were ready to receive it.

In this he acted wisely. To have done otherwise may have caused them to be discouraged before they were ready for the work. So he ascertained first what work had to be done, then carefully planned as to how to go about it. Finally he gathered the elders of the people together, to secure their co-operation in the labors that he was about to propose to them.

He Discusses the Work with the Jewish Elders

Nehemiah's next task was to make the Jewish people willing participants in the work he proposed to do. He thus called a conference with the elders of the people, and, having outlined to them the state of the city, he addressed them as follows: "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem that we be no more a reproach!"

It was a reproach upon the people, that after so long a time the city should reveal such evidence of neglect. It was the subject of ridicule to the world, that the Jews should be so indifferent to the requirements of the times. It adversely reflected upon Yahweh, that such apathy should exist among His people. Slip-shod methods adopted by His servants in the things concerning Himself invariably bring reproach and ridicule upon the Truth. Only the very best is good enough for God's service, and when that is rendered, His strength is perfected, even in weakness.

Thus the people were made ashamed of their neglect of the things of God. Nehemiah told them of his personal experiences, how "the hand of his God had been upon him for good" (ch. 2:18), and how the king had been induced to give his support to the work proposed.

He was a born leader. He generated enthusiasm among the people for the work he was about to undertake. He first carefully surveyed what was required (vv. 12-16), then quietly planned his methods without telling anybody about them (v. 16), then secured adequate co-operation from those who could help him (vv. 17-18).

The people were stimulated by his words. "Let us rise up and build!" they exclaimed when he finished his discourse.

Thus they strengthened their hands for the good work about to be undertaken.

The Adversaries Mock at Nehemiah

Having received promise of the full support of the Jewish leaders, Nehemiah proceeded to make preparations for the work. Others heard of this, and soon neighboring countries were buzzing with rumours of the intentions of Judah.

Sanballat and Tobiah, the enemies of the Jews, heard of it, as did Geshem the Arabian. They assembled together to consider what should be done, and decided that the efforts of the builders were so pitifully weak that the best opposition was to ridicule them. They thought that the Jews would become discouraged, and soon cease their labors. Nehemiah recorded this in his diary. He wrote: "They laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, what is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king?"

Nehemiah had a complete answer: "The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem!"

This was similar to the reply of Zerubbabel to the Samaritans when they earlier opposed his work under the guise of helping him. Nehemiah's reply angered Sanballat and his companions, and they retired to consider what further they should do to prevent the building of the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah Organises the Laborers

With such an energetic and faithful leader as Nehemiah in charge of affairs, the people soon became caught up with the growing enthusiasm. All were pressed into the work: priests, Levites, nobles, commoners. It levelled them all in one great act of service. From every part of the land, workers converged on the city of Jerusalem to assist in the labor. In most cases, the elders of their particular cities encouraged and supported the people; but in other cases they opposed the work, as we shall see.

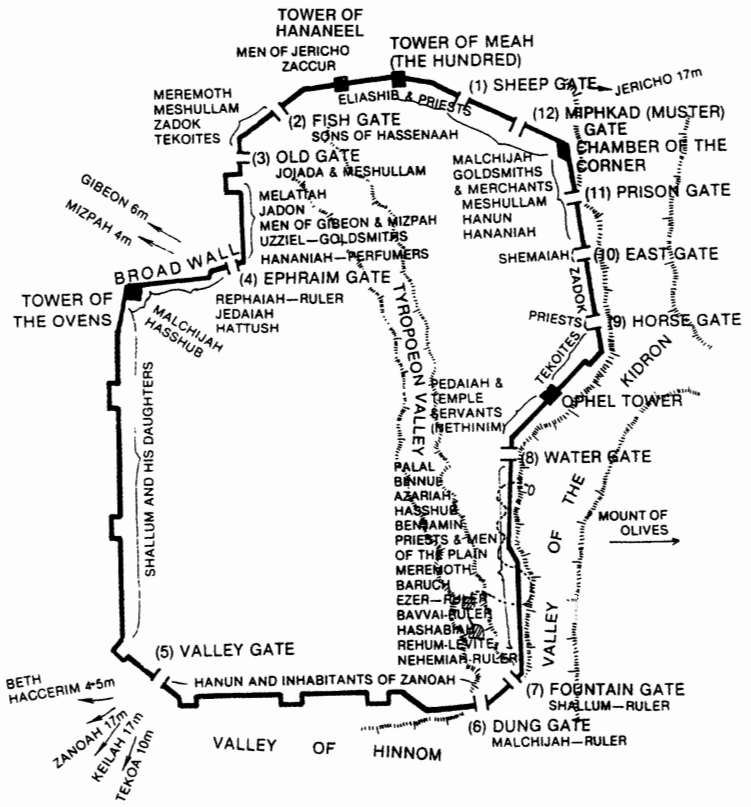
Nehemiah kept a careful account of the workers, and the place where they labored. It is recorded in Nehemiah chapter 3, and as we consider the people who labored, and the work they did, together with their subsequent history and actions, some powerful exhortations and

examples are revealed.

Eliashib the high priest, was foremost in the work. He rose up eagerly in support of Nehemiah with his brethren the priests, and set to work building the sheep gate in the northeastern corner of the wall, through which came the animals to be offered in sacrifice.

In the building of the wall, Eliashib thus rendered valuable service. Unfortunately, he was not always foremost in the things of God. He was the type of person who is energetic in material duties, but negligent of spiritual requirements. Later on, he revealed himself to be quite inadequate for the position of high priest (ch. 13:4, 28). He was tolerant of marriage with the alien (cp. Ezra 10:18), so that he, himself was later allied by marriage with Tobiah, the deadly enemy of the Jews. In addition his grandson became son-in-law to Sanballat (Neh. 13:4, 28).

How often we meet people like Eliashib! They are keen to serve



Nehemiah placed the workers completely around the ruined wall of Jerusalem to build up the various sections. He records in his Diary the different groups employed in the important labour.

God in material things, but fail to give Him what He mostly desires: their hearts and minds! Their service, though valuable, is ruined by their lack of appreciation of what God requires in a spiritual direction.

Another worker, similar to Eliashib was Meshullam. He, too, was energetic in material labors, but he also lacked the spiritual qualities God desires. He repaired two portions of the wall (ch. 3:4, 30), but he later permitted his daughter to marry Johanan the son of Tobiah, with disastrous results (ch. 6:18).

How important it is that we should be consistent in our labors for God.

As earnest as the efforts of these men were for the things of God, they ruined them all by inconsistent actions later on.

Others were different. There were the people of Tekoa, for example. They heard the appeal for assistance, and wholeheartedly gave themselves to the work. They did so in spite of the attitude of their leaders: "their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord" (ch. 3:5). The nobles probably gave everything but personal labor. They were theorists in God's service, but refused to soil their hands in the work. But the people of that area more than compensated for the tardiness of their leaders; they not only repaired the section of the wall given them to accomplish, but gave themselves to "repair another piece" (v. 27), thus shaming their nobles.

The work levelled all classes. Priests (v. 1), Levites (v. 4), commoners (v. 5), tradesmen (v. 8), doctors (v. 8), rulers (v. 9), women (v. 12), merchants (v. 32) all united to do the work. Many labored at spots where they had a particular interest. So, the priests labored at the sheep gate close to the temple (v. 1), others repaired the wall at points where it defended their dwellings (v. 23), the Nethinim repaired by the water-gate where they resided (v. 26).

Thus all Judah was united in a wonderful work of service to God. The city of Jerusalem hummed with activity as the people builded and Nehemiah supervised the work.

Chapter Three

OPPOSITION AND PROBLEMS

THE adversaries of Judah viewed the work in Jerusalem with the greatest concern. Chief of their number was Sanballat, the governor of Samaria. This city was held by a Persian garrison called "the army of Samaria" (Neh. 4:2), and its governor derived his authority from the Persian Satrap of Syria. As governor of Samaria, Sanballat's position was one of dignity and influence. He was on terms of close alliance with an Ammonite chief, Tobiah, and an Arab sheik, Geshem. Geshem was chief over a band of marauders who seemed to be willing at any time to put their swords at the disposal of Sanballat.

In addition to all this, Sanballat was allied in marriage to Eliashib, the high priest elect. His daughter Nicaso was wedded to Manasseh, son of Joiada and grandson of Eliashib. Tobiah, also, became allied in marriage to Eliashib (ch. 13:4). These men were thus in important positions which rendered them formidable enemies to Nehemiah. Sanballat, especially, being a man of reckless and violent temper, could be expected to cause serious trouble. From the very first he disliked Nehemiah's appointment, and thought that ill would come from it (ch. 2:10). He hated the thought of a powerful Jerusalem, for he realised that such could only be established at the expense of Samaria's position. It seems, also, that he had designs on the priesthood itself. This is suggested by his offer of help (ch. 2:20), and his ties of marriage with the priesthood in Judah (ch. 13:28). He therefore saw Nehemiah as a dangerous enemy who could defeat his ambitions, and sought in every way to undermine his work. In turn he tried intimidation (ch 2:19), ridicule (ch. 4:2) and force (ch 4:7-8). Nehemiah met all these attacks by prayer, vigilance and work.

Sanballat Ridicules the Work of Nehemiah

Sanballat had tried guile and intimidation (ch. 2:19), but they failed to interfere with Nehemiah's labors. Now he determined to return to the attack. Gathering the army of Samaria together over which he was chief, he stood at their head, and addressed them concerning the work of the Jews. A paraphrase of his speech is as follows:

"What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they complete the walls and dedicate them by sacrifice? Will they finish the work at the time they have appointed? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?"

These words were intended to incite the Samaritans to acts of violence against the Jews. Sanballat implied that his soldiers would not be punished if they should indulge in any unauthorised attacks upon the Jews. He was decrying Judah by mocking at their feeble efforts, describing the wall they were building as a makeshift wall built out of secondhand stones gathered out of heaps of burnt rubbish! Tobiah the Ammonite, his companion in crime, was standing next to him as he thus addressed the troops and ridiculed the efforts of the Jews: "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall", he mocked.

Thus the enemies of Judah taunted and laughed at the efforts of the Jews.

Nehemiah Answers by Prayer and Work

There is a saying, however, which states: "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me!" It is doubtful whether Nehemiah knew of that saying, but he certainly acted upon the wonderful advice it contains.

He heard of the mocking of Sanballat and Tobiah. A mighty jeer probably went up from the Samaritan troops when they heard the sarcastic comments of their leaders. The troops probably repeated the sayings of their commanders until Nehemiah and his fellow-workers were ridiculed everywhere throughout the land.

But Nehemiah did not foolishly try to match their sarcasm with sarcasm. Instead, he made the problem a matter of prayer. He turned to God, and directed His attention to the mocking reproach of the enemies, beseeching Him that He would bless the labors in which they were engaged.

And, in addition to the prayer, he redoubled his work. "We builded the wall," he reported in his diary, "until the half of it was finished; for the people had a mind to work" (ch. 4:6).

What an excellent way to handle the backbiting of one's enemies! Sanballat had nothing of value to counter the prayer and labor of Nehemiah! In spite of all his mocking words, the wall went up steadily — becoming a complete and effective answer which even Sanballat's troops must have recognised. Their laughter did not last long.

Sanballat Threatens to Destroy Nehemiah's Work

Steadily the walls rose to the dismay and anger of Sanballat and his companions. They saw them rapidly rising, the breaches being filled, the gates erected. They could see that soon Jerusalem would have adequate defence. Some direct action was needed, if Samaria was to retain its position and not be challenged by a powerful Jerusalem!

Sanballat called a conference for all those interested in defeating the work of Nehemiah. It was obvious to all that a direct attack must be made. They "conspired to gather together and fight against Jerusalem, and thus hinder the work." They thought that the merest display of force would be sufficient to hinder the labors of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah Replies by Prayer and Vigilance Nehemiah reported all this in the diary he kept: "*Nevertheless,*" he wrote, "*we made our prayer unto God, and set a watch against them day and night because of them.*"

What a wonderful passage of Scripture (ch. 4:9)!

Nehemiah was a man of prayer and action. He realised that if prayer was to be effective, it had to be combined with work. The farmer who prays for a good harvest will not find his prayer answered unless he labors to sow the seed; the person who prays that God will grant him wisdom (James 1:5) will not find his request granted unless he is prepared to seek for it in the place where God has revealed it (John 5:39). So Nehemiah not only prayed, but he set a watch *day and night* to protect the people against the enemy.

He combined work with prayer and succeeded because he provided a foundation for the blessing of God.

Some of Judah Become Tired and Discouraged But now trouble mounted for Nehemiah from within. Some of the men of Judah, hearing the ridicule of Sanballat, seeing the display of force he was making, became wearied and afraid. They reasoned that if God was with Nehemiah in the work, they should not be faced with such great troubles. They saw only difficulties on every side — heaps of rubbish and ruin, problems in building the wall,* and became discouraged. They repeated among themselves the mocking words of their adversaries, and, as their fear grew, they went in a body to Nehemiah to repeat to him what Sanballat and others were threatening.

The Need Met by an Organised Defence Nehemiah could see that there was some justification for their complaints. He therefore armed the people, and made the watch around the city more sure by personal supervision of it.

---

* See Neh. 4:10, which, according to Rotherham's translation, reads as follows: "Then said Judah: The strength of the burden-bearer faileth, and the rubbish aboundeth, and we are not able to build at the wall; and our adversaries have said, 'They shall not know, neither shall they see, till we come into their midst, and slay them, and so shall we cause the work to cease'." Thus a spirit of defeatism made itself felt, which was immediately challenged by the prompt action of the vigilant Nehemiah.

At one stage* the danger seemed imminent; the forces of Sanballat, hovering around the walls of Jerusalem, must have been on the point of attack. He armed the people, encouraging them to fight with confidence, for God was with them. "Be not afraid," he told them, "Remember Yahweh, who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

With these words of encouragement ringing in their ears, the defenders arose in defence of their work, standing forth boldly with weapons in hand, ready to repel the enemy. This determined attitude deterred the attackers. They could see that the Jews were prepared to fiercely defend their city at any costs, and in the face of such an attitude, they hesitated to attack. So the crisis passed, and the people returned to their labors (ch. 4:13-15).

This threatened attack convinced Nehemiah that some form of organised defence was necessary, lest the enemy one day take them off their guard, and succeed in his intentions. He arranged firstly, that the personal bodyguard he had brought with him from Persia should be divided into two. Half were instructed to stand ready armed, to repel any attack, whilst the other half continued in the work of building the wall. Next, he ordered that every Jewish worker should be armed, and keep his weapons by his side, so that at the sound of the trumpet he could put down his tools and take up his weapons and gather at the point of attack. Finally, he gave himself the task of keeping vigilance over the city. He became the principal watchman upon the walls of Jerusalem, keeping guard over the city. He kept a trumpeter by his side, and commanded the people that if they heard the trumpet blast, they were to immediately put down their tools and hasten with their weapons towards the sound of the trumpet. He also instructed the people that they were to lodge within Jerusalem at night time, and not return to their individual cities as they had previously done.

Nehemiah provided a wonderful example of devotion to duty. Neither he, nor his brethren, nor his bodyguard put off their clothes day or night. They were always found at their post, always laboring at the wall, or standing guard in its defence. The people came to rely upon Nehemiah, and see in him a living example of what was required of themselves. As they observed him so untiring in his labors, so they were induced to follow him in whatever he did.

Nehemiah, himself, was a strict disciplinarian. He demanded a lot of himself and his immediate followers. He permitted nothing to interfere with the work in hand, and no member of his own personal band of followers was permitted to absent himself from his duty,

* Note Neh. 4:14: "And I looked, and rose up..." This is an entry from the diary of Nehemiah, recording an actual incident. He looked up and noticed the enemy about to attack, and thus moved in the manner described in the succeeding verses.

night or day, except to provide for the barest necessities. The only excuse permitted for absenteeism from the work was the need for each man to obtain his daily requirement of drinking water.* Each man was permitted time off for this purpose only.

Nehemiah: Champion of the Downtrodden (Nehemiah 5)

But having temporarily defeated the attacks by the surrounding enemies, a further problem faced Nehemiah and his courageous associates. It concerned numerous distressing factors faced by his own people. The exiles had ridden forth from Babylonia, mounted not only on asses, but on horses, camels and mules (Ezra 2:66-67). They had been affluent enough to contribute around 4,200 pounds of silver and 41,000 drams of gold (Neh. 7:70-72) toward the erection of the temple, but since that time the tide of prosperity had turned. Yahweh had sent famine, drought and want in the land (Hag. 1:9-11; Zech. 8:10), and though this was subsequently relieved (Hag. 2:19), it left its mark upon the community, and was reimposed when deserved (Mal. 3:8-10). When the entire nation was required to dedicate the whole of its resources to the building the wall of Jerusalem and securing its defences, this weak point in their spiritual armour was revealed. Impoverished Jews had sought assistance from their more wealthy brethren. These had refused to lend except on security. The borrower was required to mortgage his house, or land, or both (ch. 5:3), or offer as security his person, or that of his son or daughter.

Although the Law permitted this in measure (it allowed a man to pledge the person of a daughter (Exo. 21:7), but made no provision for a son), it required that such should go free in the sabbatical year (Exo. 21:2. Deu. 15:12), and further required that at the time of release, the creditor should "furnish the man liberally" out of his own store with a supply of necessities (Deu. 15:14). This was not being done, and a large number of the poorer people had sunk into a state of perpetual slavery to the richer nobles (ch. 5:5). Some had even been sold into the hands of the heathen (ch. 5:8). This was strictly forbidden by the Law, and had been one of the reasons why Yahweh cast them and their wicked king out of the land (Jer. 34:8-17; Lev. 25:39-46). The population of the land was being diminished by this drain upon it, and that of Jerusalem was especially scanty (ch. 7:4). Failure of crops (ch. 5:3), heavy taxation (v. 4), oppressive governors

* Nehemiah 4:23 states: "None of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing." The marginal note better expresses the original: "Every one went with his weapon for water." Each one had to take his own vessel to the pool to obtain what water he needed daily. Nehemiah thus records that until the work was completed, none of his immediate followers took off their clothes for sleeping, and none left the site of the work, except to take his vessel and obtain his daily supply of drinking water.

(v. 15) had increased the difficulties. Both the Law concerning usury among brethren (Exo. 22:25; Lev. 25:36) and the Law of Release relating to the Jubilee (Lev. 25:24-32) had become a dead letter.

The building of the wall accentuated these problems, for many who built were little more than poor slaves to their wealthier brethren, and were still compelled to pay them their monthly interest, which at this time, they had no opportunity of providing for themselves and their creditors! Thus, as the creditors continued to make demands, so the condition of the oppressed became increasingly unbearable until, at last, they rose against their oppressors. These poor Jews found a worthy champion in Nehemiah.

Trouble in Jerusalem (Neh. 5)

The trials of the poor Jews in Jerusalem became so great that they could not bear them any longer. They lifted up their voice in a terrible cry of anguish to Nehemiah, pointing out that the work of building the wall interfered with their opportunity of providing for the needs of their families. "We have large families," they lamented, "and have to provide corn for them that we may eat and live!" Some came to him complaining of the terrible oppression that they suffered from their more wealthy fellow-Jews. "We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth," they declared.

Others had an even more bitter complaint to make: "We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, upon our lands and vineyards, and our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren *(i.e. they had become as slaves to their brethren),* our children are as their children; and, lo, we have brought into bondage our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are brought into bondage, neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards!"

Nehemiah was astounded at what he learned. It was incredible that fellow-Jews should be so lacking in consideration as to bring their fellows who were laboring to establish the defence of Jerusalem, under such bondage; it was unbearable that those who were prepared to sacrifice their time and energy should have to mortgage their lands, and even their families, bringing them into bondage and slavery, in order to meet the monthly requirements of interest to fellow-Jews!

His heart was stirred within him, and he determined something must be done. Being a man of action he did not allow much time to elapse before he instituted the reform.

Nehemiah's Reform

Stirred up and angry at the state of things revealed to him, he openly rebuked the nobles and rulers for their avarice. "You are exacting usury of your

brethren!" he declared indignantly. He then called an assembly of people who had witnessed the evils that had been done, and gathering them together, he impressed them with the enormity of the action that had been committed. "Why!" he exclaimed angrily to them, "we have already, after our ability, redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will you sell your brethren? Or shall they be sold unto us?"

The rulers were ashamed when they heard these words of their governor. They could see the inconsistency of their action. Their brethren had been forced to borrow from them because of difficulties that had arisen through giving their time to building the wall, that is, in doing the work of God, but instead of readily helping them, they had charged them heavy interest on their loans. Further, they had forced their poorer brethren to meet these interest payment when they came due, even taking their children into bondage as security for it. So the audience, pricked in conscience, remained silent as Nehemiah spoke.

He continued: "It is not good what you do! Should you not walk in the fear of God? Do you not see that this will cause the heathen our enemies to reproach us? I and my brethren and my servants, might have exacted of the poor Jews money and corn, for we have assisted them, but we have not done so. I pray you, let us leave off this usury, and restore to them, even to this day, their lands, their vineyards, olive-yards, houses, and the hundredth part of the money that you have exacted of them."

Moved by the action and words of Nehemiah, the rulers and wealthy Jews agreed to do as he asked. Then, whilst the people were still gathered before him, he called for the priests, and took an oath of them, that the rich brethren should do according to their promise.

This was done, and again the people turned to the noble leader who had given such single-minded service in the things of God. Again he stood up before them, and shaking the lap of the garment he was wearing, he declared: "*So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labor, that performeth not this promise! Let him thus be shaken out, and emptied!*" Solemnly the congregation answered with a loud: "Amen"!

And the rich did according to their promise.

Nehemiah's Personal Example Nehemiah's words of exhortation to the rulers and wealthy of the nation were carried out, partly because they saw that what he demanded was only reasonable, and partly because he gave them a personal example as to what should be done. Though he had been appointed governor in the land, he had not exacted of the people the tribute that he was justified in demanding. Former governors had made oppressive demands upon them, but he did not think it right to

do so. The fear of God was with him, and he therefore acted liberally towards the people.

He had not used the poverty of the people as a means of enriching himself. Others had done so. When the people were in personal want through giving their time to building the wall, wealthy Jews had purchased their property at much less than it was worth. The opportunity was there for Nehemiah to do likewise; but he would not stoop to such an evil. In fact, he had impoverished himself in employing his servants to give themselves to the work.

And as his diary recorded, he had kept an open house for the Jews and rulers who, as well as other Jews that had been redeemed from the heathen, dined at his table, at his expense. This exacted a heavy toll upon his resources. He could have recouped it by the tribute which he, as governor, could have demanded from the people. He refused to do so, for with the people giving themselves so freely to the work of God, the payment of tribute would have imposed a heavy burden. His action was a sacrifice he willingly made, that the wall and defences of Jerusalem might be established. And with this sacrifice he offered unto God a brief, but intimate prayer: ***"Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people!"***

We are sure that God will abundantly answer this prayer in the day when Nehemiah stands before the Lord Jesus to receive public commendation for his action.

Further Problems Nehemiah had to Solve

In Nehemiah 5, we read of the enemy within. Whilst burdened with the heavy task of building the wall of Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to turn his attention to correcting abuses that were apparent among his own countrymen. In Nehemiah 6, we read how his work was hindered by enemies without. Already (see ch. 4) these bitter adversaries of Judah had tried to hinder his noble work by ridicule and the threat of war; now they used guile and hypocrisy. But in spite of all trials and oppositions, Nehemiah faithfully, courageously and quietly pursued his duty undeterred by friend or foe. In that, he was like the apostle Paul who wrote at a time of much stress: "Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us... " (2Cor. 7:5-6).

How Nehemiah met the troubles heaped upon him is a wonderful exhortation to us.

Sanballat Seeks a Conference (Neh. 6)

Sanballat was furious. All his efforts to thwart the building of the wall by Nehemiah had proved futile. He could see the Jews swarming like an army of ants on their project and every day saw further progress made. He had to move,

and that quickly, to defeat the purpose of Nehemiah, otherwise Jerusalem would be completely ringed around with its strong defensive wall, and a further step would have been made in its developing power.

He discussed the problem with his allies, Tobiah and Geshem the Arabian. It was plainly seen that Nehemiah was the moving power behind the Jews, and that so long as he remained, the work would continue. Therefore, the solution to their problem was simple: do away with Nehemiah. But how to accomplish this was far more difficult: Nehemiah was a hard man to overthrow.

They decided to try treachery, to change their tactics, and pretending to act as friends, take him off his guard, and murder him. They sent him a message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono." This was an invitation to a conference to see if some compromise might be effected. But Nehemiah saw through their plots. He knew that their request for a conference was mere subterfuge, and that they wanted to get him on his own to do him mischief. He was shrewd enough, however, not to disclose that he could see through their plans. To do so would have perhaps driven them to extremity, and caused them to launch an open attack on Jerusalem, which, with its unfinished walls, would not have been easy to defend at that time.



He replied with words of wisdom: ***"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"*** (Neh. 6:3).

Here was a wonderful answer, giving a complete reason for his refusal. Why should a good work cease whilst workers engage in useless argument? Nehemiah's response can be applied to many circumstances of life. It is the complete answer to the many invitations and provocations that a man of God might receive to stop the work he is doing, and enter into useless and trivial arguments or conferences. It is the perfect attitude for a man of God to take in the face of underhand, wicked, and malicious attacks, that are sometimes directed against his labor, motives or endeavors.

"I am doing a great work, why should it cease, whilst I leave it and COME DOWN to you!"

If Nehemiah had accepted the invitation, he would have "come down" in every sense! So those who labor in the cause of Christ today, should also refuse to "come down" and compromise when false insinuations are laid against them. Instead, in the face of such trials, wisdom dictates that they should follow the example of this

faithful man, and reply as he did. Four times Sanballat tried to get Nehemiah to come down to him — but to no avail. Meanwhile the building of the wall went on apace.

Sanballat's Insulting, Lying Letter Sanballat was becoming desperate. Something had to be done to stop the Jews, otherwise his schemes would be completely frustrated. He decided to try to undermine Nehemiah's influence among the people by falsely imputing wrong motives to his work. He wrote a letter, claiming that Geshem his friend* had evidence proving that the Jews were planning to rebel against Persia and appoint Nehemiah as king.

"You are building the wall of Jerusalem for that purpose", he wrote to Nehemiah. "Further you are employing prophets to preach of you at Jerusalem, saying,'There is a king in Judah.' Therefore, come and let us take counsel together."

He hoped to frighten Nehemiah into the conference he had planned earlier. Then, when he was in his power, he would have doubtless slain him. In fact, the letter was an open one, designed so that all could read it. As such it was an insult to Nehemiah the governor, to whom it was addressed. A letter to one of such high status as Nehemiah should have been sealed up, and marked for his personal attention.

But it performed its intended purpose, for it made many afraid. People became concerned lest such accusations should come to the ears of the king of Persia, and that he should rule that the work of building should cease.

But Nehemiah was not afraid. He sent a message back to Sanballat: "There are no such things done as you say; you are inventing them out of your own heart!" Then, in the midst of trouble, he turned to God: *"O God, strengthen my hands!"* he prayed.

Tried by Treachery All Sanballat's efforts to defeat the work of Nehemiah had proved in vain. He was forced to look around for other means to succeed. He found them in Tobiah his ally. Tobiah had powerful friends in Judah who were prepared to advance his cause against Nehemiah, and Sanballat decided to use them to that end.

Thus, one day, Nehemiah received a mysterious request to visit a prince of Judah called Shemaiah, who was temporarily confined to his own home for some cause or other. In presenting himself at the home of this prince, Nehemiah found himself received with the greatest respect and the utmost kindness. Shemaiah claimed to have Nehe-

* "Gashmu" of Neh. 6:6 is the same as "Geshem the Arabian" of v. 1, the friend and ally of Sanballat. See margin of the AV Bible.

miah's interests at heart, and warned him that enemies were seeking to kill him. He suggested that Nehemiah should hide himself against the possibility of such an attack: "Let us meet together in the temple, and let us shut the doors", he suggested, "for they will come to slay you; yes, in the night they will come to slay you!"

Shemaiah's interest was not genuine, however, for he cared nothing for the welfare of Nehemiah. Nehemiah clearly saw behind his duplicity. Nor was he the kind of man to be easily moved by suggestions of personal danger. He was not easily frightened, and detected treachery in the smooth, oily talk of this prince. "Should such a man as I flee?" he boldly asked, "And should such a man as I go into the temple to save his life?"

If Nehemiah had acted on the advice of Shemaiah, and sought refuge in the temple, he would have broken the law of God, for only priests were permitted therein. That was partly Shemaiah's scheme. He had hoped to implant fear into the heart of Nehemiah, so as to cause him to sin in this way, and then bring an evil report against him to discredit him before the people.

But he failed. Firstly, because Nehemiah was a man of courage and not easily frightened; secondly, because he was a man of faith and would not break the law to save his own skin. Nehemiah could see behind the scheming of Shemaiah, and confided to his diary: "I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me; for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him" (ch. 6:12).

He not merely confided in his diary; he also confided in his God. As usual, he poured out his heart in prayer, placing the problem squarely before God: "My God", he prayed, "think Thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets that would have put me in fear".

Thus the wisdom, faith and courage of Nehemiah triumphed over the treachery of this pretended friend.

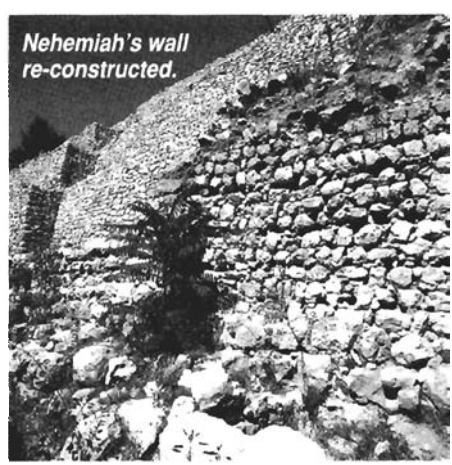
Chapter Four

THE CITY WALL IS COMPLETED

MEANWHILE, despite all the plotting and scheming of enemies, both within and without the city, the work went on steadily, and was ultimately crowned with success. Despite all hindrances, difficulties, attacks, threats, treachery and opposition, the wall was completed in the incredibly short period of fifty-two days (Neh. 6:15).

Sanballat had been completely outmanoeuvred and defeated in every direction. This was obvious as the enemies of Judah looked upon the completed walls of Jerusalem. A feeling of depression came over them, and they became very much cast down in their own eyes. But though the wall was completed, there could be no relaxing on the part of Nehemiah. Within Judah, Sanballat had his sympathisers. Tobiah, his ally, was son-in-law to a prominent Jew by the name of Shechaniah, and Tobiah's son had married the daughter of Meshullam who had been prominent in rebuilding the wall (ch. 6:18; 3:4, 30). With the work finished, Shechaniah, Meshullam and others, began to look critically at Nehemiah. Their ties of marriage with the alien caused them to view with hostility Nehemiah's demands for complete separateness. They described him as being too harsh and unyielding. They claimed that Sanballat and Tobiah were desirous of helping in the work, and that Nehemiah was wrong in refusing them this privilege.

These sympathisers within Jerusalem entered into correspondence with the enemy without. Letters passed between them and Tobiah. They tried to break down Nehemiah's opposition. They tried cunning. They came to him "reporting the good deeds of Tobiah," representing him as a friend of Judah, implying that Nehemiah was wrong to refuse his aid. And when Nehemiah impatiently swept such false representations aside, they reported back his words and attitude to Tobiah (ch. 6:19).


Nehemiah's wall re-constructed.

This led to unprofitable correspondence between

Tobiah and Nehemiah which took toll of his time and energy (ch. 6:19). Ultimately, these sympathisers with the enemy became responsible for serious abuses of God's law within Judah that Nehemiah had later to correct.

Security Precautions For Jerusalem Many a man who has proved himself a genius in controlling a crisis, or in winning a battle, has nevertheless proved a failure in the follow-up process. Not so Nehemiah. Having won the tactical battle, he now carefully gave his attention to the work of consolidation.

Perhaps the treachery of Shechaniah and Meshullam proved a blessing in disguise. It must certainly have made Nehemiah realise that there were still enemies he had to guard against, and though the walls were completed, the gates were still needed to be guarded by men he could trust.

There were two men in whom he could place the utmost confidence. One was his kinsman Hanani, who had originally brought the report of conditions in Jerusalem to Nehemiah (cp. ch. 7:2; 1:2); the other was a man named Hananiah, who was a ruler of the fortress, and who was dominated by a desire to serve the Truth.* Nehemiah placed these two men in supreme control over the city, carefully instructing them that the doors were to be closed at night. He also called upon the Levites to stand guard at the doors of the wall as well as attend to their duties in the temple. The common people were pressed into the task of guarding the city and were required to keep watch over the section of wall nearest their homes.

All this was necessary because the population of Jerusalem was so scanty at that time, and the enemies of Judah so powerful. Thus additional duties were placed on those who were available for work. Jerusalem became a vigilant city surrounded by its walls and overshadowed by the ever watchful Eyes of Yahweh — a wonderful type of the spiritual Jerusalem referred to also in the Bible.

The Population Problem But the city could not remain as it was — largely empty, so Nehemiah now tackled the problem of increasing its population. Many people had fled the city when the threat of trouble had arisen. As governor, Nehemiah decided that this had to be corrected.

Nehemiah took a census of all the people in the land (ch. 7:5), and as a basis of comparison he consulted the record of those who had returned with Zerubbabel. With the facts of the census before him,

* He is described as a "faithful man" (ch. 7:2) but in Hebrew these words signify: "The Truth's own man." He was a man completely dominated by the Truth and dedicated to its service.

Nehemiah began to plan his next move. He had already strengthened and fortified the city; now he had to strengthen and fortify the people.

Three things were obviously necessary:

1. The abuses of the law which the opposition of Shechaniah, Meshullum and others had made obvious, needed to be corrected.
2. The people made to realise the requirements of the Law, and agree to perform them.
3. Jerusalem to be further fortified by a greater influx of population.

Nehemiah could clearly see what was required, and he also understood the difficulties. He had powerful enemies within Jerusalem to counter, some of whom were connected with the priesthood. Eliashib the high priest (ch. 3:1) was his bitter enemy. How could he, Nehemiah, a mere layman, hope to bring the people under the bond of a covenant without the support of the high priest? How could he instil into the people the need to keep the law if the high priest stood aloof from such action? It was impossible. Nehemiah needed the help of someone with sufficient authority to override even the high priest. But who could provide that? There was only one man, a man respected as the greatest scribe and priest of his age — Ezra the priest-scribe.

Nehemiah decided to send for Ezra that he might assist him in the important work that now opened up to him.

Chapter Five

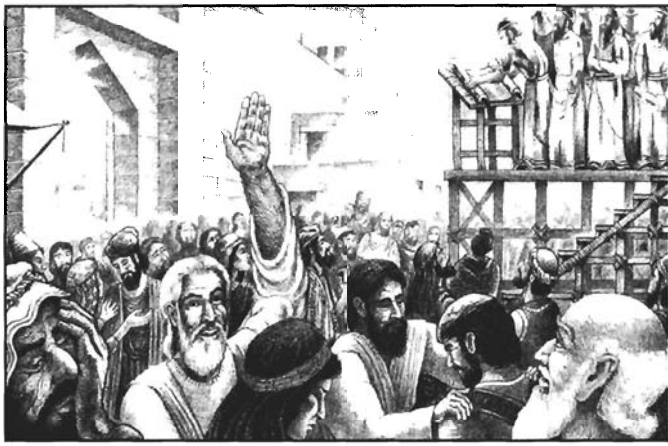
RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN JERUSALEM

NEHEMIAH needed the help of his great friend, the priest-scribe, Ezra, but where was he? Nothing further is heard of him in the Scripture record after he instituted the notable marriage reform referred to in Ezra chapter 10. Evidently the commission granted him by the king had been completed, and he had returned to Persia to make his report.

Now, after a thirteen years' break, he returned to perform a notable service in the work of God. Perhaps Nehemiah had applied to King Ahasuerus that Ezra be sent to help him in the important work that now was opening up. Certainly he could have obtained no better assistant. Nehemiah was a layman, and as such could not command the respect of either the priests or the people in religious matters, such as Ezra the respected scribe and priest would undoubtedly do. Eliashib the high priest was deeply involved with the enemies of Nehemiah (ch. 13:4, 28), and was more likely to give him active opposition than any loyal support. Ezra was the most distinguished and elderly priest of the day; he was a member of the high priestly family (Ezra 7:1-5), elevated in the favor and confidence of the Persian king, eminent above all others for his learning, and possessed of a personal influence that was second to none (Ezra 10:1-16). His support would make possible the reforms that Nehemiah desired to implement. So, at the appropriate moment, Ezra returned to take his stand alongside Nehemiah to assist him in his valuable work. Thus the aged priest and the much younger governor co-operated together in the difficult and most important work that now opened up.

Bringing the Bible to the People

The most careful preparations were made to carry into effect the religious revival that Nehemiah desired to implement. The leading part was assigned to Ezra. His age, his priestly character, his well-known learning, his recognised prestige enabled him to speak on religious matters with an authority that would have been impossible to Nehemiah. His mastery of the Law enabled him to read and expound it, and so enforce it on men's consciences as no other living person could have done. The weight of his influence with the priests and Levites more than counterbalanced any opposition that Eliashib or the other adversaries of Nehemiah might attempt, whilst his reappearance in a public capacity after an absence of about thirteen years lent the charm of surprise and novelty to the proceedings which



Ezra leads in the reading of the Law

attracted general attention.

The people were therefore called together at an appointed time to hearken to the reading and exposition of the Law that was to be given by Ezra. People of understanding only were asked to attend,* and the time appointed was the first day of the seventh month when it was normal for the priests to sound the trumpets in order to gather the people together.

A large platform of wood had been erected in the broad space within the walls of the city, and before it, on this day, was gathered a large audience of people. Ezra stood upon the platform surrounded by thirteen carefully selected priests and Levites. His very presence was an exhortation to the people. As they looked upon the countenance of the aged priest and scribe, who was noted for the way he had set his heart to understand and do the Law, they were faced with the example of what they should do. With his thirteen assistants, surrounded by Israel, he foreshadowed the return of the Lord Jesus, associated with his apostles, surrounded by his ecclesia.

All eyes were turned on Ezra as the proceedings began. Standing on the high platform, he respectfully took up in his hands the scroll of the Law and carefully opened it before the people. As he did so, the concourse of people which was previously seated on the ground, unitedly stood up in reverence to *The Book*. Then Ezra led them in prayer, blessing Yahweh for His great mercy to His people. As the prayer came to an end, the gathering of people lifted up their hands to heaven, and responded with a heartfelt *"Amen! Amen!"* And now they had their opportunity of personally petitioning the Father in the heavens. A great silence settled upon the crowd, as each one bowed

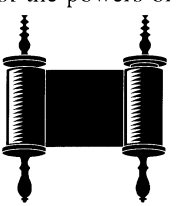
* This gathering was a most important occasion, and the reading and exposition of the Law was not to be disturbed by the noise or motions of tired and restless children (Neh. 8:2). — *Editor.*

his or her head and worshipped Yahweh with their faces towards the ground.

Following this time of prayer, the reading commenced.* Scattered throughout the crowd were thirteen Levites whose duty appears to have been to repeat and explain the words read by Ezra. Thus any questions were answered quietly and on the spot by these Levites moving among the audience: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (ch. 8:8).

This public reading and exposition of the Law had a powerful effect. The people were enabled to see how far they had fallen short of what was required. The words in Hebrew rendered "gave the sense" signify to "put weight to it." The careful reading and explanation of the text gave value and weight to the words of Scripture. The Levites, by their skill in exposition, showed the value and usefulness of the Law by personal application to the Jews who listened.

Thus the people were "instructed in the Law" (Rom. 2:18), and this went on throughout the morning (v. 3), as Ezra read and his assistants explained the reading. There were no comfortable padded seats for the audience to recline in half-asleep, as the words of the Law were droned in their ears; no noisy air-conditioning or fans, designed for the comfort of the flesh but destructive of the powers of concentration. Ezra was anxious to impress the Law; the people to receive it. Their interest in these vital matters overcame the difficulties they had to endure, and with concentrated attention and perception they received the instruction.



It made a powerful impact upon them. They applied the exhortations of the Law personally, and were emotionally stirred. "The people mourned and wept when they heard the words of the law."

But mourning was not appropriate to this occasion. Nehemiah and Ezra jointly pointed out that there was a great cause for rejoicing. A mighty work had been accomplished at Jerusalem and in the people. The first day of the seventh month (ch. 8:1) was the beginning of the civil year, and was therefore a time of rejoicing in view of the prospects of the great future. Nehemiah and Ezra stood before the people, exhorting them to rejoice together at this time in the blessings of Yahweh; to forget the past and work for the future. ***"The joy of Yahweh is your strength!"*** they declared (ch. 8:10).

How true are these words; how often has the same exhortation

* The first eight verses of Nehemiah ch. 8 are out of sequence. First the purpose and length of the meeting are given (vv. 1-3), but the introductory prayer is not mentioned until v. 6, which precedes the reading of vv. 4-8.

been pressed upon faithful men and women. The Psalmist exulted: "Yahweh is my Strength and my Shield; my heart trusteth in Him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my sons will I praise Him. Yahweh is their strength, and He is the saving strength of His anointed. Save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever."

Paul likewise pointed to the example of the Philippians: "In a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (2Cor. 8:2). He made mention of his own experience: "I will not glory, but in mine infirmities... and lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, *My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness*. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2Cor. 12:5-9).

This exhortation of Ezra and Nehemiah, together with these words of Paul, are vitally important. Adversity, affliction, defeat and failure, even in a spiritual sense, will humble us; but they can also help us if we view them correctly. The humbling effects of trouble can make us more effective mediums of God's power, for it will throw us more completely upon His help. And, leaning on Him, seeking His strength, we will find the power to rise triumphant above every adversity or enemy, and experience the joy of victory. For this reason, the Lord refused Paul's request that the "thorn in the flesh" from which he suffered, should be removed. If God removed from our paths every difficulty there would remain no need for the discipline of self, no cause for the exercise of faith, no leaning upon the divine strength, no joy of victory, but only a feeling of self-sufficiency which would spoil us for the real battles of life. Flesh would glory instead of being humbled, and God would be removed far from us, instead of us constantly seeking His presence.

Thus the Jews were exhorted by Ezra and Nehemiah to find their strength in God; to count their blessings and rejoice in Him. Wisely instructed, the people understood the words that were declared unto them (ch. 8:12); their mourning was turned into joy for they turned to the *Source of Strength* which could cause them to triumph even over their own sins.

Feast of Tabernacles Celebrated with Joy

The people had been instructed and comforted. But there was still further work to be done. On the next day, Ezra met a deputation of the people made up of the elders of the people, the

priests and the Levites. They had found in the Law, the commandment that all Israel should keep the Feast of Tabernacles, and they realised that though this had been instituted by Zerubbabel on the return from Babylon (Ezra 3:4), it had not been conducted in quite the manner outlined in the Law.



18th century copperplate engraving of the Sukkah showing the preparation of the booths.

After due consideration, it was decided to revive it as it was first instituted. So, for a week, the whole of Judah camped out under booths again as they did at that time of deliverance when they had come out of Egypt. For seven days they rejoiced together as commanded under the Law. Then, on the eighth day, they had a solemn assembly as instructed.

The people were thus suitably prepared for the solemn covenant that Ezra and Nehemiah had designed for their benefit. The Feast of Tabernacles reminded them of the great deliverance from Egypt, and emphasised that Yahweh had called them out of the state of Egyptian slavery that He might dwell among them as His people (Exo. 29:46). This now became a preparation of the mind leading them to accept a covenant to serve Yahweh according to the law which Ezra and Nehemiah had prepared. The final "solemn assembly" at the conclusion of the joyful Feast of Tabernacles taught that a people who enjoyed the joy of deliverance from slavery should dedicate themselves to serving God. The people were now called upon to do this.

Judah Endorses God's Covenant

On the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month, just after the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 9:1), a great gathering of all the people was again arranged, that they might hear the terms of the covenant, and solemnly endorse them. Preparation suitable to the occasion was necessary. The people had been called upon to fast, to destroy any feeling of well-being to the flesh; they came dressed in sackcloth, to indicate that they recognised and mourned their constant failures before God; they had earth upon their heads, to show that they felt humbled to the ground.

Quietly, reverently, with due appreciation of the solemn occasion, they assembled before Ezra and Nehemiah. Many foreigners were found among them. Those who had not wholeheartedly embraced the things of God were separated from the congregation, so that only true Israelites remained, emphasising the real identity of the covenant

people, and showing the need for separation in order to serve God acceptably. Those who remained were called upon to confess their sins, and enter into covenant with God.

All this ritual underlined the following principles: self-denial *(fasting)*, recognition of unworthiness *(sackcloth)*, humility *(earth on head)*, separation *(foreigners removed)*, confession, meditation *(Word read)*, and dedication *(the Covenant itself)*. These are the principles that the call of Christ demands now. It requires sacrifice; it cannot be entered into lightly; it must engage all of our consideration; it is a dedication of heart and mind to God and Christ.

This was also impressed upon the Jews. These religious exercises were not performed quickly. The whole day was spent in exhausting spiritual exercises. From 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. the people stood in their places, and heard the book of the Law read; from 9 a.m. to 12 noon they prostrated themselves to the ground, meditating upon their lives and confessing their sins to God, doubtless reviewing the national history as well as their personal lives. After six hours spent in this fashion (ch. 9:3), they were commanded to "stand up" and communally seek God in prayer (v. 5).

They called upon God by His covenant name of *Yahweh*, the Name that guarantees the perpetuation of the people of Israel.

They were led in the prayer by a number of Levites, who, standing upon a platform high above the people "cried with a loud voice unto Yahweh their God." Over the attentive, standing audience of humbled Jews the words of the long prayer rolled sonorously:

"Blessed be Yahweh your God for ever and ever; and blessed be His glorious Name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Thou, even Thou art Yahweh alone; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and Thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth Thee..." (vv. 5-6).*

Now the prayer became more personal to Israel. It spoke of how God chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name of Abraham (vv. 7-8); of the way Israel had been separated from Egypt at a time of great affliction (vv. 9-11); of the divine guidance and instruction in the wilderness and at Sinai (vv. 12-14); of Yahweh's parental care and love (v. 15).

---

* Notice the beauty of this prayer, particularly in its opening sentences. (1) The covenant Name is invoked guaranteeing the continuance of the nation. (2) God is referred to as Creator, and is therefore capable of fulfiling what the covenant Name promised. (3) All life stems from the great Preserver of all who therefore can preserve Israel. (4) The host of heaven (stars, etc.) worship Him by obeying divine laws which are indicative of the divine purpose (see Psalm 19). This prayer is worthy of the closest attention. Notice also how prominent the Levites were in this reform, rather than the priests. Perhaps Ezra and Nehemiah experienced some opposition from the high priest, and other priests.

But then it spoke of the wickedness of the people. How they were proud and hardened, how they became idolatrous and disobedient. Yet the merciful attributes of the God they served assisted them when they turned back to Him: "Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not!" (vv. 16-21). For forty long years He bore with them. He brought them into the Land of Promise and conquered their enemies (vv. 22-25). But Israel's base ingratitude became again apparent (v. 26), so that again Yahweh had to discipline them in love (v. 27). The prayer summed up the whole of Israel's history: how that sinning brought suffering, whereas when they supplicated God it brought salvation (vv. 28-30).

Then came the grand summing up of the prayer, the significance of Israel's history. Despite all suffering, all punishment, the divine mercy had been manifested. Remembering that, and acknowledging the punishment as just (vv. 33-35) and that they were guilty of extreme folly (vv. 36-37), the people now threw themselves upon that great mercy:

"For Thy great mercies' sake, Thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for Thou art a gracious and merciful God. Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before Thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all Thy people since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day... for we are in great distress. And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it" (vv. 31-37).

Thus, having carefully prepared themselves for the occasion, after having their minds stimulated by the reading of the Word, and being uplifted by the wonderful prayer, the nation entered into a covenant to keep the Law.

It was performed with due ceremony. A sacrificial animal was brought forward, slain, divided into two parts. Ceremoniously the elders of the land, headed by Nehemiah, solemnly entered into covenant with God by passing between the pieces and proclaiming that they would keep the Law. Many of those who stood with Nehemiah on this occasion were elders who had returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2; Neh. 7, 10), But there were two notables whose names do not appear in this group. They were Ezra the scribe and Eliashib the high priest.

The reason for the omission of Ezra's name is understandable. He was presiding over this ceremony and therefore supervised the transaction; it would have been inappropriate for him to have signed. But Eliashib's absence was significant and ominous, as we shall see.

In the meantime the people also endorsed the covenant. Their representatives likewise passed between the pieces of the sacrificial victim (Jer. 34:18-19). Specific points of the Law were emphasised as having particular need for observance at that time:

1. *There was to be no intermarriage with foreigners (Neh. 10:30).*
2. *The sabbath and sabbatical years were to be strictly enforced (v. 31).*
3. *A voluntary contribution was to be made of a third part of a shekel for the service of the temple (vv. 32-33).*
4. *There was to be a contribution of wood for use upon the altar (v. 34).*
5. *The regular offerings to be made of the firstfruits, firstborn, and tithes (vv. 35-37).*
6. *The Levitical tithe was to be regularly paid to the priests (vv. 38-39).*

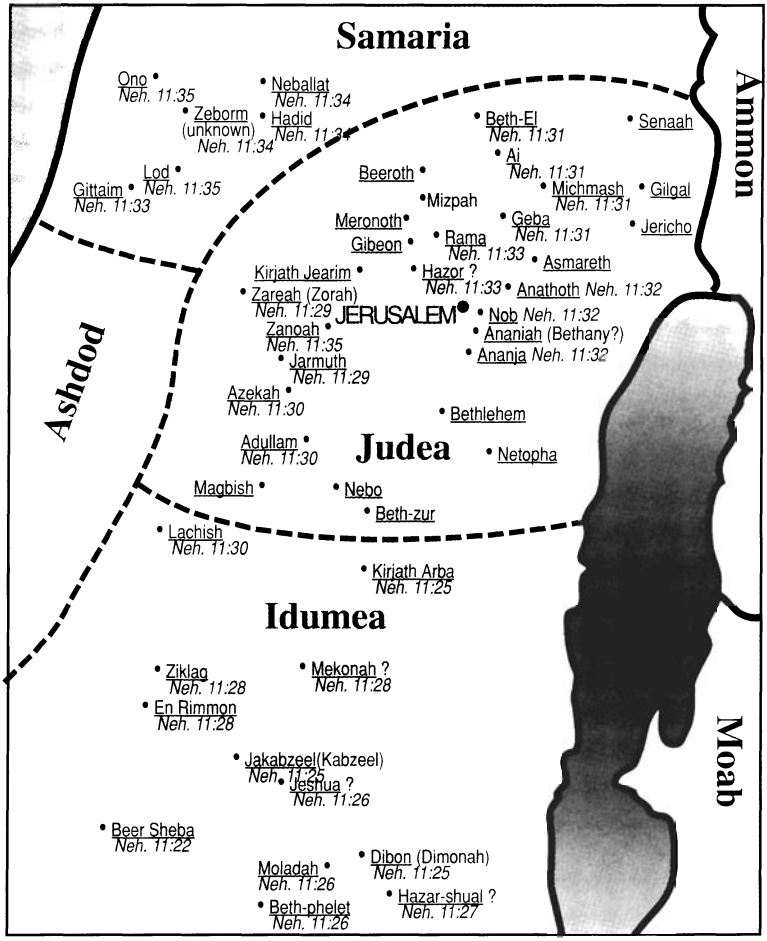
The whole covenant was summed up in the important declaration: ***"We will not forsake the house of our God"*** (v. 39).

There were important reasons why each of these provisions should be singled out, for they were the ordinances of the Law that had been greatly neglected. Intermarriage with the alien had become common; the sabbath had fallen into neglect; the payment of offerings and tithes had been discontinued; the work of the priests had been hindered. All this was enjoined upon the people as an earnest of the fulfilment of the rest of the enactments of the Law. And with great enthusiasm the whole congregation promised to obey.

A grand service had been performed by Ezra and Nehemiah. It provided the foundation for other reforms that he now set his hand to accomplish. But time was short. Nehemiah had soon to return to Persia as he had originally agreed to do. So he hastened to accomplish other necessary tasks in Judah and Jerusalem.

Nehemiah Solves the Population Problem

The troubles that Jerusalem had experienced had affected the size of its population. Many had left the city, causing Nehemiah to report in his diary: "The city is large and great, but the people are few therein" (Neh. 7:4). He now determined to correct this while the people were in the mood for reform. Calling the representatives of the nation together, he revealed unto them the need for a larger population in Jerusalem. They readily agreed that a tithe (a tenth) of those dwelling elsewhere should remove to live in Jerusalem. This, doubtless, entailed some sacrifice for those involved, but they were prepared to submit to this. It meant that they had to uproot themselves from their dwelling places, perhaps at personal loss, and establish themselves within the confines of the city. And even then their troubles were not at an end, for most likely they had to take up



Some of the Villages mentioned in Nehemiah ch. 11

"Kirjath-arba" — This signifies *City of the Four* (see Gen. 13:18). This was the original name of the village, but it later became better known as Hebron (sig. *Between the Neck;* i.e., *Burden Bearer).* However, during the captivity its old name had reasserted itself (see Josh. 14:15).

"Dibon" — Sig. *Pining,* and is identified with Dimonah in the south.

"Jekabzeel" — Sig. *El will Gather.* Identified with Kabzeel.

"Jeshua" — Sig. *Yah Will Save.* An unidentified locality.

"Moladah" — Sig. *Origin; Birth.* A city in the extreme south of Judah, assigned to Simeonites (Josh. 15:26; 19:2).

"Beth-phelet" — Sig. *House of Escape.* In the area of the Simeonites (Josh. 15:27).

"Hazar-shual" — Sig. *Village of Jackals.* Unidentified, but on the south border of Judah (Josh. 15:28) and assigned to Simeon (ch. 19:3).

"Ziklag" — Sig. *Measure of Oppression.* This was the town given to David by Achish, king of Gath

(1Sam. 27:6), and soon afterwards taken by the Amalekites (ch. 30:1).

"Mekonah" — Sig. *Base; Foundation.* An unidentified locality.

"En-rimmon" — Sig. *Foundation of a Pomegranate.* See Josh. 15:32. Identified with the modern Umm-ernummamin, 14km north of Beersheba.

Zareah" — Or known as "Zerah," signifying *Stroke; Scourge; Hornet.* Birthplace and burial place of Samson, and thus in the Shephelah, or low coastal tract. Assigned to both Dan and Judah (Josh. 19:41; Jdg. 18:2).

"Jarmuth" — Sig. *Elevation; Height.* Its king joined the confederacy of Adonizedec which challenged Gibeon for uniting with Israel (Josh. 10:3-5; 15:35).

"Zanoah" — Sig. *Rejected.* Josh. 15:34. About 15km west of Jerusalem.

"Adullam" — Sig. *Enclosure.* It was in this vicinity that David's cave was located (1Sam. 22:1). It had its own king in the time of Joshua (Josh. 12:15), was later fortified by Rehoboam (2Chr. 11:7), and remained a significant city under the Maccabees (2Mac. 12:38).

"Lachish" — Sig. *Tenacious.* It was a powerful fortress city, from which Joshua was challenged by a confederacy of kings (Josh. 10:5), and was later fortified by Rehoboam (2Chr. 11:9). It was besieged by Sennacherib (2Chr. 32:9), and was of strategic importance as a fortress city, protecting the southern entrance to the land.

"Azekah" — Sig. *Tilled.* The confederate Ammonite kings' army was destroyed here by hailstorm, as they attempted to flee from the forces of Joshua (Josh. 10:10-11).

"Beersheba" — Sig. *The Well of the Covenant.* See v. 27.

"Geba" — Sig. *Hill; Height.* The RV translates this phrase: "dwelt from Geba onwards, at Michmash..." Geba was considered a city of Benjamin to the extreme west, and consequently occurs last in the first list of Joshua (ch. 18:24). The northern extremity of the plateau will be formed by the great earthquake when Christ and the saints stand upon the Mount of Olives (see Zech. 14:10).

"Michmash" — Sig. *Something Hidden.* Located close to Geba.

"Aija" — A variation of Ai; signifying *Ruin.* Therefore these three towns were adjacent to Bethel.

"Bethel" — Sig. *House of El.* Originally called Luz, and noted for its importance in the days of Abraham (Gen. 12:8; 13:3) and Jacob (28:19).

"Anathoth" — Sig. *Answer [to prayer].* Hometown of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1), and located on the road from Geba to Jerusalem (Isa. 10:30).

"Nob" — Sig. *Fruit.* Near the capital and could be seen from it (Isa. 10:32). It was infamous for the massacre of the priests by Doeg (1Sam. 22:18-19).

"Ananiah" — Sig. *Protected by Yah.* Unidentified locality.

"Hazor" — Sig. *Castle; Enclosure.* A city of Benjamin which is only mentioned here.

"Ramah" — Sig. *Height.* Just to the north of Jerusalem (Josh. 18:25; Jdg. 4:5; 1Kgs. 15:17; Isa. 10:29; Jer. 31:15).

"Gittaim" — Sig. *Two Winepresses.* A Benjamite town (2Sam. 4:3).

"Hadid" — Sig. *Sharp-pointed.* Probably modern Haditheh, 5km east of Lod (Lydda) in the Shephelah.

"Zeboim" — Sig. *Gazelles.* Only reference is as a town; perhaps in the area of the valley of Zeboim (1Sam. 13:18), to the east of Michmash in the bleak country towards the Jordan.

"Neballat" — Sig. *Foolish Secrecy.* Unidentified.

"Lod" — Sig. *Contention; Strife.* Called Lydda in Acts 9:38.

"Ono" — Sig. *Strong.* See also Neh. 6:2.

uncongenial work as laborers and artisans in the capital, so different to the work in the field, such as they had been used to previously.

But in the full flush of their enthusiasm to reform, these trials seemed as nothing. The people undertook to do all that was necessary, and a tenth of those in the country shifted into the city. Thus Jerusalem was not only restored, and provided with a wall of defence, but it was also populated.

Nehemiah's work foreshadowed that of the Lord Jesus, whose sacrifice not only provided a defence for the spiritual city, New Jerusalem, that he "founded" by his own labor two thousand years ago (cp. Heb. 11:10; Col. 1:13-18), but also made it possible for the "city" to be adequately populated, by a careful selection of those who have been brought near to the hope of the calling.

There were other duties that still remained for Nehemiah to do. The king of Persia had instructed that provision should be made for the maintenance of the temple singers, and had directed that tribute should be gathered for that purpose. He instructed that the tribute was to be paid, not only by the Jews, but by neighboring nations as well. A treasurer had to be appointed with authority to collect these moneys. All this was accomplished by Nehemiah.

Grand Celebration at the Dedication of the Walls

Gradually the work that Nehemiah had been appointed to do in the land was reaching a conclusion. One arrangement alone remained: the official dedication of the walls. A great celebration was arranged for that purpose. People from all parts of the land were called together to witness it. The Levites were especially instructed to come, and to keep the dedication with gladness. It was to be a day of thanksgiving and of rejoicing: singing and music with cymbals, psalteries and harps were to be prominent features of the celebration.

At the appointed time a great crowd gathered together at the city of Jerusalem. Solemnly they witnessed the ceremony of sanctification. The priests and Levites first purified themselves; then they purified the people, and finally the gates and walls. This was probably done by careful ablutions of water as far as the persons were concerned, or by splashing it on the gates and walls as far as the buildings were concerned (see Exo. 19:10).

Then, as previously organised by Nehemiah in collaboration with the priests, two processions were formed. In each group were assembled priests with trumpets; Levites with cymbals, psalteries and harps; princes of the realm and some of the common people.

A choir headed each group, and then following the choir, came the two great leaders, Ezra, in one group, and Nehemiah in the other. Thus these two grand leaders of the nation — the aged scribe and the

energetic governor — were brought prominently before the people (Neh. 12:27-38).

At a given signal, the procession with Ezra at its head, commenced to march south upon the top of the wall, then turned east along the southern wall, until it came up to the eastern side and stood in front of the temple itself. At the same time, the procession with Nehemiah at its head, half encircled the city in the opposite direction. Singing, playing their instruments, and marching, the two companies completely encircled the city with song, finally coming to a stop opposite each other in front of the temple itself.

It must have been a wonderful occasion for the aged Ezra, and the energetic and faithful Nehemiah, and a glorious day of victory for all faithful Israelites, who had laboured so hard with these men of God, to do the work before them. Surely, as they saw the beloved city surrounded by its faithful citizens, and heard the anthems of praise to its honour, their minds must have turned to Psalm 48, if, indeed, it was not used as a basis of rejoicing by the singing companies on the wall: *"Let Mt. Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of Thy judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death"* (vv. 11-14).

As the two companies paraded around the newly-built walls, the musicians played their instruments, and the singers sang glorious anthems of praise, composed by the sweet Psalmist of Israel. Thus the holy city was encircled by music and song as the marching companies continued their circuit around the city to meet in front of the temple. "So the two choirs came to a stand at the house of God" (Neh. 12:40, Rotherham).

And here the celebrations reached their climax. Here, in an ecstasy of feeling the orchestras and singers now merged their instruments and voices in a glorious crescendo of praise. "The singers sang loud with Jezrahiah their overseer". The sound of music and singing echoed throughout the holy city, and reverberated among the hills, and along the valleys, so that the whole land seemed to re-echo the refrain. And in front of the wall, the great crowd gathered together to witness the celebrations and rejoice with their leaders standing above. Sacrifices of thanksgiving were offered in abundance as the mercy and blessings of God were recalled to mind. Even the children were drawn into the general rejoicing and, with their mothers, celebrated the goodness of God, so that there was an initial fulfilment of the words of Zechariah: "The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (Zech. 8:5).

Death of Ezra and the Withdrawal of Nehemiah

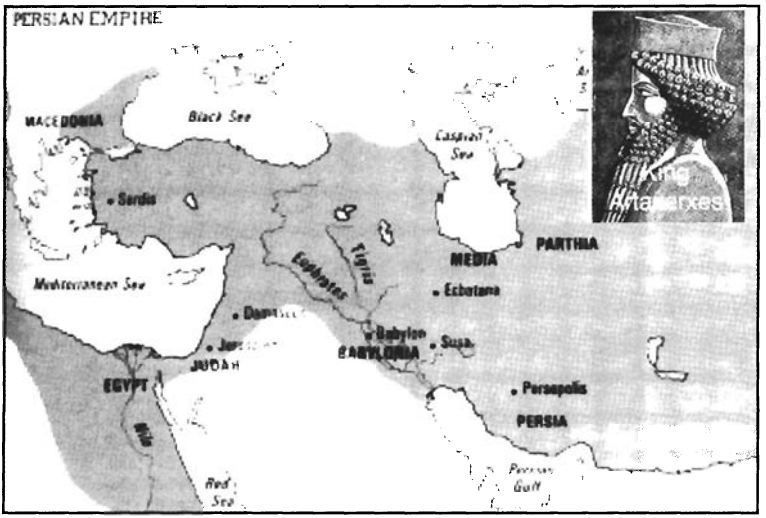
But there was also a sadness about these celebrations. On the wall, before the people, receiving the acclamation that was his due, was the aged scribe, Ezra. How greatly the people had benefited from his ministrations. As a young man he had set himself the task of helping them. He had "prepared his heart to *seek* the law of Yahweh, and to *do* it, and to *teach* in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).

A greater service no man can render. And Ezra had done it well.

When the kingdom of God is finally established on the earth, there will be found therein, many who have been helped Zionwards by the faithful ministrations of this wonderful scribe. Even today his example and his words continue to help us. The work that a man does for God is endless in its value and its scope, as the life of Ezra reveals. But it was obvious, as he looked down from the wall he had helped to build, upon the rejoicing people below, that his work was temporarily at an end. This was destined to be his last public appearance. He now passed from the scene, and we hear of him no more.

Josephus declares that he "died at an old age." When this occurred we do not know, but Nehemiah must have heard of it with the greatest regret. The influence of Ezra was great, and Judah could ill afford to lose his services at that time. For though the walls had been completed, though an initial reform had been effected, there was a need to consolidate the work commenced. Time was required for that, and Nehemiah's time was fast running out.

Nehemiah had been given leave by King Artaxerxes for only a



limited period of time (Neh. 2:6). That had now come to an end, and he had to return to the court of Persia.

His enemies heard this news with pleasure; it would give them the opportunity they had sought for some time. But before we consider those circumstances, let us ask an important question: Why did God provide such good leaders as Ezra and Nehemiah, and then, when their work was only partially accomplished, withdraw them from the scene of their labours?

Note that He does that time and again in the circumstances of life. Moses brought the children of Israel to the promised land, and then was taken from them. Joshua made it possible for them to conquer the land, and then passed to his rest. Josiah brought about the greatest possible reform in Judah, and then was slain at the very time he was most needed.

Why?

Because God wants to give everyone the opportunity of demonstrating their worth in service to Him. He tests His servants, shows them the way, provides them with aids and examples, and then leaves them to develop characters that He can and will use in the Age to come.

But so often, when the props that He has provided are taken away, people hopelessly fail! They lack the faith and courage that God requires.

That was the case, unfortunately, when Nehemiah returned to Persia, and Ezra passed to his rest.

Concluding Exhortation

The example of Nehemiah remains to encourage, direct and stimulate those who desire to labour upon the walls of spiritual Jerusalem. In studying, reading and meditating upon his record, left for us by divine providence, we are helped to bear our witness to the Truth bravely, live our lives holily and blamelessly, do our work diligently and in the spirit of full consecration. If we are opposed by enemies, or those who would discourage us from our commitment, let us not be dismayed, deterred or even checked by the absence of man's appreciation. We can continue to walk firmly, with psalms of hope within our hearts and upon our lips, steadfastly upon the path of spiritual dedication and service, because Yahweh our Saviour will "remember us for good," and will not "wipe out" our efforts. Instead He will, according to His mercy and favour, write them in a Book of Remembrance, which no hand may touch to blot out, or erase. Then, through His beloved Son, the greater Nehemiah, who has himself trodden the same path of service and sacrifice, Yahweh will give us a large reward, "abundance" of eternal joy, in the day of glory. Let this be our prayer and our determination, unto the end of our record!

Chapter Six

DURING NEHEMIAH'S ABSENCE

IT is remarkable that some men can experience all the goodness of God, be brought close to the Truth, be raised to eminence in its service, and yet hopelessly fail to adhere to its requirements.

Such a man was Eliashib, who was high priest of Israel at the time of Nehemiah. It is significant, that among those leaders of the nation who are recorded as having signed the covenant that Nehemiah had arranged, the name of Eliashib is missing. Obviously he disagreed with it. He believed in tolerance towards the things that Nehemiah opposed. Though he was foremost in building the wall (Neh. 3:1), he could not see the value of spiritual virtues, or was prepared to close his eyes to the abuse of these things on the part of others.

He was willing to sacrifice and labor at material things associated with the work of God, such as building the wall; but was not prepared to labor in things which would not provide an immediate gratification or reward, nor provide material and concrete blessings.

There have been many Eliashibs down through the ages; men and women who render service in material things to God, but see no value in doing that which God really requires of them (see Mal. 3:16). They are foremost in good works, but not foremost in honoring God in the way He wants to be honoured.

Eliashib constituted a danger to Judah. Though he toiled to build the wall, he was prepared to tolerate the abuse of the law which Nehemiah was at such pains to establish. But so long as Ezra was living and Nehemiah was present, his policy of toleration could not be put into effect. Now, however, one was dead, and the other had returned to Persia. Full authority rested on Eliashib as far as spiritual matters were concerned. The people soon discovered that he was prepared to relax the stringent laws set up at such pains by Ezra and Nehemiah. They found that he winked his eyes at the breaking of marriage laws, and did nothing to correct this sin. Soon Jews were again intermarrying with foreigners who proceeded to introduce their strange, profane ways and worship into Judah. A strange jargon began to be heard in the streets of the holy city, as infantile tongues babbled, half in the Jews' language and half in the speech of Ashdod (Neh. 13:23-24), for their mothers spoke to them in one tongue and their fathers in another.

Ezra and Nehemiah had found their chief support for reform had stemmed from the priests and Levites, but the weak and tolerant

policy of Eliashib diminished the influence of the religious class throughout the land. He seems to have connived at the non-payment of tithes and firstfruits (Mal. 3:8), so that the priestly order became impoverished, and many priests and Levites had to leave Jerusalem, and employ themselves in the cultivation of fields. With the absence of priests and Levites, the law was not taught nor maintained. Apostasy made rapid inroads into the unfinished reforms of Nehemiah, so that soon the choral services were discontinued, the treasury became emptied, the once crowded courts of the temple were deserted (Neh. 13:11). What had taken much time and effort to establish, was overthrown in a very short period.

And Eliashib, that weak apostate, connived at it all. He converted the now empty storehouses of the temple into dwellings, one of which he permitted Tobiah, the deadly enemy of Nehemiah, to occupy (Neh. 6:1; 13:7-9). Other temple buildings were similarly desecrated. He also allowed the sabbath to fall into disuse. Instead of it being set aside as a day of rest from normal toil, so that the people could give the time to meditation upon the things of God, it became an active day of trade. Its sanctity and significance were destroyed by the continuous haggling and shouts of greedy traders and avaricious buyers, bustling in the streets and squares of Jerusalem (ch. 13:15). The greater part of these traders were foreigners, whose strange ways and outlandish speech attracted the idle curiosity of the Jews, who eagerly abandoned the sabbath to do business with them. There was little to distinguish life in Jerusalem from life in any Gentile city. With all the noise and confusion of trading in the streets on the sabbath, one of the most meaningful ordinances of Jewish life had been foolishly desecrated.

With this state of apathy and confusion in the land, there was an urgent need for the return of Nehemiah, to complete the work he had originally been sent by the king to accomplish.

In his absence, however, through the labours of Malachi, the last of the prophets, the voice of Yahweh was heard once more, pleading with and exhorting the people to repent before the day of judgment took away such opportunity.

Malachi Opposes the Wickedness of Eliashib

God never leaves Himself without a witness. He is ever merciful, always desirous of helping His people, so that His pleading voice has been heard down through the ages. Towards His people He has "feelings of peace and not evil to make their latter end an object of hope" (Jer. 29:11).

It does not always seem like that. His people sometimes find themselves in circumstances of difficulty, faced with problems that threaten to overwhelm them. But they must ever remember that God,

MALACHI:
LAST OF YAHWEH'S MESSENGERS TO THE PEOPLE

There is no date given to the prophecy of Malachi, and no direct historical reference whereby we can pinpoint the exact time of his ministry. But indirect evidence suggests that he was contemporary with Nehemiah. His writings indicate conditions such as developed under Eliashib. They show that he wrote at a time when the temple was built, for he reproves the people because of their neglect of its true worship. It was also a time when the Law was relaxed, when foreign marriages were being contracted, when the observance of the sabbath was no longer retained, when the paying of tithes was neglected. Malachi indicts Israel because of all these things and they are the very abuses that Eliashib the high priest permitted when Nehemiah was recalled to Persia.

It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Malachi helped Nehemiah in his work on his return from Persia, as Ezra had supported him on his first visit, and as Haggai and Zechariah had assisted the labours of Zerubbabel. It is probable that Malachi's message sounded forth before the return of Nehemiah, that his was a voice of protest and warning before Nehemiah appeared to more vigorously effect the reforms for which the prophet pleaded. If that be the case, then Malachi was the forerunner of Nehemiah, as John the Baptist, the messenger of the Lord (Mal. 3), was the forerunner of Jesus.

Malachi's name means *"My Messenger."* He represented the Voice of Yahweh in Israel, and as he warned the people he spoke of another Messenger who would come — even "the Christ" (Mal. 3:1), who will bring about a great reformation at his second coming (chs. 3:13–4:6).

Malachi's words were not all condemnation and warning; he also declared that there were some who had not given way to the prevailing wickedness. These few gathered together at regular intervals, to speak "one with another" concerning the things of Yahweh, and to strengthen themselves in the glorious hope He had set before them (ch. 3:16). They met for this purpose, when others were raising the old cry: "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before Yahweh of Hosts?" These malcontents in Judah saw about them conditions that weakened their faith. It seemed to them that the arrogant were happy whilst the righteous appeared miserable; that those who did wickedly seemed prosperous whilst those who observed God's law were in poverty; that those who tempted God were delivered from evil whilst those who humbled themselves before Him continued to suffer (vv. 14-15).

But Malachi showed that such a viewpoint was incorrect; that there is a day coming that shall burn as an oven, and then the arrogant, the wicked, and those who tempt God will be cut off, whereas the righteous shall be saved. And who are the righteous? Malachi declared: ***"They that feared Yahweh spake often one to another: and Yahweh hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared Yahweh, and that thought upon His Name; and they shall be Mine, saith Yahweh of Hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him"*** (ch. 3:16-17).

What wonderful words of encouragement are these for those who seek to study and understand the Word of God, and apply it in their lives. Such not only find peace of mind now, but they are storing up for themselves treasure for the future. Their destiny is assured, and it shall be a great one.

Malachi's short book is a wonderful exposition on the *Scope and Value of True Worship*.

It speaks of: **[1]** Yahweh's love for His people (ch. 1:2-5); **[2]** Israel's indifference to that love (ch. 1:6-14); **[3]** The failure of the priests to assume their responsibility (ch. 2:1-9); **[4]** The faithlessness of the people even to one another as shown in their hardhearted attitude to their marriage vows (ch. 2:10-16); **[5]** The faithlessness of the people to God shown in their indifference to the demands of His worship (chs. 2:17; 3:6); **[6]** Yahweh's promise of prosperity in return for a practical application of religion (ch. 3:7-12); **[7]** The true prosperity of the spiritually-minded among Israel (ch. 3:16-18); **[8]** The purging effect of the second coming of Christ (ch. 4).

Malachi's message was typically fulfilled in his day, for in Nehemiah — who had brought Judah into covenant relationship with God, who had been sent by the king, but recalled "into a far country," who ultimately returned to perfect the work he had commenced earlier — the wise in Judah had a type of the One who will come, to purify Judah and Israel, to make their offering worthy, and to vindicate his Father's Name in all the earth.



The Jews had returned from exile only a few years earlier and rebuilt the walls which were broken down because of their sins. Malachi's appeal on behalf of God: "Return unto Me," demonstrates that Israel was returning to many of the errors of the previous generations. They had returned to Jerusalem, but not to their God.

like a wise Father, overshadows their lives for good. He chastises and disciplines them for their benefit, seeking to guide them into ways of righteousness and ultimate peace.

When Nehemiah left Judah for Persia and the people drifted away from ways of righteousness, they began to suffer. Everything seemed to go wrong. The crops began to fail; the seasons were bad, business was not good. Actually, the blessing of God was withdrawn from them, but they did not understand that; they blamed it on to "bad luck".

There was one man among them that knew differently, however. His name was Malachi. He saw Nehemiah leave for Persia with misgivings, and viewed the compromising policy of Eliashib with growing anxiety. He saw the reforms of Nehemiah defeated, one by one. His indignation grew as he observed that God was given second place in the lives of most of the people. He viewed with particular concern the manner in which marriage with the alien was becoming commonplace, how the sabbath law was held in contempt, the way in which the priests turned from their appointed functions as teachers of the Law to other things. He felt strong stirrings within himself, felt a growing indignation against a people that did not appreciate their privileges, felt that he must do something to stem the tide of apostasy that was sweeping the nation.

Then, one day, the spirit of God took complete possession of him. He felt keenly the love of God; saw clearly the apostasy of the people; and then, publicly, moved by the Spirit of God, he began to speak...

Stern, forthright words, expressing a vigor worthy of Nehemiah himself, poured from his lips. He reminded the people of the love of God, and denounced their indifferent worship. He was scathing in his denunciation of the demoralised state of the priesthood, and the general condition of irreligion and laxity among the people (Mal. 1:13-14; 2:17; 3:5-7). He repeated the condemnation of Nehemiah in even stronger terms. He told the priests that they had "despised and profaned" God's name (ch. 1:6, 12); that they had departed "out of the way" (ch. 2:8), that they had "corrupted the covenant of Levi" in that they had become partial in the administration of the Law (v. 9). He denounced the people as "thieves and robbers," for they withheld the tithes and offerings which were God's due (ch. 3:8-9); he pointed out that they did not profit by this thieving, withholding of God's due, for God, in turn, withheld His blessing (ch. 3:8-9); he ruthlessly condemned intermarriage with heathen wives, and decried it as adultery, for sometimes it had been done to the hurt of loving Jewish wives whose position was testified by the tears of hypocritical husbands, to the indignation of God (ch. 2:13). Malachi used the most extreme adjectives, denouncing the people as "adulterers, sorcerers, false swearers" (ch. 3:5), "treacherous dealers," "workers of abomi-

nation" (ch. 2:11, 14). He summed his message up by warning the whole nation, that though it had been granted great privileges initially, it was now "cursed with a curse" (ch. 3:9).

But he did not only upbraid and denounce. He had a lofty vision of glory to reveal as well. He saw visions of the future, of a time when not merely in Jerusalem, but throughout the whole world, men will worship God in truth, when even the Gentiles will flock to Him (ch. 1:11); he spoke of the coming of a great messenger to prepare the way before the Lord (ch. 3:1), and of the Lord himself who would come suddenly and unexpectedly to his temple. He spoke of the continuing and changeless love of God who was so forbearing that the sons of Jacob were not consumed, despite their wickedness (ch. 3:6). He spoke of a day that would burn as an oven, to consume all the wicked, but which would purify the sons of Levi, so that they would offer a sacrifice in righteousness, a day that would witness the going forth of Elijah to turn the people wholeheartedly to God (ch. 4). And he saw in vision the coming of the Sun of Righteousness who would destroy the powers of darkness, and cause men to turn to God in truth...

Malachi's Final Message

Malachi's words stirred those of the people who desired to serve God. They were probably uttered before the return of Nehemiah, and thus helped to make ready a people prepared for him when he appeared again in Jerusalem. Both prophet and governor may have acted in concert together, thus typifying the coming work of the Lord Jesus, who will appear as Prophet and King, to establish righteousness in the earth, and to set up his worship in truth and holiness.

Nehemiah did that. His second coming to Judah was figuratively like the second coming of the Lord to complete that which was commenced two thousand years ago. In that regard, Malachi was to Nehemiah what John Baptist was to the Lord Jesus, and what Elijah will be to him at his second coming.

Thus, in these events, the Jews of those days saw enacted before their eyes, that which will ultimately be fulfilled in the purpose and mission of the Lord Christ Jesus. They had a foreshadowing in Malachi's vision of the future Age.

Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament Scriptures. It ends dramatically with three significant words: ***"With a curse!"*** Thus the Old Testament which opens with God looking upon all that He had made, and acknowledging that it was *"very good"* (Gen. 1:31), ends with those two ominous words — *"a curse."*

It was sin that brought such a change.

The Law of Moses, the Old Covenant that God made with Israel,

emphasised the sinfulness of human nature, and brought everybody under its curse, because all sinned. It made obvious the need of a Redeemer: one who could remove the curse, and lead the way to life.

Jesus Christ is that Redeemer. It is remarkable that Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, concludes with those three significant words *"with a curse"*, and the New Testament opens with the genealogy of the Lord Jesus who alone, can remove that curse!

The Bible is, indeed, the Book of God.

Meanwhile, the Jewish people cling only to the Old Testament, and refuse to accept the One who can remove the curse! They receive only half of the revelation of God, worshipping Him according to their interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant; accepting only that portion of God's revelation that leaves them *"with a curse"!*

Chapter Seven

NEHEMIAH'S DRAMATIC RETURN

RETURNING to Persia in order to report on his activities to the king, Nehemiah later learned of the treacherous policy being pursued by the high priest Eliashib, and the state of anarchy that had developed in Judah during his absence. He asked King Ahasuerus that he be allowed to return to complete the work he had commenced. His petition was granted, and soon Nehemiah was back in Jerusalem where previously he had labored for twelve years.

Again he inspected the work before him. Previously it had involved repairing the walls that had been broken down; when, at the dead of night, he had set out with a few companions, to inspect the ruins of the city and to make plans for the work before him.

Now the work was much more difficult. He was not treating with stones and mortar now, but people and attitudes — and individuals can be far more difficult and stubborn than inanimate matter.

Grimly he learned how quickly deterioration had set in. With indignation he found that the high priest Eliashib, was now not only allied by marriage with the enemy Tobiah, but had brought him to live within the temple itself, setting him up a place of residence in its very courts, where previously only the tithes had been stored. The high priest had been guilty of the very thing for which Yahweh, through Ezekiel, condemned Israel: "Ye have brought into My sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to pollute it, *even My house*... and they have broken My covenant because of all your abominations" (Eze. 44:7).

Nehemiah walked through the courts of the temple, and saw how deserted they were. Few priests and Levites remained to do its work; signs of poverty were manifest on all sides. What he saw made him increasingly angry. At last he came near the place where Tobiah had been allowed to set up his dwelling, and now the indignation of the governor could be restrained no longer. Full of zeal for the things of God, flushed with anger at the wickedness of the high priest, he burst his way into the dwelling place of Tobiah, and, catching hold of the furniture, he dragged it to the door, and flung it into the court below. He did not try to reason with Eliashib or his supporters. The time for argument and expostulation had long passed, and the time for action had come, and so, one by one, the household goods of Tobiah were ruthlessly smashed in the courtyard below. And, seeing his determined, grimly-set face, neither Eliashib nor Tobiah dared interfere.

Nehemiah now assumed the authority of the high priest himself.

He completely ignored Eliashib, and commanded the Levites that remained in the city to cleanse the chambers, and make them ready to again receive the offerings of the people to God.

Seething with indignation, he gathered their rulers together. "Why is the house of God forsaken?" he harshly demanded of them. Nor would he accept any explanation, any excuse. They were ordered to immediately set everything in order in accordance with the law.

But he found that there were insufficient Levites for the work before them. Eliashib had allowed the payment of tithes to fall into disuse, and the priests and Levites had not been maintained. Gradually they had left Jerusalem to find sustenance for themselves in other centres. But now, Nehemiah sent a proclamation throughout the country, and gathered them together again. He rebuked them for forsaking the temple, ordered the payment of tithes to be restored, set in order the proper forms of worship, and appointed into positions of authority men in whom he could repose the greatest confidence.

Once more the priesthood was elevated to its proper authority and standing before the people.

Nehemiah Restores The Authority Of The Law

Nehemiah recognised, however, that whilst he had authority to command obedience to the things of God, unless the people willingly desired to obey God themselves, the worship he was at such great pains to establish would only last whilst he remained there to enforce it. The people must be shown the value of seeking God, so that they would continue to do this of their own accord.

Besides, it was not likely that Eliashib, with the considerable support he could gather, would remain unmoved at the action of Nehemiah. It adversely reflected upon him personally, and must affect his standing before the people. Nehemiah could anticipate some powerful opposition from him, and, as people tend to support those who weakly allow them their own way rather than obeying the Word of God, the possibility was that they would be swayed to support Eliashib and oppose Nehemiah.

He determined to guard against this eventuality. He recalled the splendid influence that the public reading of the Law had upon the people in the time of Ezra, and arranged for it to be again read before the people. In due course, the community gathered together, and everyone heard publicly read the portion of the Law that denounced the very sins that were common in their day. They learned that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God — but here was the high priest bringing into the precincts of the temple itself such as Tobiah! They read, again, how that Balaam had been hired to curse Israel, and only the mercy of God had turned the

curse into a blessing — and here, in their day, were the leaders of the nation co-operating with their bitter enemies! They heard the indictment of the Law on marriage with those who did not embrace God's Truth — and they knew that such was again becoming common in Judah (Neh. 13:1-2).

Their consciences were pricked at all they heard; they realised that the spiritual condition then manifest throughout Judah could result in terrible punishment upon the nation if it was not corrected. The public reading of the Law, the study of the Bible by honest and sincere hearts, resulted in many turning to Nehemiah and assisting him in his labours.

But Nehemiah, that energetic man of faith, realised that all his labours would be without avail, unless God overlooked them for good, and blessed them. Thus he sought refuge and support in prayer, seeking a greater source of strength than which mere flesh could provide: ***"Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof"*** (v. 14).

God blessed his labours at that time, and will not forget in the future the good deeds of Nehemiah. He will never forget anybody who works faithfully, courageously, and with single-minded devotion in His cause, as did faithful Nehemiah.

Nehemiah Restores The Sanctity Of The Sabbath

A week passed away, full of activity and many difficulties for Nehemiah, until at last the sabbath dawned. And on this day, Nehemiah had another shock. He found that all reverence for this holy day had been discarded. No longer was it honoured as the Law demanded; no longer did the people appreciate its real meaning and the beauty of its significance.* He found that it was treated as any ordinary day. His meditation on the things of God was disturbed by some noisy activity outside in the streets. Investigating the cause, he saw in amazement, a long procession of laden animals entering the city, bringing in their burdens on the sabbath day.

He asked what this meant, and was told that this had become common practice throughout the land. In every place, through the folly of Eliashib, work was carried on as it had been before the

* The sabbath law demanded that people rest from their normal labours, and devote the day in meditation upon the things of God, and in performing His will in certain ways prescribed. Though the sabbath law is not obligatory upon followers of Christ (Col. 2:16-17), the principles of the sabbath still remain. It is still required that followers of Christ meditate upon the things of God and do His will, but they are expected to do this every day, and not one day in seven. Even the normal duties of life can be made a thing of sabbath observance from day to day in Christ (see Eph. 6:1-9), if we do them "as unto him".

restoration that Nehemiah established at his previous mission: now Jews were treading grapes, reaping fields, engaged in business, bringing their burdens into Jerusalem on the sabbath.

It was complete violation of the Law of Moses which enjoins that the sabbath be kept holy to Yahweh.

Poor Nehemiah! Here was further unpleasant work to be done! But he was the man for the task. Having, without hesitation, boldly thrown Tobiah's furniture out of his dwelling place, opposing the high priest himself, he was not prepared to stand aside and see the common people violate God's laws. He vigorously protested against this abuse, reminding them of the severe punishments levelled against it by the Law, demanding it should be obeyed immediately.

But as the day wore on, he discovered something even worse! He saw men of Tyre dwelling within the city of Jerusalem, setting up their wares for sale! Jews crowded around their stalls buying their produce. Above the gibberish jangle of foreign tongues rose the shrill voices of haggling buyers as they made their purchases. It was total confusion!

Determined to immediately stop this desecration of the sabbath, he called for a meeting of the nobles of Judah. Grimly he eyed them as they came before him. "What evil thing is this you are doing?" he harshly burst out at them. "You are profaning the sabbath! This is what your fathers did, and God brought evil upon the nation and the city! Do you want to bring even greater wrath upon it?"

He demanded that they attend to the matter immediately. All profanation of the sabbath was to cease at once, and on the sabbath days, the gates of Jerusalem were to be kept shut.

The rulers hastened away to attend to this matter. And on the next sabbath the gates were closed as required. So determined was Nehemiah that this law would be enforced, that he set some of his servants at the various gates of the city, to make sure that they remained closed all day. So when the Tyrians and other merchants arrived again at Jerusalem expecting further profitable trading activity, they found to their astonishment that they were not permitted entrance into the city. But, anxious for gain, the merchants and sellers persistently camped outside the walls on the eve of the sabbath, awaiting the end of the day, that they might enter the city and engage upon their trade. This was a profane violation of the spirit of the sabbath day.

Nehemiah's servants reported to him what was going on, but for a time Nehemiah hesitated to make any direct move, hoping that their patience might become exhausted, and that they would cease in this action. But it continued, and within the city some were awaiting the end of the sabbath, that they might return to their buying and selling. Direct action was required, and Nehemiah implemented it.

Thus, at the end of the following two weeks, on the sabbath, as the traders were again noisily arranging their goods outside the city walls, one of the gates opened, and they were confronted by the stern, determined countenance of the governor: "What are you doing lodging about the walls?" he asked them. "If you do it again I will see that you are forcibly ejected! I will lay hands upon you!"

The merchants could see that Nehemiah meant what he said, and decided to respect his command. And Nehemiah saw that it was obeyed. He arranged that additional Levites be on duty and keep the gates, that the sabbath day might be completely sanctified (Neh. 13:22). He also kept praying to God: "*Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy.*" He thus offered his good deeds as a sacrifice to God, and blended them with the sweet incense of prayer, that God might accept them as such.

Nehemiah Again Enforces The Marriage Laws

And now, another difficult matter obtruded itself upon Nehemiah's attention. As he walked the busy streets of Jerusalem, he heard a strange jargon. Little children were speaking half in a foreign tongue, and half in the Jews' language.

What was the meaning of this?

Nehemiah learned to his sorrow, that in his absence, intermarriage with women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab had been tolerated. These wives had not embraced the hope of Israel, but had introduced foreign ways and speech into the midst of the people (Mal. 2:11). This was a flagrant breach of the covenant that the Jews had solemnly entered into when Nehemiah had been in Jerusalem previously. God is not mocked, and if this were permitted to continue, the whole nation would soon be affected, and would suffer in consequence. Nehemiah knew that God would not tolerate those who break His laws in such a way, nor those who were prepared to condone such violation of His commandments. The people had previously endorsed their covenant with God by a sacrifice which called upon God to destroy them if they turned away from it in disobedience, the very thing they were now doing!

No wonder, therefore, that Nehemiah was gravely concerned. Something had to be done, and that quickly. Continued indifference by the Jews would bring the whole nation to ruin.

Angry and perturbed by all the evidence of wickedness that he saw about him, Nehemiah acted vigorously. He was not prepared to argue the merits of the case. Sternly he pointed to the Law, to their own acceptance of it. It was no quiet reasoning that he adopted, but firm, forthright denunciation and demands. The case was a clear one of violation of God's laws which had been firmly established by

Nehemiah at his first coming, and no amount of reasoning could overthrow that! Those who tried to justify heathen marriages were themselves as guilty as those who had contracted them.

The contention became heated and Nehemiah demanded that the Law be obeyed, and vigorously compelled the people to submit to it. In his diary Nehemiah confided what he had been forced to do because of the seriousness of the offence: "I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, 'You shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives'!"

This action seems harsh, but the circumstances demanded it. Let us not be mistaken as to the action taken by Nehemiah; let us not imagine that he descended to undignified wrangling, personal abuse and force.

By *CONTENDING* with them, he swept aside their arguments, pointed to the requirement of the Law, and their own agreement in the covenant they had made with their God.

By *CURSING* them, he reminded them of the judgment of God, and the sentence of the Law which cursed those who did not live in accordance with it. They had earlier entered into a covenant with God concerning this very matter, which invited His curse upon them if they disobeyed it (see Neh. 10:29) and now Nehemiah reminded them of the implications of this curse.

By *SMITING* them, he doubtless means that he had some, who persisted in justifying their action, publicly punished by scourging. He was in authority to administer the Law, and this he did for the benefit of the individuals concerned as well as the nation as a whole (see Heb. 12:6-7).

By *PLUCKING OFF THEIR HAIR,* he means that he had them shaven as a mark of the greatest disgrace.*

By *MAKING THEM SWEAR TO GOD,* he brought them to see the folly of their ways, and to agree to correct their action.

All he did, was to help the people he loved so much, and for whom he was prepared to make the greatest sacrifices himself. Some of his actions seem harsh, but they were necessary if the nation was to be kept pure. If Nehemiah had not acted in this way, the whole nation

* Such an action was taken against David's servants, to bring contempt and discredit them before the nation (2Sam. 10:4-5). It occasioned the retribution of the righteous king against those who had despised his servants.

would have been ultimately involved in trespass, and would have suffered the greatest evil and disgrace. We only have to bear in mind the terrible persecutions that the Jews have suffered down through the ages, to see what the consequences would have been if Nehemiah had let this matter drift. Had the Jews heeded his instructions, followed the Law, sought God in truth, they would never have suffered as they have ever since. But in turning from God, the nation rejected the only effective defence it has, and so has suffered in consequence.

In fact, Nehemiah was being cruel to be kind. He was following the wisdom of the Word which teaches: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Pro. 13:24). "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Pro. 22:15). "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from the grave" (Pro. 23:13-14). "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Pro. 29:15).

Nehemiah's vigorous action was dictated by love, and was the greatest act of kindness that could have been administered to the nation at the time.

Nehemiah Cleanses The Priesthood

But there were some who looked angrily upon the vigorous action of Nehemiah, and sought in every way to overthrow his growing influence with the people. Among these enemies was one who is nameless, who is known only as "one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest" (Neh. 13:28).

This priest, who was in the line for the position of high priest, had married into the family of Nehemiah's old enemy, Sanballat. It was the example, and influence, of such as he, that had brought Judah into the state of apostasy into which it had fallen. Nehemiah's action in regard to marriage directly involved him, and greatly angered him. He was not amenable to the law of God, nor did he care about the anger of the governor. He became boldly defiant of Nehemiah.

Others supported him. They are also nameless, but are included in the pronoun "them" of Neh. 13:29. They formed a party against Nehemiah, and set about developing widespread opposition against him.

But they were no match for the determined, resolute, and bold Nehemiah. He refused to argue with them, he refused to enter into any sort of compromise. When they approached him, he chased them from him, doubtless threatening them with scourging and shaving if they dared try and turn the people from God. He recorded it in his diary: "One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from

me!" He chased him away, and drove him from the land of Judah forever. And that was the best thing that he could do to such a person, for the influence of this unnamed son of the high priest could have brought terrible evil upon the struggling nation of Judah.

Again Nehemiah turned to God for confirmation and strength in his action. *"Thou wilt remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites."*

What covenant was this? It was the covenant that God would be given first place in all the affairs of life, that He would be honoured before mother, father, brethren or children (Deu. 33:9). A person endorses a similar contract when he embraces Christ (Mat. 6:24; Luke 14:26). And, when we do this, when we give God first place in our lives, we best love our father, mother, wife, brethren, or children, for everything we do will turn out for their ultimate benefit.

Faith teaches us that!

Nehemiah's Work Completed

The purification of the priesthood finalised the work of Nehemiah. At last the nation was purged, and the reform made effective. He had cleansed Judah from Gentile pollution, elevated the temple worship, corrected the abuse of the sabbath, set in order the marriage problems, restored the priesthood in its purity. And in the fleeing figure of the unfaithful priest Nehemiah chased from him, there was symbolised the success of his mission of judgment and restoration.

According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, this grandson of the high priest who opposed Nehemiah, fled from Judah, and sought refuge with his father-in-law, Sanballat. With Sanballat's permission, he built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, over which he continued as high priest. For some centuries, this rival worship of the Samaritans continued as a thorn in the side of Judah. It was used as a refuge for traitors and renegades, a centre of hostility and antagonism, a constant source of trouble and difficulty.



Josephus says that the name of this priest was Manasseh. If that is so, Manasseh had his revenge, for he set up a rival, apostate worship to that of Nehemiah: like the apostate worship of Christendom as opposed to the Truth. But in doing so, Manasseh made Nehemiah's reform more permanent. For the building of a rival temple, and the establishment of a rival worship, showed the people of Judah how important were the reforms of the governor, and how far the apostates were prepared to go. They were shocked

at the attitude of Manasseh, and rallied completely to the support of Nehemiah.

The practical result was that with Manasseh's withdrawal, opposition finally ceased, the reforms of Nehemiah were completely established, and the newly freed nation developed upon the foundation of Truth laid by Ezra and Nehemiah, and not the false way designed by Eliashib and Manasseh.

Nehemiah joyfully saw this develop in the nation, and with thanksgiving to God who had so abundantly blessed his labours. Thus his work ended with a prayer: ***"Remember me, O my God, for good."***

The Last Significant Incident In The Old Testament

We have seen that the Old Testament ends with the two significant words: *"a curse,"* and that the New Testament opens with the genealogy of the One who shall remove the curse and bring great blessings to the people of God.

This last act of Nehemiah in chasing the unnamed priest from the precincts of the Temple is also most significant. It is the last recorded historical incident found in the Old Testament. It witnessed the temple cleansed, the priesthood purified, and the rebellious priests chased from the holy city.



Samaritan priest and scroll.

The next recorded historical incident takes us to the birth of John, who prepared the way for the Lord who will one day occupy the position of the great priest in Jerusalem.

So, in the Old Testament, we see in the person of Manasseh, a representative of the Aaronic priesthood ejected from the city and the temple; and the next incident takes us to the coming of the Great High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek, who has superseded the Aaronic priesthood (Heb. 7:1). He will one day occupy the temple and the city as priest and king — replacing the priests who fled the temple in AD70.

Nehemiah's labours typified those of the Lord Jesus. He will yet witness Christ occupying the position of high priest in the temple in Jerusalem (Zech. 6:12-13), from out of which he drove the apostate priest so long ago.

May we be with Nehemiah at that time! ***"Remember us, O our God, for good!"***

THE SECOND ADVENT OF NEHEMIAH *and* THE PARABLE OF THE NOBLEMAN'S RETURN

On one occasion, when the Lord Jesus was approaching the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:11-27), he delivered to his disciples the parable of a nobleman who went on a far journey to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. He left his servants with certain riches, and instructed them to "occupy till he come again." His citizens, however, hated him, and declared that they would not have him to reign over them. The nobleman, however, proceeded on his journey, and received the authority that he desired. Then he returned. First of all, he gathered his servants before him, and enquired as to how they had conducted themselves in his absence. Those who had done so worthily, he rewarded by granting them positions of authority in his kingdom; those who had not done so, however, he punished by completely deposing them. Then he dealt with his citizens who had sent the message after him saying they would not have him to reign over them. He punished them with the greatest severity, and forced them to submit to his rule.

It was a parable relating to the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus is the *nobleman*, and at the moment he is on that far journey to "receive a kingdom". He has left instructions with his *servants* — his disciples and followers — to occupy their time suitably during his absence, and they must try to carry out his wishes. His *subjects* — the people of Israel who formed the kingdom of God in the past — repudiate his authority, and refuse to acknowledge it. In effect, they say "we will not have this man to reign over us". When the Lord Jesus returns, he will reward those servants who have tried to serve him faithfully, but he will discipline and punish those who have rejected his authority. Finally, he will set up his power throughout the earth.

Nehemiah types the Lord Jesus as he is represented in this parable. Nehemiah was sent by the king to establish the rule of God in Judah. He was recalled to the far country (of Persia) to report the results of his labours. He came again to Jerusalem to complete that which he had originally established, and to bring some permanence to the reforms he had instituted earlier. His labours thus foreshadowed those of the Lord Jesus.



Three prophets of the exile: Haggai, Malachi and Zechariah. It was Malachi whose voice sounded whilst Nehemiah, the governor, was absent from Jerusalem, reporting of his work to the great monarch of Persia.
Malachi's prophecy was a salutary warning to the Jewish Household that their apostasy would be addressed when the "messenger of the covenant" appeared.
As the closing voice of the Old Testament prophets, Malachi remains a voice of exhortation to the Gentile ecclesia on the eve of the return of the Great King, the Lord Jesus Christ, himself.

IT is sometimes inferred that the Bible is silent concerning the events between the two Testaments, and that we must turn to profane history in order to trace the story of the times. That is not altogether correct. In the remarkable prophecies of Daniel, particularly those contained in Chapter 11, there is outlined in great detail much of what took place. He predicted the downfall of the Persian Empire (v. 2), the uprise of the Grecian Empire, the division of that empire into four parts, and of the emergence of the King of the South (Egypt) and the King of the North (Syria), who were to ravage the Holy Land over the years. He prophesied of the wickedness of one king in particular (Antiochus Epiphanes), who would try to crush the rising power of Judah, and of the valiant efforts of the Maccabees who would faithfully and successfully oppose him. He prophesied of the rise of Rome and how it would conquer and ultimately destroy the nation of Judah and Jerusalem its city.

It was a period of confusion when mighty empires rose and fell; of great heroism when a people, weak in number but strong in faith, did valiantly; of dark betrayal when those who should have known better succumbed to evil pressure; of ultimate triumph for the forces of sin and wickedness when Rome asserted its power and stretched forth its hand over the land of Israel.

The events of this period established the conditions that existed in the land at the birth of the Lord. They therefore assist in providing the background to his life. They occupied a period of some 400 years.

Chapter One

CHANGED CONDITIONS IN THE LAND

THE last incident in Old Testament history records how Nehemiah indignantly drove the grandson of the high priest from the precincts of the temple. Nehemiah had returned to restore the temple services in their purity, and complete the reformation that he had instituted at his first visit to the land, only to find the priesthood foremost in apostasy.

The next historical incident takes us to the New Testament, and there we witness a great change. Jerusalem is no longer the pioneering city of Nehemiah, but a sophisticated city of wealth and importance. The temple is no longer a hastily erected building with but a few worshippers gathered there, but a marvellous edifice of great architectural beauty and wealth with impressive ritual and religious services. The nation is no longer in poverty, its towns and cities destitute of inhabitants, but is well populated, with synagogues established in most places, and the country crowded with people of different races. The tolerant Persians no longer exercise authority over the people, but instead the iron hand of Rome is found heavy upon them. The capital is no longer free with a Jewish governor exercising great independence and protected by a benevolent foreign power, but a Roman governor haughtily dominates the city, and an Idumean (Herod the Great, an Idumean, one of Esau's race) is seated on the throne.



In the crowded streets of Jerusalem, and the towns of Judea, are found different Jewish religious sects. The proud, haughty *Pharisees* are there, with their narrow-minded concept of the Law, walking the streets as a race apart, critically observing the attitude of others about them. The *Sadducees* are there, wealthy and supercilious, laying claim to the office of high priesthood because of the influence and power it brought, but openly contemptuous of much of the Bible and those governed by its teaching. The *Zealots* are there, hotly indignant to the point of fanaticism at the domination of Rome, scheming to overthrow their oppressors, prepared to wade through blood and use every means of violence to gain their end. The *Scribes* are there, educated in the Law, conceited in their knowledge, insistent upon the formalism of the temple service. The *common people* are there in vast

numbers, grinding out an existence often in direst poverty, looking for the Messiah whose coming their prophets had predicted, vainly seeking a shepherd who would care for them and lead them into truth. The *publicans* are there, hated and despised by the people because they use the misfortunes of the nation to enrich themselves.

Outside of Judea, in countries near and far off, reside large communities of Jews. They are attached to Jerusalem by their ties of religion and nationalism, and make frequent pilgrimages to the land of their forefathers, that they might give some semblance of worship to their God. But in reality they find themselves far happier in foreign lands, where they can trade and enjoy high culture, and give themselves to foreign culture, and have their children highly educated in foreign societies.

It was a vast change to the pioneering days of Ezra and Nehemiah. What had brought it about?

That is the story that unfolds between Malachi and Matthew.

The Persian Period The Persian monarchs, from Cyrus onwards, had proved to be sympathetic to the Jewish people. Cyrus had issued his decree favorable to the return of the exiles in Babylon; Darius had permitted the temple to be completed in the days of Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah; Artaxerxes had given Ezra his commission and authority; Ashasuerus had married Esther and elevated Mordecai; Artaxerxes had granted Nehemiah permission to visit the land and institute any reform he desired to establish.*

But students of the prophecies of Daniel realised that Persia must give way to the rising power of Greece. The belly and thighs of brass, in the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream (Dan. 2), had been interpreted by the prophet Daniel to signify that another power would supersede that of Persia. In a further prophecy (Dan. 8), he had seen in vision a ram with two horns, and though it stood up in all its power, it was attacked by a rough goat with a large single horn upon its head. It furiously rushed upon the ram with its horn poised to kill, travelling so fast that, to the watching prophet, it seemed as though its feet did not touch the ground (v. 5). The goat smote the ram with such force as to break its two horns and overthrow it. In the fulness of its anger, the goat then stamped upon the ram as it lay writhing on the ground. Daniel was told: "The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia; and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, four stood up for it" (vv. 20-22).

---

* In previous chapters of *The Story of the Bible* we have given reasons for believing that these names were actually titles, several of which were held by the one king. See volume 4, page 334.



Battle between Alexander and Darius, as depicted on a mosaic from Pompeii.

Thus Daniel was shown that the Persian Empire must give way to that of Grecia, and that when the first king of Grecia had performed his work, his empire would be divided among four successors.

The Persians were a world power, ruling from Carthage in the west to India in the east. All nations bowed down before them. Great riches were enjoyed by their rulers. The Persian soldiers were known for their bravery, and their leaders for their skill. For many years they dominated the world scene.

Rise of Greece Meanwhile, in the west, Greece was divided by a number of small, quarrelling states. They could not agree among themselves, and constantly called upon the Great King (as the king of Persia was called) to intercede in their quarrels. But prophecy had decreed that Greece should ultimately gain the ascendancy, and circumstances (which God ever controls) threw to the fore a notable leader in Philip of Macedon. He was a wise administrator and a skilful warrior. He united the Grecian states under his rule, and extended his influence on every side until the rising power of Greece became a threat to its neighbors. The Persians were not unduly concerned. They had mighty resources at hand both of wealth and of manpower, and they had already invaded Greece on several occasions to keep the little states under control.

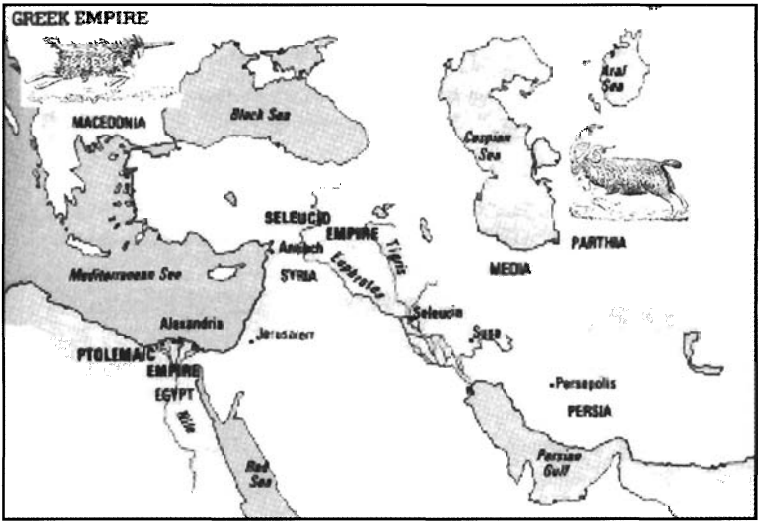
Then, at the height of his power, Philip was poisoned, and his power passed to his son, Alexander the Great. He was young man of only twenty years of age, but he had an insatiable ambition for world domination. He proved to be an even more skilful warrior than his father, and, organising the forces under him, he went out to conquer the world. And he succeeded. Like a meteor he flashed across the political heavens eastward until all the lands over which Egypt,

Assyria, Babylonia and Persia had once exercised control passed into his hands.

About the year BC334 he invaded Asia to challenge the might of Persia. Darius III was ruling at the time. He gathered together a huge force, five times as large as that of Alexander, and entrenched himself behind the river Granicus. The Persians felt secure in the protection of their forces, and the river which flowed as an obstacle before the advancing Grecians. But, nothing daunted, Alexander spurred his men on to the attack. They swam the river, and (like the rough goat in the vision of Daniel) fell upon the Persians with such fury that they retreated and fled. It was the first of a series of terrible defeats to which Alexander subjected Darius, by which he was elevated to the pinnacle of power. At the straits of Issus in Cilicia, and in the plains of Arbela in Assyria, further victories were won by the Grecians, and the power of Darius was finally broken. Ultimately Alexander's empire extended from Europe in the west to India in the east, and Egypt in the south.

During the course of his conquests, he overthrew the island fortress of Tyre as Ezekiel had predicted, and then he turned and demanded the allegiance of Jerusalem.

But here, according to Josephus the historian, he unexpectedly received a rebuff. The Jews refused to give him their allegiance on the basis that it had already been given to Darius the Persian. A wrathful Alexander marched against the city, but as he approached it, he was halted by a strange procession that met him. In answer to a heavenly vision (so it is claimed), the Jewish high priest at the head of priests and people advanced to meet him from out of the open city. At the



sight of the priests in their garments, Alexander bowed low to the ground, claiming that he was paying homage, not to the priests but to God, and that he had seen such a procession as this in a vision back in Macedonia. It is alleged that the high priest led him into the city, showed him the prophecies of Daniel which predicted the conquest of Persia by the Greeks, and received from him important concessions.

So Jerusalem was spared. In addition, Alexander offered immunities to Jews who desired to settle in Alexandria, an important city he established in Egypt. Wherever Alexander went, he established Greek cities all over his conquered domains, and along with them, Greek culture and the Greek language. The Persian Empire had now passed away, and that of Greece had taken its place.

But Daniel had seen in his vision, that the notable horn on the rough goat was broken at the height of its power, and that in its place there appeared four horns. This was now fulfilled. Alexander's reign was very brief. Only about thirteen years after he commenced his reign, he entered the city of Babylon in triumph — at about 33 years of age (approximately the same age as the Lord Jesus, who entered the city of Jerusalem to the approbation of the crowds, and who died shortly thereafter in sacrifice: in an entirely different manner to Alexander!). There he decided to celebrate his victories. He did so not wisely, but too well. It is said that he died in a drunken orgy.

Immediately the empire he established began to break up. He had no son old enough to take over the reins of control. His four principal generals, commanding his various armies, began to quarrel among themselves, and soon the united empire was divided into four parts. Two of these are known in prophecy (Dan. 11) as the King of the North (Syria) and the King of the South (Egypt). In an attempt to wrest power one from the other, war broke out between these two kings, and the Holy Land became the cockpit of warring nations. The tramp of soldiers began to be heard in the land and Judah experienced the fear and sorrow of the invading enemy.

Conflict Between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms

The king of Syria was a man named Seleucus; the king of Egypt was a Greek called Ptolemy. In history, therefore, the kings north of Judah are often called *Seleucids,* and those in Egypt, south of Judah, are called *Ptolemies*. For a little while, Judah was under the control of the King of the North, but it soon passed to Egypt, and remained under the control of the Ptolemies until about the year BC198.

During this time the character of the world was changing. Greek influence was making itself felt more and more. In language, literature, sculpture, drama and sports, the influence of Greece made an impact on the people everywhere. It became fashionable to speak

Greek, and to follow Greek ways. It became almost a universal language, so that many years later, when Paul went preaching the gospel throughout the world, he was able to do it in the principal language of the culture of the times: Greek.

It became popular also to worship Greek gods. Athens, the capital of Greece, was famous for its splendid temples, shrines, altars, and statues, and its influence rapidly spread.

In Judah, however, the Jews remained faithful to their religion. They spoke the common Syrian language called *Aramaic* in conversation, but they used *Hebrew* in their religious and legal writing. Some commenced to talk in *Greek*, the language of education and culture.

But there was no Grecian theatre or gymnasium in Jerusalem, as there were in other cities, until the time of Herod the Great.

Alexander had established in Egypt a city which he named Alexandria, and which he designed as a centre of Greek culture and influence. He particularly invited Jews to settle there, and a large number did so. They comprised an important part of the community. Soon the king of Egypt, *Ptolemy Philadelphus*, became interested in their religious background, and ordered that a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures be translated into the Greek language. According to tradition, some seventy Jews, skilful linguists, were sent from Jerusalem to Egypt to perform this work. The Law of Moses was first translated. Later the rest of the Old Testament books were added. It was called the "Septuagint" translation of the Bible (the word means *seventy* because of the seventy translators that commenced the work, which is still in circulation today).

The Maccabees Fight For Freedom of Worship

In the northern kingdom, a brutal man, with the nature of a tyrant, and ambitious for power, came to the throne. He hated the Jewish people, and determined that they must worship the Greek gods. His name was *Antiochus Epiphanes*. The peace and prosperity that the Jews had experienced until this time was now about to be rudely broken, as Daniel had predicted in his prophecy (ch. 11:20-35).

Antiochus attacked the Egyptian king. He was victorious, and, returning to his land, determined to take Jerusalem by storm and spoil the city. Daniel declared: "His heart shall be against the holy covenant; and he shall work his will, and return to his



Front and reverse of a coin depicting Antiochus Epiphanes

own land" (ch. 11:28).

He did terrible things. He broke down the walls of the city, set houses on fire, and, worst of all, defiled the temple and even offered swine's flesh on the altar, which was sternly forbidden by the Law of Moses. He left a mourning city. Eighty thousand of its men lay dead; forty thousand were taken as prisoners and slaves.

He left, but not for long. Again he invaded Egypt, and returning, he dispatched a force of 22,000 men under Apollonius to destroy Jerusalem. And now, terrible to relate, he had Jews who supported him. Daniel predicted: "...he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant" (ch. 11:30). Wicked Jews, apostate from the faith, fawned before his captain and agreed to put into practice what Antiochus should decree.

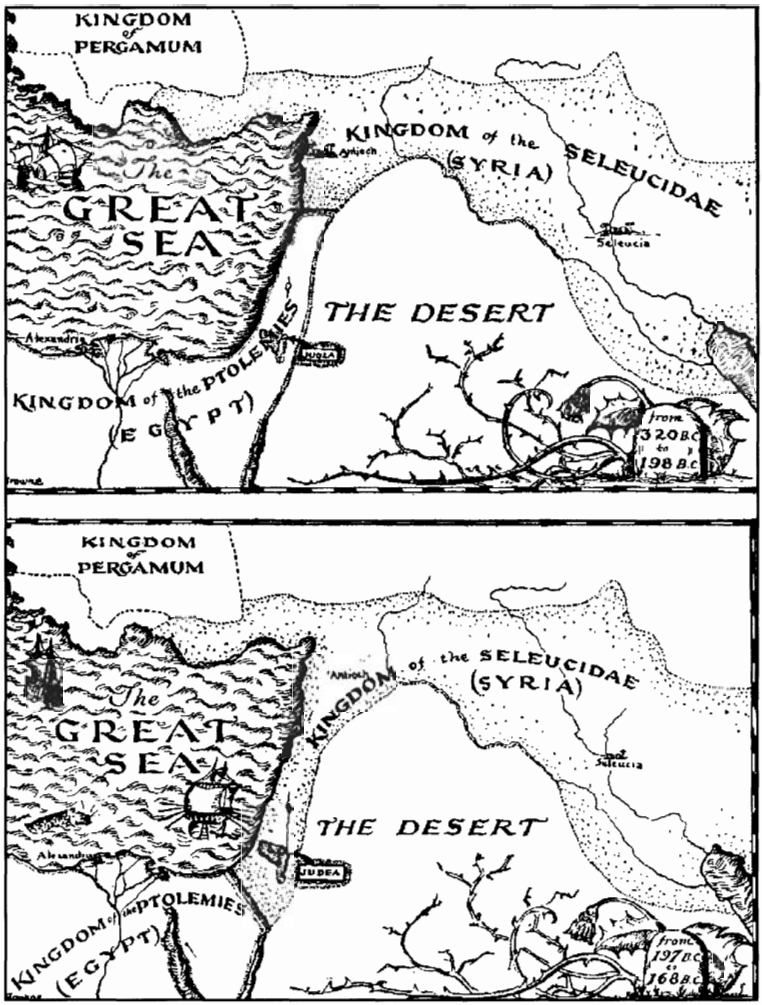


The Altar of Sacrilege. In his endeavours to compel the Jews to worship false gods, Antiochus iV commanded that there should be set up in every town and village throughout Judea altars on which pagan sacrifices were offered. This act, with others of religious persecution, began in BC170 and led to the Maccabaean revolt. This stone altar, found at Gezer, is dedicated to Heracles, but also bears the name of Yahweh.

They soon learned what he decreed: the total abolition of the Truth. Jewish sacrifices were forbidden, and the Jews were not even allowed to keep holy the Sabbath Day. The rite of circumcision was to be discontinued. The books of the Law and the Scriptures were to be publicly burned. Temples and altars to Grecian gods were everywhere to be set up, and the Jews commanded to sacrifice there. They were forced to eat swine's flesh, and the flesh of other animals forbidden by the Law. The temple was to be rededicated to the god Jupiter whose statue was to be erected in it.

The Jews heard the terrible decree with horror. They also knew that Antiochus was ruthless and brutal enough to destroy them if they resisted his decree.

What were they to do? Though many had embraced Grecian ideas, and were drifting from the ways of God, this new persecution sent them back to their national faith. With great heroism many preferred to die rather than submit, and to starve rather than eat food offered to idols, or swine's flesh.



The Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires.

Chapter Two

UPRISE OF THE MACCABEES

MEANWHILE the country seethed with indignation and revolt. In the small town of Modin, about 28 kilometres (17 miles) northwest of Jerusalem, there lived an old priest by the name of Mattathias. His name means *Gift of Yahweh*, and this he proved to be in Judah's hour of need. Suddenly a Syrian official appeared in the town, and called on Mattathias to use his influence in introducing the practice of idolatrous worship, offering him and his five sons great wealth in reward for their assistance.

But fiercely Mattathias repulsed the officer. "If all the nations that are in the king's dominions hearken unto him, to break away from the worship of their fathers, yet will I and my sons walk in the covenant of our fathers. Heaven forbid that we should forsake the Law and the ordinances," he declared.

But not all the Jews were so faithful. At the bidding of the Syrians, one stepped forward to sacrifice on the heathen altar to one of the Greek gods. Mattathias' indignation got the better of him. Seizing a sword he slew the apostate Jew, then the Syrian officer, and finally broke down the altar. Then he fled with his sons, to live for a time in the caves that abound in the hills of those parts. Here the standard of rebellion against Syria was raised, and many Jews





Above: Mattathias and his family flee into the wilderness (1Maccabees 2:29-30).

Left: Statue of Mattathias wielding the sword of vengeance against the Greek idolators.

gathered together to the support of Mattathias. When, next year, he died, they appointed his third son Judas to be their leader. He took upon himself the name Maccabaeus, meaning *The Hammer,* and proclaimed his intention of destroying the influence of Antiochus in Judea.

Soon enthusiastic Jews were flocking to Judas and his brothers in the caves, and on all sides defiance was being hurled at the Syrians.

Something had to be urgently done. Meanwhile, Antiochus being involved in war in other parts, could not spare the time to subdue Judah. He directed that a general of the army named Lysias should invade the land and quell all Jewish uprisings. The forces of Lysias greatly outnumbered those of Judas, and were well trained and armed. But Judas won remarkable victories. He inflicted heavy losses on the Syrians at small expense to his own forces. In this he was helped by God. Daniel had predicted: "They that know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... they shall be helped with a little help" (ch. 11:32-34).

Encouraged by victory, Judas now set about retaking Jerusalem. Once more Jerusalem was attacked, and now victory was with the Jews. Once more the temple was purified and the daily sacrifice restored. It became the occasion for a joyous celebration, which became an annual affair known as *The Feast of Dedication*. We read of it in the days of the Lord Jesus (John 10:22).

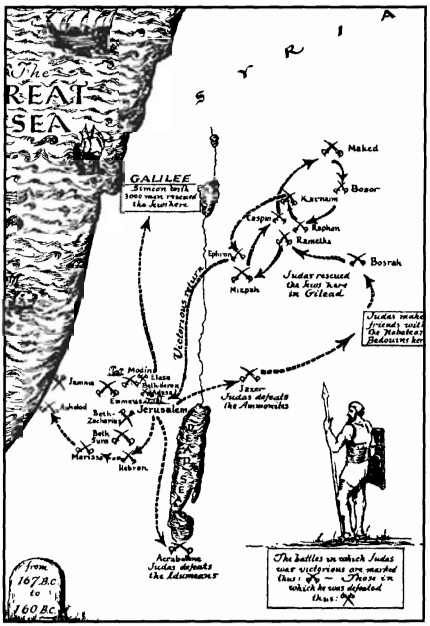
Word of the disaster which had befallen Lysias was hurriedly borne to Antiochus. He started for home, but before he got far, the grim enemy death caught up with him, removing one of the Jews' most bitter enemies.

And now turmoil reigned in the Syrian capital. Lysias seized power, but was deposed. Gradually stability was restored to the Syrians, and another army was dispatched to Jerusalem. The siege was lifted, but only for a time. The Syrians insisted upon controlling the office of the high priest. They slew the wicked Jewish high priest Menelaus, and appointed to the high priesthood a man by name of Alcimus, who was not of the high priestly stock, and whom Judas opposed. As the struggle blazed up, Alcimus was forced to flee the city. Quickly Syrian forces appeared, and although Judas again defeated them, this time at Adasa just north of Jerusalem, he knew that he must find other help to continue to oppose the more powerful kingdom of Syria. To whom should he appeal?

Rome Moves into the Picture

Far in the west was the rising power of Rome. Many reports of the victories accredited to the valiant Roman legions were heard in Jerusalem. It was obvious that Rome was about to take over the declining power of Greece.

The Jews turned to Rome for aid. The only assistance they received was a declaration of friendship. Rome proclaimed that she was Judah's friend, and warned other nations to keep away. But the Syrians took no heed of this, and again and again invaded the land. One by one the sons of Mattathias died, until John Hyrcanus, son of Simon (and thus the grandson of Mattathias), took full power. He organised the army, and vigorously and successfully opposed the Syrians. Another time, Jerusalem was besieged, and appeal made to Rome. Again Rome made a resounding promise, but did nothing. Again the Jews had to beat off their enemies.



But now Syria was a fading power, and under Hyrcanus, Judea rose until it reached a greatness unparalleled since the days of Solomon. At his death, he was able to leave to his son, Judas Aristobulus, a considerable kingdom. Aristobulus I only reigned for about a year. Then his brother, Alexander Jannaeus, took over. He was a fighter like his Maccabaean forebears, and much of his twenty-seven year reign was given to warfare directed against neighboring cities and kings. He pushed his conquests eastwards over the Jordan, and at his death in BC76 he had restored the Promised Land to about its original dimensions. Among the nations conquered and "converted" to Judaism were the Edomites (also called Idumeans), the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother.

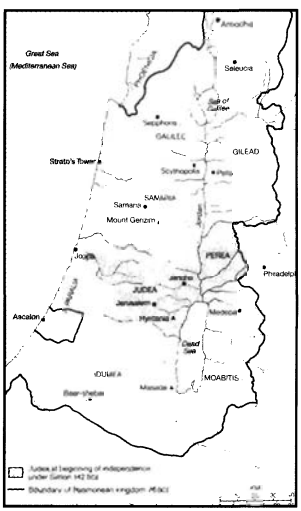
The Hasmonaeans Judea now became racked by civil war of a religious character. This was largely because of the Hasmonaeans, as the descendants of the Maccabees were called. They ruled in Jerusalem from about BC167 to BC60. The early members of the family conducted the nation's affairs with wisdom; but, as the years passed, ambition crept in, and there were quarrels and jealousies, which led to weakness.

The truly religious Jews were greatly distressed by all this. There was much rivalry for the position of high priest, much bitterness, bloodshed, and wickedness.

In the year BC67 two sons of Jannaeus called Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II quarrelled over the throne. A battle was fought in which Aristobulus came out the victor. Immediately Hyrcanus commenced intriguing with the Arabs, to whom he made many promises if he were elevated to the throne. The go-between in this little drama was an Idumaean, by name of Antipater. He eventually became an important Roman puppet, and was father of the bloodthirsty Herod, who was reigning at the time of Christ's birth.

Rome Takes over in Judea

In the year BC66, Pompey, a brilliant Roman general, conquered the king of Pontus, a country on the shore of the Black Sea. Then, turning his legions toward the south, he destroyed the Syrian Kingdom founded by Seleucus Nicator.



Pompey had a legate, one Scaurus, working ahead of him, and when the latter came to Damascus he was told of the foolish quarrel between the two brothers in Judea. He hurried there to intercede, to find that both were prepared to pay him sizable tribute for the intercession of Pompey. The matter was carefully reviewed, and the more likely of the two aspirants seemed to be the younger, Aristobulus.

Meanwhile, Pompey entered Damascus, and here the two warring brothers presented themselves, that they might set their respective claims before the great man. Whilst he made up his mind, Aristobulus encouraged the Roman commander to order the occupation of Jerusalem. Resistance developed as a result, and the city was put under siege. This was in BC63, and thus it was, under those circumstances, that Rome finally entered the arena, not as an ally, but as a conqueror. The Maccabean period had come to an end, and Judea had become a vassal of Rome.


Pompey

But the drama was not yet over. The authority of Pompey was challenged by another notable Roman: Julius Caesar. He landed in Alexandria at the head of a relatively small force, and immediately blundered into one of the most critical moments of his career. A large army attacked him, and he was in danger of death. He was rescued by an army from the Syrian cities, among which was Antipater at the head of 3,000 troops. He greatly helped Caesar, and did himself much good through his timely appearance.

Antipater had been the mediator in the struggle between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus. He had assisted Hyrcanus who had been deposed in favor of Aristobulus by Pompey. Caesar could only look upon Antipater as a valuable ally. He advanced him in Judea; made his sons rulers in the land; and through him helped the Jewish people.

Among the sons of Antipater was Herod the Great, who was ruling at the time of Christ. He was made ruler of Galilee.

The troubles of the times continued. Bloodshed and violence remained the order of the day. Antipater was poisoned by a rival. Herod married Mariamne, sister to the Jewish ruler, Hyrcanus. He was opposed by powerful forces, and, recognising that he could not successfully defeat them, he hurried off to Rome, there to plead for authority over Judea. This was granted him, and he returned in triumph to Jerusalem, to enter upon his glory with the full support of Rome. He still had to fight his way to power, but he did this with such a ruthless disregard for everybody in his way, as to ultimately bring him what he required: full authority and leadership.

Herod the Great Herod the Great was appointed by the Romans as King of Judea in BC47. He was not a Jew, but an Idumean, a member of the Edomite people that descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob and who had been forcibly converted to Judaism by the Maccabees earlier in history. He married a beautiful princess named Mariamne, a Jewess, a descendant of the Maccabees.

Herod was an able monarch, and the nation prospered under him in a material sense. He was ambitious for grandeur, and engaged upon a widespread building programme. He rebuilt the temple, spending tremendous wealth on the project; he also established a theatre and an amphitheatre for games and shows, which disgusted the religious Jews. He built strong fortresses up and down the land so that he might be secure, and lavished wealth on his own palace. He built Caesarea, which he named after the Emperor of Rome.

But he revealed himself as a true Edomite, being a cruel, ruthless, brutal man. His reign was stained by bloodshed and violence. Through jealousy he murdered the wife he loved, his two sons, as well as the remaining members of the family. No one who stood in his way had any chance against his power and savage wrath. Even the Emperor Augustus in Rome said it was better to be Herod's hog than his son!

A remarkable prophecy of Moses was fulfilled at this time in the circumstances in which Rome dominated Judea, with an Idumean on the throne in Jerusalem. Moses had warned the people of Israel that if they proved disobedient to God they would be taken into captivity with their king (Deu. 28:36). This came to pass when Nebuchad-

nezzar took them and Zedekiah their king, captive to Babylon. He also indicated that they would return back to the land, as they did under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. But he warned the people that if they still proved disobedient, God would punish them in a very remarkable way: "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low" (Deu. 28:43). This came to pass just prior to the birth of Christ. In Herod the Idumean, we have an example of the "stranger in the midst of Judea" getting up very high, for he became king. And in the Roman influence in Judea we have a further example of the stranger in Judea bringing the people down very low.

God's Word is always fulfilled to the very letter. Herod was on the throne when Christ was born about BC4. He was dying of a terrible disease (some have suggested that it was cancer) which increased his cruel passions. Few mourned when Herod the (so-called) "Great" came to his end.

Sects of the Jews The period of the Maccabees saw the uprise of various sects of the Jews including the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The word *"Pharisee"* means *"Separated One"*. The Pharisees separated themselves from the body of Jewry when they saw attempts made to "Hellenize" the people in order to bring them under Greek influence. They turned to the Scriptures, and insisted upon living in accordance with their ritual laws. They also had an uninspired oral law in addition to the written law, which they insisted should be observed likewise.

The Pharisees undoubtedly did a good work at the beginning. But gradually they became too rigid in their attitude, and, whilst preserving the letter of the Law, they completely lost its spirit and truth.

On the other hand, the *Sadducees* accepted the Law of Moses, and rejected the rest of the Bible. They were found mostly among the priesthood, but they were not a good influence upon the people. They did not believe in the resurrection because it is not taught openly in the Law of Moses, and therefore sought what pleasure and power they could find in the present. They became completely unscrupulous in their search for power, and played a very prominent part in condemning the Lord Jesus to death.

There was still another group called the *Essenes,* which was also probably established about this time. They stood aside from both the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and put their confidence in the whole of the Old Testament. It is thought that, by the time of Christ this sect had grown to about 4,000 members.

Though not mentioned in the Bible, they doubtless exercised a pious influence by their quiet, highly disciplined life, dwelling in the

Chronology of Alexander the Great to the Nativity

This chronology is taken from "Universal History of the World" (J. A. Hammerton) and Robinson and Oesterley's "History of Israel."

Date B.C.	History of Palestine	Contemporary Events: Greece and Rome	Contemporary Events: Egypt and the East
332	Alexander's Campaign in Palestine		
323		Death of Alexander	The Ptolemies take the Egyptian Kingdom and the Seleucids the Syrian
322		Deaths of Demosthenes and Aristotle	
320	Ptolemy Soter captures Jerusalem. Palestine subject to Egypt		
314	Palestine subject to Syria		
310	Simon the Just, High Priest		
301	Palestine reverts to Egypt		
284			Beginning of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament
264		First Punic War (264-241)	
218		Second Punic War (218-201)	
201			Colonies of Jews from Babylon transplanted to Asia Minor
198	Antiochus the Great of Syria masters Palestine		
183		Death of Scipio Africanus and of Hannibal	
175			Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria (175-163)
170	Tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes		
168	Revolt of the Hasmonaeans (Maccabees) led by Mattathias		
166	Judas Maccabeus, son of Mattathias, leads the Jewish insurgents, taking and holding Jerusalem		
163			Death of Antiochus Epiphanes. Ptolemy Philometor, king of Egypt, on appealing to Rome is reinstated as sole king
160	Judas killed in battle at Eleasa. His brother Jonathan succeeds him 		
149			
146		Third Punic War Fall of Carthage and Corinth Greece becomes a Roman province	
142	Murder of Jonathan Maccabeus. Hasmonaean dynasty in Judea established		

Date B.C.	History of Palestine	Contemporary Events	
		Roman Empire	Egypt and the East
	under Simon, last of the brothers		
134	Murder of Simon Maccabeus: John Hyrcanus succeeds him as High Priest and King		
130	Hyrcanus destroys the temple on Mount Gerizim		
103	Aristobulus I succeeds John Hyrcanus		
102	Alexander Jannaeus becomes High Priest and King (102-75)		
75	Alexandra, queen (75-67); Hyrcanus II High Priest (75-66)		
67	Aristobulus II, High Priest and King (66-63)		
63	Hyrcanus II restored as High Priest (63-40)		
		Pompey subjugates Judea	
60			
55		The first triumvirate	
54	The Temple plundered by Crassus	Caesar invades Britain	
48			
		Battle of Pharsalia: death of Pompey	
47	Antipater the Idumaean appointed by Caesar procurator of Judea. Herod made governor of Galilee		
44			
		Assassination of Caesar	
43	Death of Antipater		
40	Hyrcanus banished: Antigonus succeeds (40-37), last of Hasmonaean priestly line	Herod at Rome appointed king of Judea	
37	Herod captures Jerusalem		
31			
30		Battle of Actium	
			Egypt becomes a Roman province. Line of Ptolemies ends
27		Augustus made emperor	
19	Herod begins to rebuild the Temple		
11	The Outer Temple finished		
4	Herod dies at Jericho after the Nativity of Jesus Christ		

barren wilderness of Judea, waiting for the Messiah to appear. Some of their writings have been discovered in what is known as the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. It is from this source that we learn about the Essenes.

At the time of Christ's birth there were many people looking for the coming of the Messiah, because the time period of the "70 weeks" in the prophecy of Daniel, which foretold of such an event, had almost expired. The influence of the Essenes could have played a part in this. If so, it was a very important work that they did.

These sects were all in existence at the time when the New Testament record opens.

Chapter 1

CONFUSION AND DISTRESS IN THE NATION

FOREIGN domination overshadowed the land of Judea. It was an age of spiritual drought, concerning which the prophet Isaiah declared: "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of Yahweh revealed? For he shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isa. 53:1-2).

These prophetic words, foretelling the birth and development of the Lord Jesus, predicted how dry and arid would be the spiritual condition of the people of Judea at the time.

It was an age of political chaos and frustration. The heroic epoch of the Maccabees* (BC175-AD63), when men of faith had courageously and successfully battled against the enemies of Israel, and the borders of the nation had been extended on every side, had now passed into a condition of anarchy, civil war, bloodshed, and spiritual decadence.

The independence of Judea was gradually lost, particularly when Rome extended her influence eastwards. Rome's policy was to divide and conquer, and she pursued it ruthlessly and successfully. She accepted Judea as a friend and ally, but at the opportune moment, she brutally suppressed her as an enemy. Soon the proud Jewish rulers found themselves humbled before a haughty foreign governor set up in authority in Jerusalem, and the independence of Judea was lost, as the nation found itself shackled to the iron fetters of a Roman dictatorship.

Even within Judea itself, a strange thing was observed. Instead of a Jew occupying the highest authority in the land, this had also fallen to a foreigner. By duplicity and cunning, Herod the Great (as he was called) had insinuated himself into the good graces of the Romans, married Mariamne, and was appointed by the Romans as King of Judea in BC47.

So the Jews saw not only the hated Romans set up as overlords, but found themselves under the control of a foreigner. For Herod was an Idumean, an Edomite: a member of a nation that had been conquered and "converted" by the Maccabees.

In all this, there was a wonderful fulfilment of the warning prophecy of Moses: "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low" (Deu. 28: 43). The power of Herod the Idumean, and the presence of the Roman governor, were sad tokens of the truth of this prophecy.

---

* See *Story of the Bible,* page 76.

An Age of Religious Confusion

The troubles and messianic expectations of the times saw the uprise of many religious sects each setting forth a different approach to divine worship, and each destructive of the true spirit of divine teaching.

Members of these different sects were seen in the narrow, crowded streets of Jerusalem, or in the isolated parts of Palestine where some tried to live lives of great austerity. The proud, haughty Pharisees trod the streets of Jerusalem as a people apart, criticising and condemning those about them, in the terms of their narrow concept of religion, with its emphasis upon outward show. The Sadducees were seen about the temple, wealthy and supercilious, laying claim to the position of high priesthood because of the influence and power it brought to the sect, but openly contemptuous of much of the Bible and those governed by it. The Zealots were there, a fanatical secret society, dedicated to the overthrow of Rome, prepared to wade through blood to gain their ends, and busily scheming to destroy their oppressors with violence if necessary. There were Scribes aplenty, ready to support the Pharisees, and lay upon the people grievous burdens that they could not bear. In the deserts there were the Essenes, contemptuous of the rest, self-righteous in the severity of the rules they laid upon their followers, awaiting the coming of the Teacher of Righteousness.

And in the midst of all this religious confusion, there were the common people, looking for guidance, vainly seeking a shepherd who could lead them into truth and purpose, often grinding out an existence in the direst of poverty.

There were other forms of religion that took a political character. Rome worshipped the God of Power, and brought the adoration of this false god into the very shadow of the temple in Jerusalem. Caesar was the personification of this form of worship, the earthly image of their idolatry. And the marching Roman legions, leaving a trail of blood across the world, were as its priests, sacrificing to its god.

Greece worshipped culture and human thought. That was its real god as Paul discovered when he visited Athens. The Greeks worshipped an abstraction, something created out of the mind, a god of imagination built out of the musings of man. And as Grecian thought and teaching was widespread, so there were many advocating the worship for which this nation stood.



Roman soldiers under arms

Even Jewish formalism was tinctured by Grecian culture.

The four main religions of the world at that time were therefore heathen paganism, Jewish

formalism, Roman power, and Grecian thought. The last three particularly affected the Land of Promise. There was no life or power in these systems; their worshippers all lay in the shadow of death. There was a dire need for the coming of One who could bring life to the world.

An Age of Hope But despite the religious confusion of the times, it was also an age of hope. In Palestine, some people were awaiting the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. These predicted in thrilling terms of the coming of the Just One, and the glory that would come to Jerusalem and to Israel at that time. Daniel foretold the very epoch of the coming of Israel's Messiah (Dan. 9:23-27), and it was obvious that the time was at hand. Strange omens and voices were heard, adding to the general excitement. Many were looking for the promised Redeemer (Luke 2:38). One man, Simeon, received a revelation from God that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ (Luke 2:25). Another, a prophetess, Anna by name, a familiar figure in the temple courts, proclaimed the imminence of the coming of the Saviour (Luke 2:37-38). Small groups throughout Judea were searching the Scriptures, and earnestly discussing the theme of the promised Kingdom of God on earth. The general excitement was contagious, and affected all classes of society; some, even among the priests and Levites, were looking for the manifestation of Israel's King and Messiah (John 1:19-20).

The Old Testament Scriptures which they diligently studied, proclaimed the glory of that king. He would be a descendant of David, a mighty military leader, who would snap the bonds that held the nation enchained, and lead Israel to heights of national grandeur and power such as it had never seen even during the golden age of its history. The prophecies spoke of Jerusalem as the metropolis of a worldwide government (Isa. 2:2-4), of Israel being the chief of nations (Mic. 4:8), of the whole nation being restored and united under its king (Eze. 37:21-22), of that king being the "Son promised" in the line of David who would establish universal peace throughout the earth (Isaiah 9:6-7), of the blessings of his administration in protecting the poor and extending righteousness on every hand (Psalm 72), of there being one religion which all would worship (Zech. 14:16).

"Glorious things are spoken of Jerusalem" (Psalm 87:3), and those who were looking for the manifestation of the Messiah, anticipated that he was coming to establish the conditions promised.

They did not realise that he had first to appear as the "Lamb of God" to be offered for the "sin of the world." They did not recognise that he would be first manifested as the suffering servant of Yahweh,

to lay down his life in redemption for humanity's sins. They did not understand this even though the prophecies proclaimed it (see Isa. 53; 1Pet. 1:11).

But though they were mistaken as to his initial mission, though they looked hopefully for his coming, they were not altogether wrong in their expectations. Jesus was born at the time decreed of God (Gal. 4:4), and is destined to come again (Acts 1:11) to fulfil the promises relating to the kingdom. His first advent was not an event unconnected with that which went before, and that which came after, but one that fitted in perfectly with the circumstances and needs of the times. As one writer has stated:

"The coming of the Son of Man was not an absolute isolated event in the history of mankind. There was a long preparation, a continuous development, a gradual differentiation through the ages. Prince after prince, ruler after ruler, prophet after prophet, man of God after man of God, were sent. They were forerunners; they were types; they were links in the chain. They all pointed onwards and prepared the way for the coming Prince, Ruler, Prophet, the Man of God. The gifts, the powers, the excellencies, the glories of all were to be combined in one. He was to be Crown and Flower as he was also the root of all. All the events in all the ages were marching forward to this culmination. Conscious and unconscious prophecy reached its fulfilment; its partial fulfilment as the earnest of the higher fulfilments to be."

Amid all the frustrations and confusions of the time, Jewry was impatiently awaiting its Messiah.

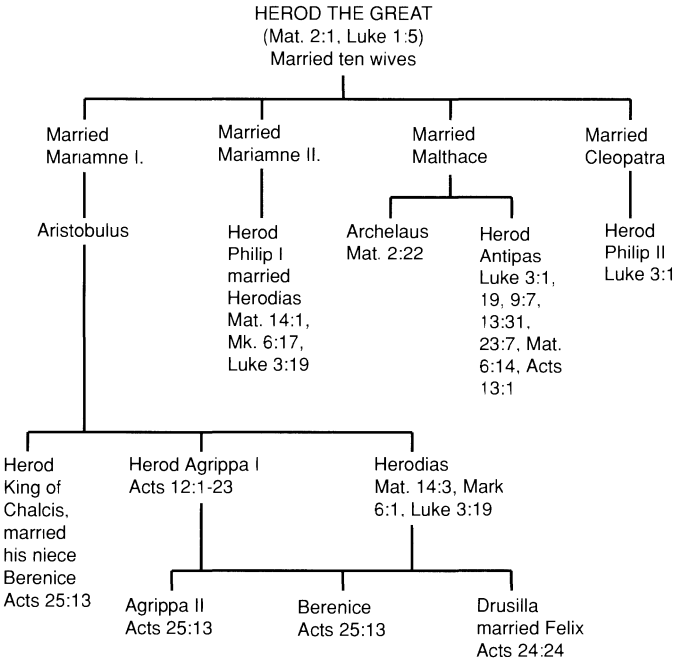
THE SIGNIFICANT OPENING VERSE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." With these words, the New Testament opens its account of the wonderful mission of the Lord Jesus. Immediately it focuses attention on two men as the predecessors of the Lord, whose names are linked with glorious covenants of promise. Christ came to "confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. 15:8), and thus was in the line of Abraham and David. He was the seed promised both, as well as the "seed of the woman" promised in Eden (Gen. 3:15). Thus the New Testament rivets attention upon the three great men of the Bible: Abraham, David, Jesus Christ. To the first two, glorious, hopeful covenants of promise were given, covenants which demanded the appearance of the Lord that they might be confirmed.

The HERODS of the New Testament

Herod

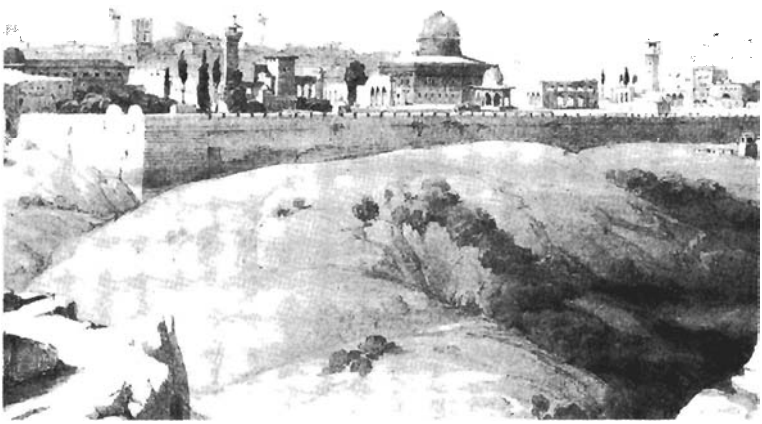
Judea was a province of the Roman Empire. It was occupied about BC63, by Pompey and placed under tribute. Herod received his appointment from the Romans, and had reigned 36 years at the birth of the Lord. He was called "the Great" because he distinguished himself in wars against his enemies, showed talent in ruling, rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, built up and ornamented the cities. But he was notorious for his cruelty, and Josephus called him "a man of great barbarity, and a slave to his passions." The slaying of infants was in complete accord with his odious character. Herod arranged for the murder of Aristobulus, brother of his wife Mariamne, because the Jews of Jerusalem evinced affection towards him.



In the seventh year of his reign he put to death Hyrcanus, the 80-year old grandfather of Mariamne I, who had formerly saved his life. He publicly executed his beloved and beautiful wife, whom he professed to idolise, and her mother, Alexandra, followed after. He had his two sons by Mariamne, Alexander and Aristobulus, strangled in prison, on groundless suspicions, leaving his grandchildren fatherless. He caused his son, Antipater, to be slain five days before he died, and on his own death commanded that the chief men of the Jews be imprisoned and slain so that

all Jewry might mourn. But this was not carried out. The massacre of Mat. 2:16 would be a light thing to Herod, and Josephus states: "many slaughters followed after the prediction of the new king."

Herod put Antipater to death because of a conspiracy formed against him and changed his will. Galilee and Perea were given to Antipas, Gaulonitis, Trachonitis, Batanea, Paneadis to his son Philip. Judea to Archelaus.



The Holy City in nineteenth century.

Chapter 2

THE FORERUNNER IS BORN

ABOUT the year BC5, in the days of King Herod, there lived in the mountainous country of Judah, a priest by name of Zacharias with his wife, Elisabeth.

They were both descendants of Aaron, and were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all His commandments and ordinances according to the Law of Moses.

But life had brought them one great disappointment: they had no family. Many years had passed since they were married, and now both were growing old. They had often prayed to God to bless them with a child, but it seemed as though their prayers were not to be answered (Luke 1:13).

As priest, Zacharias had many important duties to perform, among which was that of burning incense on the golden altar in the Holy Place each morning and evening. This was really the work of the high priest, and Zacharias was not high priest. However, other priests were chosen to assist the high priest in his labours, and their daily tasks were appointed to lesser officials by lot.

It was the duty of Zacharias to do this for the period allotted his order of priests.

The morning and evening burning of incense was quite a ceremony. When the priest entered the Holy Place for this purpose, a bell was rung, all priests and Levites took up their stations, the space between the altar and temple was cleared, and a great silence fell on the concourse gathered together. The people, understanding that the ascending smoke of the incense symbolised prayer (Psalm 141:2), then bowed their heads in silent prayer to God (Luke 1:10).

Zacharias Struck Dumb in the Temple

This was the case on one morning when Zacharias entered the temple to perform his duty. A great silence had fallen on the people outside; he entered the Holy Place with a feeling of reverence for the important work that he was to perform; and then he received a shock. The darkness of the temple was illuminated by the light of the lampstand; on one side he could see the table of shewbread, and in the distance, with the light playing upon the gold, he could see the altar of incense. But as he walked towards it, he saw a figure standing by its side. He was filled with fear. He could sense that this was no ordinary man, but a messenger direct from God!

What was the purpose of this extraordinary visitation? The Voice

of God had not been heard since the days of Malachi the prophet. Was Yahweh about to speak directly to His people once again? Was the silence of centuries to be broken?

Thoughts like these would have crowded the mind of the troubled Zacharias. He, like others, was doubtless awaiting the coming of the promised Messiah. In fact, he probably had been praying for this, earnestly desiring that Yahweh would be moved to vindicate His holy name in Israel.*

And that being so, the message he now received was staggering in its significance, whilst, at the same time, it fulfilled the two dearest desires of his heart, namely, that his wife, Elisabeth should have a son, and that Messiah should come.

Meanwhile, the fear-stricken priest could only look with troubled and bewildered face at his unexpected angelic visitor.

And then he heard astounding words of graciousness and consolation:

"Fear not Zacharias; for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (vv. 13-17).

What a message this was! What an amazing son was promised in it!

His name was to be John. That was appropriate to both his mission and his parentage. John means: "The grace of Yahweh." Zacharias means: "Yahweh hath remembered." Elisabeth means: "The Oath of my God." It was all like a parable of the purpose of God, for the meanings of the names reveal the following statement of fact: "Yahweh hath remembered the Oath of my God and revealed His grace or favor."

He was to be "great in the sight of the Lord." There was a mighty ruler in Jerusalem at the time who was given a similar title, for Herod was known as "the Great." He was, perhaps, great in the sight of men (who hated him anyway), but this one was to be great in the sight of God.

He was to drink neither wine nor strong drink. He was to be a

* Note Luke 1:13. As Zacharias and Elisabeth were aged, it is unlikely that they had continued to pray for a son; it is more likely that they prayed for the coming of Israel's Messiah. That being the case, there is even greater point in the angel's comment: "Thy prayer is heard... thou shalt have joy and gladness."

Nazarite. The Law of Moses provided that any layman could become as a priest by taking the vow of a Nazarite (Num. 6). During the period of his vow he drank neither wine nor strong drink, but dedicated his life unto the service of Yahweh. John was the son of a priest, however, and therefore did not need the vow of the Nazarite to qualify for priesthood. The command to abstain from wine and strong drink had a slightly different significance in his case. The priests were not allowed to drink strong drink whilst they were ministering about the things of God in the tabernacle or temple (Lev. 10:9). The fact that John was commanded never to touch these liquids, indicated that he was always, at all times, to be engaging upon the ministry of Yahweh.

He would be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. His ministry, as forerunner of the Lord, was so important, that Yahweh would overshadow him from birth, quickening him in his mental perception of divine truth (Isa. 11:2-3), that he might be better equipped for the work before him.

He was to go forth in the spirit and power of Elias. The prophets had spoken of Elijah as the forerunner of the Lord (Malachi 4); now Zacharias was told that his son was to perform a similar service to Jewry and prepare the way for the coming of Messiah!

What a mission! What a son!

No wonder Zacharias was staggered — both at the appearance of the angel and the message he heard.

Obviously, if his son was destined for such an important mission, he must exercise special care in his training and upbringing.

He needed re-assurance, not only in the fact of the impending birth, but also of the exalted mission of the child.

"Whereby shall I know this?" he enquired of the angel, "for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years."

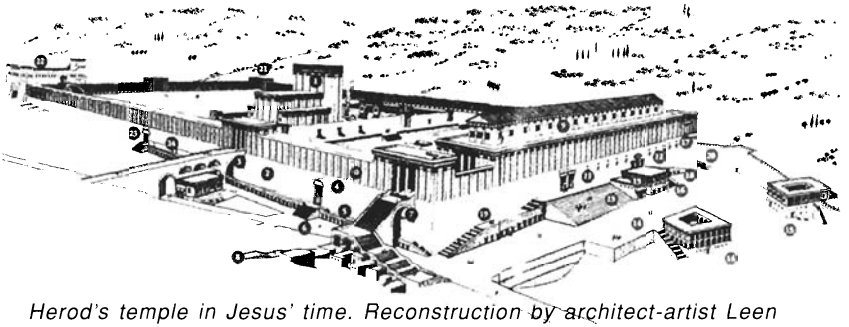
The angel replied: "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season" (vv. 19-20).

Gabriel!

Zacharias the priest was familiar with that name! With quickened interest he remembered that this was the angel which had been sent to Daniel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21), and had predicted the coming of "Messiah the Prince" at the end of a certain period that was even then coming to fulfilment (Dan. 9:24-25).

With increasing wonder, Zacharias listened to this strange visitor.

But as suddenly as the angel appeared, he disappeared. He was there one moment and gone the next, leaving Zacharias to complete his work in the temple. It was a very thoughtful priest who burnt the incense that morning, pondering over the strange words he had heard.



Herod's temple in Jesus' time. Reconstruction by architect-artist Leen Ritmeyer. Herod rebuilt the then 500 year-old Second Temple, and embellished it with a series of magnificent buildings that made the whole structure one of the wonders of the world in Jesus' time. For the southern approach from Jerusalem's Lower City, the Royal Stoa, a grand multi-columned hall stretching the entire east/west width of the temple platform which pilgrims approached via an imposing double gate, whilst priests used a triple gate to reach the store rooms. For the aristocracy living in Jerusalem's Upper City, a special bridge enabled them to avoid having to mix with the ordinary pilgrims approaching from the south. Natural valleys protect the temple from every side except the north, where the Romans stationed their Fortress of Antonia.

Outside, the people wondered at the length of time he was taking. They were concerned lest something had happened to him in the temple. At last he came out of the door of the Holy Place, his face thoughtful as he mused over all he had heard that day. They could tell that some strange experience had befallen him, they questioned him as to what had delayed him in the Holy Place.

And now Zacharias felt the full weight of the angel's words, for seeing the people about him, obviously asking him questions, he found he could neither hear them nor speak with them.* He was both deaf and dumb. He could only try and express by signs what had happened to him, and leave it to their imagination to understand his meaning.

The people left the temple that day, wondering at the meaning of the strange incident, even though they did not fully understand what had taken place.

Shortly afterwards, the period for which Zacharias was appointed to minister in the temple came to an end, and as was his custom, he returned to his home in the hill country of Judah.

Soon the friends and relations of Zacharias and Elisabeth heard with wonder that they were expecting to have a son, and Elisabeth busied herself in preparation for the happy and exciting event.

Gabriel Calls Again The little town of Nazareth, situated in the despised district of Galilee, stands on the edge of a steep cliff that rises precipitously above the broad valley of

* This is suggested by the statement of Luke 1:62, that the people "made signs" to Zacharias. If he were not deaf as well as dumb, they could have stated their request in words.

Esdraelon. Many important incidents of history had taken place in that valley; many heroic acts of faith had been performed. Along it the enemies of Israel had marched when Yahweh had seen need to punish His people; and at other times back they fled as He had moved to assist Israel in its need.

Nazareth in the 19th century



In the days of Zacharias the priest, there lived here a young maiden named Mary, of the house of David.

She had characteristics that are most commendable. She was virtuous, thoughtful, kind, considerate and godly. Educated in the divine purpose, with her mind steeped in the teaching of the Scriptures, she looked for the coming of the promised Redeemer.

She was happily espoused to a man named Joseph. He, also, was of the house of David, and was a worthy companion for Mary. For he, like her, was keenly interested in the things of God, and was also looking for the manifestation of Israel's promised king. He was well-known among his family and friends as being both just and upright.

As yet, Joseph and Mary were only engaged, but they both looked forward to the time when their love for each other would be united in marriage, and when perhaps, they would have children of their own. For to be married and childless was a mark of reproach (see Luke 1:25). From the very beginning, God had proclaimed His purpose to redeem mankind through the "seed of the woman" (Gen. 3:15), and every married woman in Israel hoped that she might contribute to that end.

About six months after the angel had visited Zacharias, when Mary was alone in her room in the home in Nazareth, she suddenly felt the presence of somebody else there. Then she saw what appeared to be a man. His countenance was so striking, however, that she detected that this was no ordinary person, but an angel. Then she heard a message that sent her thoughts racing as never before.
The angel declared: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women!"

The message perplexed Mary. She could make nothing of it. In

what way was she highly favoured? Why was she blessed more than any other woman?

She wondered about it all, and then she heard the angel again: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Mary pondered the amazing message. The words were familiar to her. They are almost a paraphrase of the promise given unto her great predecessor, King David, to whom the prophet Nathan had declared: "I [God] will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever, I will be his Father, and he shall be My Son... and thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7).

When he heard this wonderful promise, David recognised that the "seed" here promised was the seed of the woman referred to in the very beginning (Gen. 3:15).*

The words of the angel to Mary linked the promise made to David with another equally wonderful prophecy proclaimed by Isaiah: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder... of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever" (Isa. 9:6-7).

This was part of the wonderful Immanuel prophecy in which Yahweh had declared that He would give a marvellous sign to the house of David, for: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14).

These prophecies would be well-known to Mary. She doubtless recalled them to mind, as with racing thoughts she listened to the amazing declaration of Gabriel.

That she, a humble, self-effacing, modest young maiden of despised Galilee should be selected for this honor was something so staggering, so stupendous, that she could not grasp its full significance.

Truly it gave new meaning to the name of the town in which she

---

* David responded to the declaration of the prophet with the statement "And is this the manner of man?" (2Sam. 7:19). In the AV the word "is" is in italics and should be eliminated. In the Hebrew, "man" is *"the Adam."* David's declaration should read: "This is the law [oracle or declaration] of [or concerning] the Adam." Thus, he saw the declaration of the coming seed as fulfilling the Oracle of the Edenic covenant, in the provision of the Second Adam to take away the consequences brought about by the sin of the first Adam.

lived. According to some authorities, *Nazareth* signifies that which is "kept or preserved" The word suggests a valuable young stem or shoot of a plant, hedged around or protected from destroying animals.

And did not the Immanuel prophecy speak of the coming Saviour as "a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots"? And does not the Hebrew word for *Branch* signify a plant springing from the old root and reserved or preserved when the tree is cut down (Isa. 11:1)! Certainly this was the case.

But how could Mary perform the part appointed her when she was not married? The angel explained: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible!" (vv. 35-37).

The declaration of the angel posed a challenge for Mary. Was she prepared to submit to the requirements of God? It is obvious that it would mean a trial for herself. Was she prepared to face up to that?

Mary, not only pure and lovely, but also courageous and faithful, was prepared to do whatever God required of her. Unlike Zacharias, she believed (see Luke 1:45), and was blessed in her belief. She accepted the challenge and the trial. To the angel Gabriel she replied: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word!"

Many trials came upon Mary as a consequence of her ready acceptance of the will of Yahweh, but a wonderful future awaits her when she shall again see her Son in triumph.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

There were many other questions Mary would have liked to have asked Gabriel, but now, as with Zacharias, the angel had gone as suddenly as he had appeared. Mary was left alone with her tremendous secret.

She needed someone in whom to confide and with whom to share the momentous news; but to whom could she turn?

There was one who would understand: Elisabeth.

She lived in the hill country of Judah, about 60 miles (96 kms) south of Nazareth. That was a long journey in those days, for it had to be covered on foot. But it meant nothing to Mary in her excited state of mind. With haste she left



Ein Kerem, traditional birthplace of John Baptist.

Nazareth and, travelling south, eventually arrived at the city of Judah. Finding the house of Zacharias and Elisabeth, she entered and greeted Elisabeth.

And as Elisabeth looked upon the radiant face of her young cousin (for they were related), the Holy Spirit came upon her, and she realised that she was looking at the mother of the Lord. To the wonderment of Mary, Elisabeth confirmed the message of the angel: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Son you shall bear," she declared. "It is a great honor that the mother of my Lord should visit me, and it has filled me with a great joy. And blessed is she that believeth: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord."

Mary listened with wonder. She had told Elisabeth nothing concerning her angelic visitor and the message she had received, and yet here was her cousin confirming everything proclaimed by Gabriel!

Her belief was fortified by what she heard.

Her mind went back to two notable songs recorded in the Old Testament: Hannah's song of triumph at the birth of her son, Samuel; Moses' song of deliverance at Israel's redemption from Egypt. Both are prophetic of the future, and are to be fulfilled in Mary's Son. Indeed Hannah concluded her song by singing: "Yahweh shall give strength unto His King; and exalt the strength of His Christ" (1 Sam. 2:10).

And this when there was no king in Israel!

Now Mary took up the sentiments of both songs on her lips, and applied them to her unborn Son:

"My soul magnifies Yahweh,
My spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
for He has regarded the low estate
of His handmaiden.
For, behold, henceforth all generations
will call me blessed;
for He Who is Mighty has done great things
for me, and Holy is His name.
His mercy is on those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with His arm,
He has scattered the proud in the
imagination of their hearts,
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
He has exalted those of low degree;
He has filled the hungry with good things,
He has sent the rich empty away.

He has helped His servant Israel,
in remembrance of His mercy,
as He spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and his posterity for ever."

Mary hardly understood the things that she sung, for she sang in the spirit of prophecy. Certain of the fulfilment of all she uttered, she spoke of things that be not as though they already were (Rom. 4:17). The hungry have not yet been filled; the proud have not yet been scattered; the mighty have not yet been turned from their thrones; Israel has not yet been redeemed in fulfilment of the covenant to Abraham.

But all these things will be accomplished through the Son promised Mary.

And because she knew that the coming of that Son was Yahweh's confirmation of all that He had promised, Mary could see beyond the trials, and pain, and shame that would be heaped upon him to the glory that would ultimately be his. She could confide and rejoice with Elisabeth as she could with nobody else. Excitedly the two women exchanged confidences and meditated upon the great honor that had been paid them, that they should give birth to the *Forerunner* and the *Redeemer* of the human race.

Mary remained with Elisabeth in the hill country of Judah until the birth of the baby, John (Luke 1:56).

Birth of John the Baptist

Mary and Elisabeth were not the only ones excited. All the inhabitants of the small town in the hill country of Judah were stirred as well. They knew how ardently Zacharias and Elisabeth had desired a child; and now their wishes were about to be fulfilled!

At last the time came, and a son was born to Zacharias and Elisabeth.

The whole town rejoiced with them.

The Law of Moses required that every baby son born should be circumcised on the eighth day (Gen. 17:12-14). This was the token of the Abrahamic covenant. It taught the Israelites what God required of them if they were to really be the covenant people — the putting away of flesh even at the cost of pain.

It became a considerable ceremony. Friends and relations would gather together to witness it, and to officially name the young baby.

There was quite a gathering of people on the day that John was circumcised because his birth was so unexpected, and the friends and relatives of Elisabeth wanted to show their love for her, and their pleasure, that she had a little son.

Then came the official naming of the little baby.

They all decided that there was only one name possible: *Zacharias*.

It was a good name; it belonged to his father; there had been many honoured men in Israelitish history who had borne that name; it was appropriate for the occasion, for it means, as we have seen: *"Yahweh hath remembered."* And the friends and relations doubtless thought that Yahweh had remembered the great desire of Zacharias and Elisabeth, and granted them what they wanted.

And like friends and relations then and now they tended to take things into their own hands!

They even began to call him Zacharias then and there, without consulting his father, or poor Elisabeth, whose wishes were entirely overlooked.

They had forgotten that it was *their* baby!

But Elisabeth, taking the child in her arms, looking lovingly upon his little face, and sheltering him from these officious people, declared: "He shall be called John!"

This raised a storm of protest. "Why John?" she was asked. "There is none of your kindred that is called by that name?"

Poor Elisabeth! In the face of this opposition, she had to appeal to her husband Zacharias. But he was deaf and dumb! He could not hear the arguing, nor could he speak of that which was in his mind. His friends and relatives made signs to him as to what the baby should be called, sure that he would confirm what they thought was right. He had to write his answer. Crowding around him, the wondering people read the words he wrote: *"His name IS John!"*

The people were amazed both at what he wrote and at the selection of the name.

Then they witnessed something that was to cause tongues to twitter for a long time afterwards. No sooner had he written these words, than Zacharias found that he was no longer deaf and dumb. He could hear the people around him; he found he could speak; with wonderment and joy he saw the fulfilment of every detail of what the angel had declared. Before all the people he opened his voice and praised God.

He did what many people were destined to do through the ministry of John later, for his labours would cause many who were spiritually deaf to hear the words of God, and many who were spiritually dumb, to sing praises to His name.

All this was foreshadowed by the remarkable events at the birth of John.

These events caused people to wonder and to talk, so that throughout the hill country of Judea, the birth of this remarkable baby became the topic of conversation for a long time afterwards.

From an early age, John was thus the object of curiosity as people wondered what manner of child he was. From an early age he showed the most unusual characteristics.

Zacharias' Prophecy And again the Voice of God was heard. Not now through the lips of an angel, but from those of previously dumb Zacharias. His lips were opened to speak words of thrilling import and of greatest prophetic significance. They are incorporated in a song of praise unto Yahweh which beautifully expresses the main principles of redemption, the work of John in calling the people to repentance, and the mercy of God revealed in the ministry of Jesus. He sang:

Concerning Christ

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel;
for He hath visited and redeemed His people;
He hath raised up an horn of salvation
for us in the house of His servant David;
As He promised of old from the lips
of His prophets — that we should be
saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all that hate us;
To perform the mercy promised to our fathers,
to remember His holy covenant;
the oath that He swore to our fathers,
to remember His holy covenant;
the oath that He swore to our father Abraham
— that, freed from fear and from the hand of our foes
we should worship Him in holiness
and uprightness all the days of our life.

And then what love must have moved the voice of Zacharias, as turning with affection to the little child which was his dearly beloved son, he spoke

Concerning John

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest;
for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord
to prepare his ways;
To give knowledge of salvation unto His people
by the remission of their sins.
Through the tender mercy of our God,
the Day-Spring from on high will visit us [RSV]
to give light to them that sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death;
to guide our feet in the way of peace.

Childhood of John In the hill country of Judea, the child John grew. It was obvious that he was destined for great things. The guiding spirit of Yahweh was on him, so that early in life he showed an amazing aptitude for the things of God. He was different from other children, and as he

grew, he came to appreciate the wonderful work before him. He had a great desire for solitude that he might commune with God. He thus was frequently found in the deserts, separating himself from the polluting influence of city life and the schools of thought that circulated therein, which led the people away from the true spirit of the teaching of the Bible.

He remained thus until he entered upon his mission as forerunner of the Messiah.

But many years were to pass before that happened.

THE SONG OF ZACHARIAS...

There is much in the wonderful song of Zacharias to excite the closest study of the words he used at the birth of his son.

Zacharias signifies *Yahweh hath remembered*, or *Yahweh's memorial*. It is derived from a Hebrew word *(zeker)* rendered "memorial" in Exodus 3:15. His union with Elizabeth *(The oath of my God)* produced John whose name means, *The Grace of Yahweh*.

Thus the Memorial and the Oath combined to produce Grace. This is the theme of the song that Zacharias sung. In it he declared that Yahweh "hath remembered His holy covenant, the Oath which He sware to our father Abraham" (Luke 1 :72-73).

Yahweh's memorial is expressed in Exodus 3:14-15, " I will be whom I will be... Yahweh Elohim of your fathers, the God *[Elohim]* of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob... this is My name for ever, and this is My memorial *[zeker]* unto all generations."

In this declaration, Yahweh declared that He would manifest Himself *(I will be)* in a son and sons *(the Elohim of Abraham)* not then manifested. Zacharias rejoiced that this son was about to be revealed.

Yahweh's Oath is declared in Genesis 22:16-18, "By Myself have I sworn, saith Yahweh, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed... and thy seed *[singular: Gal. 3:16]* shall possess the gate of his enemies."

The Oath proclaimed Yahweh's intention to reveal Himself in a Son and sons who would conquer the enemy and supplant its power. Zacharias sang of this victory and triumph.

MEMORIAL	OATH
"The Elohim (mighty ones) of Abraham..." (the father of a multitude).	"In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore."
"Of Isaac..." (Isaac means *Laughter* or *Great Rejoicing*).	"And thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies."
"Of Jacob..." (Jacob means *Supplanter*, and was changed to Israel: *A Prince with El*).	"In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice."

Read Zacharias' song, and notice how much the Memorial and the Oath formed the theme of his composition, and his hope for the future. He saw that the Forerunner and the Messiah provided confirmation of the Memorial Name and the Oath.

FEATURES FOR STUDY IN ZACHARIAS' SONG — Luke 1:68-79

VERSE 68

"Lord God of Israel" — In Hebrew, *Yahweh Elohim of Israel*, the Memorial Name of Almighty God (Exo. 3:14-15).

"Has visited" — God did so in John Baptist.

"Has redeemed" — Accomplished in Christ (Psa. 111:9).

VERSE 69

"An horn of salvation" — The horn is emblematic of power. Criminals fled for mercy to the horns of the altar (1Kgs. 2:28), thus the term expresses the *strength* of salvation (Psa. 89:3, 4, 23-24; 132:17).

VERSE 71

"We should be saved" — See Isa. 45:22; 49:5-7; Jer. 23:6; 30:8.

VERSE 72

"To remember His holy covenant" — See Lev. 26:42-45; Eze. 16:60-63; Psa. 98:3; 105:8-11. Even in times of wickedness on the part of Israel, the covenant was kept in mind by God. It was confirmed in Christ (Rom. 15:8; Acts 3:25-26; Gal. 3:15-17). It was memorialised in the Yahweh Name (Exo. 3:14-15) which Zacharias' name recalled.

VERSE 73

"The oath which He sware" — See Gen. 22:16-18; Psa. 105:8-9. This oath was commemorated by the name Elizabeth — the *Oath of my God*.

VERSE 74

"Serve Him without fear" — Under the Mosaic covenant they served in fear, but the song of Zacharias implied that they were to be delivered from the curse of the Law. See Heb. 2:14-15; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 3:13.

VERSE 75

"In holiness" — The Old Testament predicted the time when God's law would be written on the hearts of believers (Jer. 31:31-33); when the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be all holy (Isa. 4:3) and all righteous (Isa. 60:21). The ministry of the apostles was to that end (Eph. 1:4; 4:24; 2Tim. 1:9). This is accomplished through the Word (Jn. 17:17; 2Thes. 2:13).

"And righteousness" — See 1Cor. 1:30. Justification (righteousness) is by faith that leads to baptism and works.

"Before Him" — As though walking in God's very presence (Gen. 17:1).

"All the days" — An entire life dedicated to divine service; a holiness and righteousness that is continuously manifested, and not reserved for special days or circumstances.

VERSE 77

"To give knowledge of salvation" — This was John's special ministry: to point the way to Jesus, or Yah's salvation. See Jn. 1:29.

"The remission of their sins" — Predicted (Jer. 31:34; Isa. 53:11); confirmed (Jn. 1:29). Christ was exalted to accomplish it (Acts 5:31).

VERSE 78

"The tender mercy of our God" — This is a characteristic of Yahweh (Exo. 34:6; Psa. 103:7-14). It was manifested in Christ (Rom. 5:7-8; Jn. 3:16; 1Jn. 4:9; Eph. 2:4-5).

"The day-spring" — Gr.: *anatole*, signifying "sunrising" as in Rev. 16:12. (see Jn. 8:12; Rev. 22:16).

It represented the morning light, the aurora. As the dawn is the pledge of the full glory of the sun yet to appear, so the birth of the Messiah was the pledge of the coming of the Sun of Righteousness at the consummation of the divine purpose (Mal. 4:1).

VERSE 79

"To give light" — Predicted (Isa. 9:2; 42:7, 16; 60:1-2). Confirmation: Simeon (Lk. 2:26-32); John (Jn. 1:9); Paul (Acts 26:23; 2Cor. 4:4-6; Eph. 5:8, 14).

"To them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" — Expressive of the sad, miserable and hopeless state of the unredeemed (2Sam. 22:9; Psa. 107:10-14; Isa. 9:2). Confirmation: Heb. 2:14-16; 2Tim. 1:10.

"To guide our feet" — Predicted: Isa. 48:16-17; 49:8-10; Psa. 25:8-10. Confirmed: Jn. 10:4-16; 1Pet. 2:21-25; Rev. 7:17; 14:1-5. The figure is taken from travellers who are overtaken by the darkness of night, and wait patiently for the morning light to illuminate their path. See 2Pet. 1:19.

"The way of peace" — The Hebrew *shalom* (peace) comes from a root signifying "to bind together as one." It is expressive of a unity of mind and action that draws two parties completely together. See Jn. 14:1, 2, 27.

Zacharias' song thus expresses with elegance the great principles of the Divine plan of redemption as expressed in the ministries of John and the Lord Jesus. It expresses eloquently the mercy of God that has made salvation possible; and all these things are worthy of praise, for without them our state would be a most miserable and hopeless one.

Chapter 3

THE SAVIOUR IS BORN

IT was the year BC4 or thereabouts. In the proud city of Rome, the Metropolis of the mighty empire that held sway over the then known world, Emperor Caesar Augustus ruled with an iron hand. He had brought the empire to a pinnacle of power, and was determined that it would remain there. But he could also see that certain changes were necessary in the mode of governing the many and varied people under his control, if it were to retain its influence.

How a Mighty Empire Helped to Fulfil an Obscure Prophecy For one thing, the Latin peoples, the people of Rome itself, were demanding more and more in the way of pleasure and luxury and furthermore, they wanted it cheap. They supplied the soldiers of his realm, and if they were to give their lives defending and policing the empire, the food and finance to maintain them must come from others. And this required no inconsiderable sum. The expense of maintaining the efficient and powerful Roman legions throughout the extended borders of the wide-flung empire was becoming a serious drain on available resources. Money and goods must be obtained somewhere; and Caesar was in no doubt as to where he could obtain it. Tribute had to be paid by those nations whom Rome had trodden underfoot, in order that its citizens might live in luxury and power. He decided to issue a decree, commanding that all people return to their home towns, there to be enrolled for the purpose of levelling tribute.

The decree was sent throughout the Roman Empire, and involved Judea. It reached there at a time when a favourite of Augustus, Sulpicius Quirinius, a renowned soldier and administrator, had been sent as the Emperor's legate in Syria (Luke 2:2).* It required that all

* This is according to Luke who wrote as a historian. But for centuries, critics of the Bible have claimed that Luke was wrong, on the grounds that Cyrenius (see Luke 2:2. Cyrenius is the Greek form of the Latin, Quirinius) was not sent as legate to Syria until AD6 when a census was taken. Thus history confirmed that Cyrenius had conducted a census, but that would have been when the Lord was about ten years of age! Was Luke wrong? Many claimed that he was, until a fragment of a Roman inscription was discovered at Antioch, and the surprising fact emerged that Cyrenius had also been the Emperor's legate in Syria on a previous occasion. The Bible record proved true after all, and Luke had made no mistake! That everyone was required to return to his ancestral home is authenticated by portion of an edict that has been discovered, and is dated AD104. In it is the statement: "Since the enrolment by households is approaching, it is necessary to command any who for any reason are out of their own district to return to their home, in order to perform the usual business of taxation." (From *Greek Papyri in the British Museum 111,* No. 904).

Jews return to their ancestral towns that a thorough census might be taken of the whole population. It was the first of such enrolments that were conducted, usually with an interval of about 14 years.*



Augustus Caesar, Roman Emperor at the time of the Census

Caesar Augustus little thought when he decided upon this wide sweeping decree, that he was playing an important part in the fulfilling of Bible prophecy relating to the future monarch of the world. But such was the case. And in it we see the Hand of Yahweh at work. The prophecy of Micah 5:2 required that the Saviour of mankind, earth's future ruler, should be born at Bethlehem. But Mary, his mother, particularly at the time when she was getting ready for the birth of her son, was a resident of Nazareth, a small town in the north of the land.

So, in order to bring the purpose of God to fruition, a mighty empire was moved by circumstances to take a census of its subjects. A humble carpenter of Nazareth and his newly espoused wife Mary, were affected by it, along with millions of others. As a result, an obscure and unlikely prophecy had wonderful fulfilment, and a tiny village (Bethlehem) was suddenly elevated to prominence in the sight of man, that only the ways of Providence could bring about.



Pictured is the only surviving Roman Census Decree, dated from AD104, at the time of Trajan.

History records that Caesar Augustus made the decree, but the Bible shows that behind the decree there was the hidden hand of God, shaping the course of history that it might conform to His purpose. He looks out from behind the shadows upon the affairs of man and guides them according to His will (Daniel 4:17).

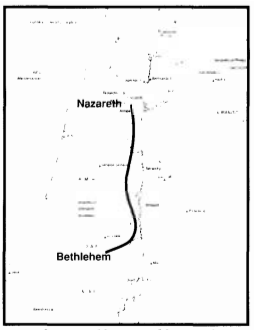
Thus was the Virgin of Nazareth brought to Bethlehem, that her son might be born there according to the prophecy of God's Word proclaimed so long before.

The Difficult Journey to Bethlehem

The Roman decree affected Joseph and Mary, his espoused wife, for they were both descendants of David, king of Israel, whose birthplace was the little backward village of Bethlehem. They had to travel there to be enrolled in the Roman census.

* A second census conducted in Judea by Cyrenius around about AD7 is referred to in Acts 5:37.

It was a difficult journey, not only because of robbers who laid in wait for unprotected travellers (although Joseph and Mary had little worth stealing!), and the animosity of the Samaritans who hated Jews and through whose territory they would have to go if they took the shortest route, but also because of the condition of Mary. For the time had almost come when she should give birth to the child promised by the angel Gabriel.



The distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem in a direct line, is a little less than 60 miles (96 kms). But a direct route is impossible, and, in any case, they probably would have avoided Samaria, because of the presence of the Samaritans who were not friendly towards the Jews. The route they most likely took would be along the wide, fertile valley of Esdraelon towards the east, until they descended to the Jordan valley. Then crossing over the river, they would continue south until they came to Jericho. Here they would again pass over the river, to follow the steep, wearying track that winds around the valleys ever upward for some miles, reaching an elevation of some 3,000 feet [1,000 metres] above sea level.

It was hard, long, slow travelling. They could only go the walking pace of the ass upon which Mary would ride, and upon which would also be laden the few humble possessions they required for the journey — sleeping mats, clothes, provisions.

No one would have imagined, as they saw the humble couple slowly toiling along the rough track, that they were descendants of the royal house of David, and that the woman upon the ass was destined to be the mother of the Saviour of mankind, world's future king!

But that was the wonderful secret that Joseph and Mary shared together on that hard journey towards the south.

A few months after the angel had appeared to Mary and she had returned home from her three months' visit to Elisabeth, the angel of Yahweh had appeared unto Joseph in a dream, to confirm the message that Mary had received (Mat. 1:19-24). Joseph learned the staggering news, that the maiden he had chosen to be his wife, had also been selected of God to mother the Redeemer whom He had planned from the very beginning to send into the world (Gen. 3:15). Joseph had pondered the matter deeply and earnestly, and had discussed it frequently with Mary. They both recognised the great responsibility that had been placed on them to care for the child in such a way as would contribute best to its future ministry.

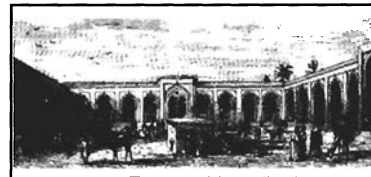
And now they were on the way to Bethlehem at which place the prophet Micah had declared the Babe would be born.

Tired out, they followed the winding road over the white bare hills of Judea, up past Jerusalem, and then downward towards Bethlehem. At last the little village was before them, perched on the top of one of the hills. Journey's end was, at last, in sight. How thankful they were.

But where were they to stay?

At Bethlehem there was an inn, or caravansary, for travellers; a place where visitors could stay overnight*. It was probably a square stone building with a courtyard in the centre, and with small rooms built around it. With relief Joseph stopped outside the inn and enquired regarding accommodation. He hoped to have had the shelter of one of the rooms for Mary, but to his dismay, learned that they were all occupied. The decree of Rome had brought about a great influx of travellers, and there was no room for the mother of the Lord even in the inn — the home of strangers!

What could he do? Night was drawing in, and shelter must be obtained somewhere, and quickly! There were a few rough stalls or caverns hewn out of the limestone rock, used as stables for the shelter of cattle; they could use one of these if they liked. It was better than nothing; it provided shelter from the night, and a measure of warmth. In desperation Joseph accepted the offer; there was nothing else he could do.



Eastern khan (inn)

Leading the ass to this humble shelter, and unloading the beast, he put down the sleeping mat, and made Mary as comfortable as he could.

"Unto us a Son is Given" (Isa. 9:6)

Later that night the miracle of new life was seen; a cry was heard, and the Saviour of mankind was born. Like every other Jewish child, he was washed, rubbed with salt, and wrapped in a blanket.

---

* This very Inn — actually a place where caravans would stop — most likely dated back to David, and had a most remarkable history. When the king was banished from the throne through the insurrection of his son Absalom, he was helped by a wealthy prince on the eastern side of Jordan whose name was Barzillai. On his elevation again to the throne, David wished to honor Barzillai in return for his friendship and help, but the prince refused on the grounds that he was too old for the honors David wished to pay him (2Sam. 19:35). However, he commended Chimham (thought to be a son of Barzillai — see 1Kings 2:7) to the care of the king. Honoured by David, Chimham settled near Bethlehem, the city of David, and established a caravansary (inn). The Jews who fled the wrath of the King of Babylon some 400 years after David, held a council of war at this inn, and forced Jeremiah to attend it (Jer.41:17). It was at the same place likely, that the greater Son of David was born. If so, it is ironical that this very inn, so closely associated with David, and a token of his gratitude, should refuse hospitality to the mother of his Lord (Psalm 110).

Luke says concerning Mary: "She brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for him in the inn" (Luke 2:7).

What an amazing scene is conjured up in the mind by this statement, when it is remembered that this was the Son of God, earth's future king.

In the rough limestone cave attached to the inn as a stable, among the bay and straw spread for food and comfort of the cattle, weary with their day's journey, far from home, in the midst of strangers, obeying a Roman law, in circumstances so devoid of all earthly comfort or splendor that it is impossible to imagine a humbler birth, the Saviour of mankind, earth's future monarch was born!

Even in his birth, men had little time for the Lord — "there was no room for them in the inn!"

One would have thought, that in the circumstances of the case, and in view of normal hospitality, room would have been found for Mary if not for Joseph. But the indifference with which her needs were treated then, foreshadowed the indifference with which many would hearken to the message of her Son later.

There was no room for them in the inn; and there is little room for the Lord in the hearts of men today.

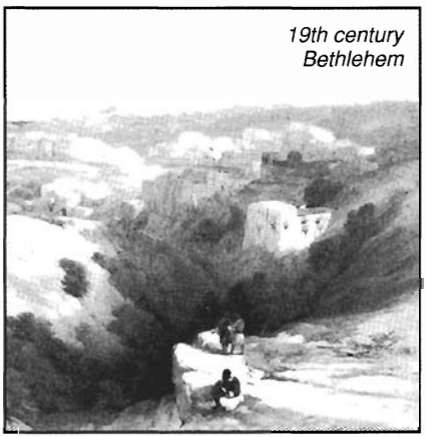
But the Saviour was born, prophecy was fulfilled, and a great Light began to shine in the midst of the darkness of Judea and of the world.

The City Of David Which Is Called Bethlehem

Bethlehem today, is one of the world's most celebrated cities. Thousands visit it every year, just to recall its past history and to see it in its present state.

It was not always so renowned.

Bethlehem, like the Saviour, was of humble origin. It was "little among the cities of Judah" (Micah 5:2), and the worldwide interest of today has stemmed from the humble birth that took place there 2000 years ago.

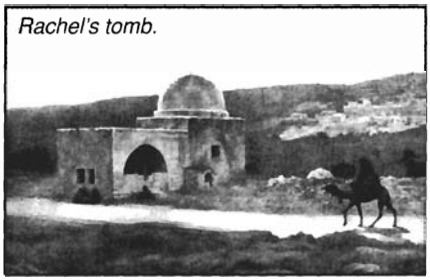


19th century Bethlehem

The city is noted for two other remarkable incidents back in the early history of Israel, that foreshadowed the life and work of the Lord Jesus.

The first of these was the death of Rachel. It occurred in giving birth to Benjamin

at a place not far from Bethlehem, which was then called Ephrath (Gen. 35:19). As she died, she called the little boy, Benoni, which means, *Son of my sorrow.* But he was no son of sorrow to Israel his father! On the contrary, he found great joy and pleasure in the little boy, and therefore renamed him Benjamin, *The Son of the Right Hand.*


Rachel's tomb.

Israel was greatly saddened by the death of Rachel, and set up a pillar on her grave as a memorial of the sad incident.* The pillar was a reminder to all the nation how that the son of Rachel's *sorrow*, became the son of Israel's *right hand.* Perhaps, as Mary and Joseph neared Benjamin on that final long and tiring day of their journey, they would have noticed the lonely grave with its pathetic memorial.

But whether they saw it or not, it is doubtful whether Mary would have realised that the sad death of Rachel, and the naming and renaming of Rachel's son, had a lesson for her as well. The sadness surrounding the birth of Benjamin was destined to have an echo in the birth of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus would prove to be a Son of Sorrow *(Benoni)* to the Jewish nation, which was to politically die in "giving birth" to him; but he was to be elevated to his Father's right hand, and become *Benjamin:* the Son of His right hand (Psalm 80:17; 110:1-2). And like the pillar on the desolate grave of Rachel, this was also to become a sign to "all those who pass by," and observe with enlightened eyes the desolate state of natural Israel.

The other notable incident took place in the lifetime of Ruth the Moabitess, who left family and home to serve the God of Israel. Loving, self-effacing, gentle, faithful Ruth set to work gleaning in the fields of Boaz to relieve the suffering of her mother-in-law Naomi, and this service of love commenced a chain of incidents that resulted in her redeemer being revealed. Boaz was her redeemer, and also a predecessor of the Lord Jesus. His name means *The Strong One*, and as such he was able to help Ruth and Naomi in their poverty and need (Ruth 4).

Ruth was a Gentile who embraced the hope of Israel, and the field in which she gleaned near to Bethlehem, is not far from where the Lord was born. Gentiles who embrace her hope, and act as she did, can look with expectation to Bethlehem and the birth of the Saviour.

---

* The sepulchre of Rachel can still be seen today, though whether it is genuine or not, we know not. It was deserted and desolate when we saw it, and in the hands of the Arabs, who had let it fall into a filthy condition!

for they see in him, not the Son of Sorrow, but the Redeemer at the Right Hand of Yahweh, the antitypical Strong One, Boaz.

The very name of this once obscure little village is significant. For Bethlehem means the *House of Bread*, and it was in the House of Bread that the One was born, who later described himself as the "Bread of life" (John 6). But Bethlehem was also known as Ephrath, which means *Fruit-bearing*, and in the one born in a manger at Bethlehem so long ago was seen the beginning of a glorious harvest which he shall cause to be brought unto Yahweh (1 Cor. 15:23. Isaiah 53:10-11).

Shepherds In The Field Hear The Good News

It was probably around about September or early October when the birth of Christ took place. It could not have been December, as is usually supposed, for it is bitterly cold in Bethlehem at that time of the year; so cold, indeed that of a night-time sheep are carefully gathered inside a fold to protect them against the bitter freezing cold and frosts that frequently occur then. Yet the record states that there were shepherds minding their flocks in the open air by night when the Saviour was born.



They were on one of the many slopes near Bethlehem, possibly not far from the place where, a thousand years earlier, David had kept his sheep, and had protected them from the wild beasts lurking in many places of Palestine, ready to pounce on the sheep if left untendered. As night spread its dark blanket over the earth, the shepherds herded the sheep together, and dividing the night into several watches, arranged among themselves to keep guard in turn over the sheep (see Luke 2:8; margin).*

These shepherds were not only vigilant as to the welfare of the sheep, but also of the signs of the times. They were evidently singled out by God for the great honor about to be paid them because of their keen interest in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the coming Messiah. Like other groups in Judea at that time, they were looking for the coming of the Redeemer promised in the prophets.

---

* What a lovely pastoral scene is presented to the mind: the sheep herded together as one flock, the shepherds co-operating together to guard them against wild beasts, the night divided into watches, and the watchmen intent upon their duty! A scene of security, peace and vigilance in the midst of danger, suddenly shattered by a blinding light and a glorious chorus of angelic voices proclaiming the appearance of the Christ. A typical picture of the ideal ecclesia awaiting the coming of the Lord.

The night was still and dark. The sheep, huddled together for protection, formed a rough, indefinite shape that merged into the hillside. Some of the shepherds lay on the ground, wrapped in their cloaks, preparing to sleep. Others remained awake, taking their turn in keeping watch over the flocks, perhaps conversing with each other in low tones of the things that interested them most.

It was to prove for them a never-to-be-forgotten night!

For suddenly the routine of watching was completely shattered. To the amazement of the shepherds, they saw the hilltops suddenly becoming diffused with light as though it were early dawn! Never had the startled shepherds seen anything like this before! The light became stronger and stronger until the night was turned into day for them. It shone particularly around the shepherds who, encased in light, were now wide awake, and trembling in fear as to what was happening. Then, suddenly, in the centre of the light, the astonished shepherds saw the form of a man, an angel! Dumfounded at the vision of divine glory, the shepherds could only crouch in fear, wondering what it all portended!

And then they heard gracious, comforting, angelic words, announcing a most wonderful event: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you [i.e., Israel] is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

What tremendous news! What an amazing revelation! The wondering shepherds listened speechless to the words of grace, as they gazed with awe and dread at the angelic visitation.

Christ the Lord? A babe in swaddling clothes? Why should he be lying in a manger? And in despised Bethlehem?

Questions like these must have formed in the minds of the shepherds, but in the presence of divine glory they could not find words to express them.

The light began to shine with even greater intensity, even more powerfully. It was brighter than the brightest day the shepherds could remember. And then the startled, fear-stricken men saw not one angel, but a great company of them. They saw them rejoicing in the news that had been just delivered, singing the praises of Yahweh in an anthem of joy such as only heaven's choir could express, announcing His purpose to be fulfilled in the Son in a grand chorus of song that proclaimed: *"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOODWILL TOWARDS MEN!"*

This wonderful anthem of praise echoed among the hills, as the divine glory manifested by the brilliantly shining light turned the dark night into the brightest of days. As at the dawn of creation, when the angels rejoiced at the material beauty they saw on every hand (Job

38:6-7), so now they rejoiced that the beginning of God's spiritual creation had been revealed in the birth of the infant Jesus (Rev. 3:14).

But suddenly the chorus ceased. The angels had disappeared as quickly as they had come; the anthem of praise had died away; the divine glory had faded.

The shepherds were again on their own, the still, dark, silent night again hemmed them in.

But now their tongues were loosed, and eagerly they discussed what they had seen and heard. They appreciated the momentous nature of the message, and the honor that had been paid them. It was not a message they could ignore. Moreover, though they were but humble shepherds, they felt that they could go and seek the Lord, for did not the angels say that he would be found, "lying in a manger"?

If it had been a glorious palace where Christ the Lord was to be found, they may have been a little nervous about seeking entrance thereto, but shepherds were used to mangers!

Here was an open invitation for them to go and view the newborn king.

Hastening towards the city, they began to make discreet enquiries, and ultimately* were directed to the caravansary. Making their way into the humble grotto or stable, they came into the presence of Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus. Excitedly they told the mother and foster-father of the Lord, how the angels had appeared to them whilst they were looking after the sheep, and of the song that they had heard them sing. Then, having paid their homage to the young baby, they went their way, speaking to others of their remarkable experience. Some believed what they said; others probably laughed it off as a delusion; but after such a revelation, nothing could shake the excited shepherds' conviction of all that they had seen and heard.

Mary pondered all these things in her heart. She recalled the circumstances of the birth of John, the cousin of the Lord, the amazing message of Gabriel the angel, the remarkable circumstances that had brought her to Bethlehem so that the words of the prophet should be fulfilled, the staggering revelation of divine glory and song seen and heard by the shepherds, and, above all, the tremendous responsibility that rested on Joseph and herself to wisely guide the young boy in his early years.

And what Mary must have pondered long and earnestly in her heart, was the greatest wonder of all to her, that she, a poor, young woman of despised Nazareth should be paid honor such as this!

As Mary turned her face to look at the beloved countenance of the peacefully sleeping child by her side, she pondered again the wonder, the grace, the love revealed in the unfolding of the great Creator's plan of redemption.

---

* See Luke 2:16 — they *"found."* This implies that a search was made.

Chapter 4

THE INFANT JESUS

EIGHT days after the birth of the babe, in accordance with the requirements of God, the ceremony of circumcision took place. By this rite, he was formally inducted into the Abrahamic covenant, and officially given the name of Jesus.*

In the case of John, friends and relations flocked around, excited at the event, and arguing as to how he should be named. But nobody seemed particularly interested in the naming of the Saviour. At least, there is nothing recorded of much interest being taken, or any arguments expressed relating to the name he was called.

The Naming of the Lord

Jesus is the Greek form of the name *Joshua*, or *YASHUA*, and means *Yahweh will save*. The angel had told Joseph that he would be thus named because "he shall save his people from their sins" (Mat. 1:21). His name announced that he would be a saviour through the help of Yahweh who would strengthen him to overcome the flesh. Only by thus conquering could he lead the way to victory over sin and death, and the very circumstances of his birth showed that Yahweh would be with him to that end. Therefore, he is known not only as *Jesus* (Yahweh saves), but also as *Emmanuel* (God with us).

In view of the purpose of God in Jesus, the rite of circumcision was an important ceremony. It was, as we have seen, the token of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:13-14). It taught Israelites what God required of them if they were to truly be the covenant people — the putting away of flesh at the cost even of pain. It pointed to a spiritual circumcision, which is of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter (Deu. 10:16, 30:6; Rom. 2:29). It symbolised what Jesus must do if he would really be Yahweh's salvation unto all people. He must live completely unto God, performing the will of his Father, and excluding the will of the flesh if the latter conflicted with the former.

In the lonely little ceremony, in which circumcision was performed, and the name of "Jesus" was pronounced upon the eight days' old helpless babe there seems to be a foreshadowing of that even more lonely time at the close of his life, when he hung helpless upon the cross, and his mother looked on in anguish at the suffering of her son. It was, indeed the final act of the Lord, by which he publicly testified to all the world that he had completely repudiated the flesh, even at the cost of the greatest pain and suffering.

* See p. 104, for the significance of this rite.

But there was also a glory in the rite of circumcision. It was performed on the eighth day of a boy's life, and as the seventh-day rest of the Law pointed forward to the millennium of rest to come for this sin-weary world, so the eighth day pointed forward to the close of the millennium, when a perfected creation will be delivered unto God. Then, on that eighth day of creation, mortal flesh shall be completely eliminated, in that all on earth will then have been made immortal. God will then be "all in all" (1Cor. 15:28).

Little dreaming that the rite she had observed that day betokened all this pain, suffering and glory of the future, Mary returned home to the house in Bethlehem which she and Joseph occupied for the time being (Mat. 2:11).

The Purification of Mary

The Law of Moses further required that a woman, on giving birth to a son, should separate herself for forty days. During that period of time, she was to remain outside the sanctuary, and was not allowed to touch any hallowed thing (Lev. 12:1-4).

At first sight it seems strange that a mother should be separated from worship at the sanctuary for forty days, merely because she had given birth to a son!

Particularly so, when the instructions of God from the beginning were for mothers to have children. He had declared: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28; 9:1, 7).

Had the mother done any wrong in giving birth to a child? Had she sinned in so doing? Was God angry with her because of it?

Certainly not! Had not God invited married people to have children? He certainly was not angry with them when they fulfilled His words (Heb. 13:4).

And most certainly this could not have been the case with the birth of His own Son, a birth that caused the angels in heaven to rejoice exceedingly.

Why, then, should He deny the mother the right of access to His sanctuary for forty days after the birth of a son?

And note, too, that the father was not so treated!

What did it all mean?

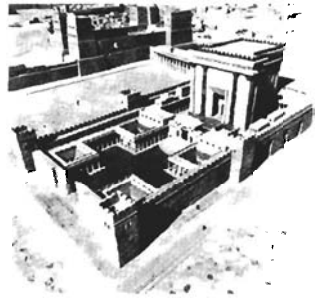
The answer is so wonderful that we can understand why Luke was most careful to explain that Mary carried out everything, according to the Law. The Law required this of mothers, to impress upon every Israelite, the effect of sin and the need of a redeemer.

It was sin, in the first place, that made the birth of the Redeemer so necessary. Through sin, man has been brought under the power of death, but God, in His mercy, proclaimed that He would provide a Son (the seed of the woman: Gen. 3:15) who would conquer the power of sin and death, and open the way to eternal life.

Through His Law, God reminded Israel of this every time a son was born, for that son pointed forward to the Redeemer who would come, and whose need was made evident by the fact of sin and the punishment of death. And therefore, to remind Israel that the birth of His Son had been made necessary by the fact of sin (and not because He was angry with the mother, or to teach that she had sinned in having a child), God required that she should remain outside His sanctuary (the court of the tabernacle or temple) for forty days.*

The father of the son was not included in this separation, to teach the point that Paul stresses in 1Timothy 2:14, where he shows that Eve was the prime sinner in Eden. The exclusion of the father from this separation also showed that it was to be the "seed of the *woman*" (not the man — Gen. 3:15) who was to be Redeemer of the world. Thus, by this ordinance, God taught that He would be the Father of the One who would be born to take away the sin of the world.

It was a parable that was enacted in Israel on the birth of every son. It taught what Paul explained when speaking of believing women (whether married or otherwise); and of the ecclesia in general (whether male or female), he wrote: "She *[the Bride of Christ]* shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (1Tim. 2:15). The word "childbearing" is rendered with the emphatic "*THE* childbearing" in the Greek. Paul was referring to the birth of the Lord Jesus. He shows that though the woman was first in the transgression in Eden, yet the childbearing would be the means whereby God would save all — both men and women who come unto Him through His Son.



That "childbearing" had now occurred, and Mary the mother awaited the ending of the forty days of separation required of her by the Law. Eagerly she prepared herself for the next significant act of obedience required of her. For renewal of worship in the temple could only follow

* Why forty days? Because 40 is the number of probation (cp. Num. 14:33-34; Deu. 25:3; Jonah 3:4 etc.). Sin revealed to man on probation the need of the sacrifice that will bring him again into full communion with God. It is significant that on the birth of a daughter, the mother was required to separate herself for 80 days — twice as long as for a son (Lev. 12:5) — because the daughter stands as representative of the Bride of Christ, the Ecclesia. As such she not only needs redemption from the mortality of fallen nature, such as Christ required, but from actual sins as well. Moreover, the Bride of Christ is two-fold inasmuch as it is drawn from the two great families of humanity: from Israel and the nations. Thus it was impressed upon every Israelite at the birth of a daughter, that it would be much more difficult to redeem the Bride of Christ, than Christ himself, who "did not sin."

after she had offered the required sacrifice. And that sacrifice also foreshadowed the offering of her son*.

The Lord Presented At The Temple

At the end of the prescribed forty days of purification, the Law required that the mother of a firstborn son should present him to Yahweh at the temple.

But how could she do this whilst she was excluded from it?

Neither mother nor son could enter into the presence of God (for the divine glory was represented in Israel by the temple) until a certain ceremony had been performed. The Law required that the mother bring a lamb to the door of the temple to be offered by the priest as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon to be offered as a sin offering. If she were so poor that she could not afford a lamb, she could bring a pigeon instead.

Normally, under the Law, a sin offering always preceded a burnt offering. In this case, however, the order was reversed (Lev. 12:6). This was done to indicate that the sin-offering did not represent atonement for a specific sin that had been committed by mother or son in birth, but to show that the "uncleanness" attached to such an occasion, could only be removed by sacrifice.

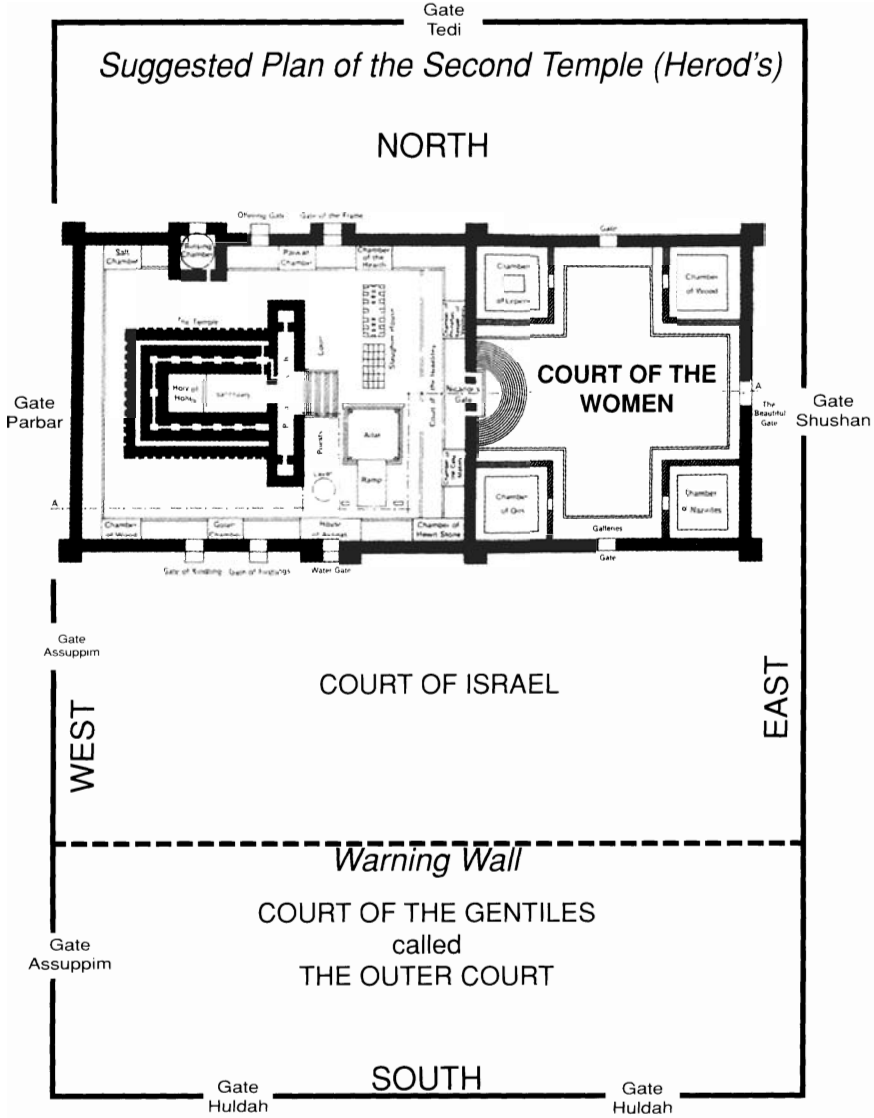
This "uncleanness" had reference to the mortality of which the flesh is heir, and which was brought about originally by sin. It relates to what we might term "human nature" which the Lord Jesus possessed in common with all mankind.

Mary probably did not realise it then, but the offering she was required to make, pointed forward to the sacrifice her son would be called upon to offer, at the close of his earthly ministry.

As the newly-born babe was permitted to enter the temple and be presented unto Yahweh through the offering his mother was about to make, so later, by his own blood, the Lord Jesus "entered into the

---

* The normal order of sin-offering, followed by burnt-offering, is reversed in Leviticus 12:6 because the offering was not for specific sins committed by the mother of a child in birth, but because of "uncleanness," brought about through no fault of the parties concerned. This is exhibited by the life and death of the Lord Jesus. His life was dedicated as a burnt-offering unto Yahweh; his death upon the cross was a sin-offering through which he was enabled to come into the very presence of Yahweh by resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the throne on high. The sin-offering that he made was not on account of any sins that he committed, but was required in his case as a means of redemption from the mortality that he inherited, in common with all mankind, as the result of sin in the first instance (Rom. 5:12; Heb. 13:20). Sin springs from within (Mark 7:21), and because Christ possessed the same nature as we possess, it can be said of him that "his own self bare our sins ***in*** his body on the tree" (1Pet. 2:24). Christ did not sin, and God was not angry with him because of his nature, but his sacrifice did demonstrate what all must do spiritually if they would please God (see Gal. 5:24). In Christ thus saving himself by doing God's will, he saved others.

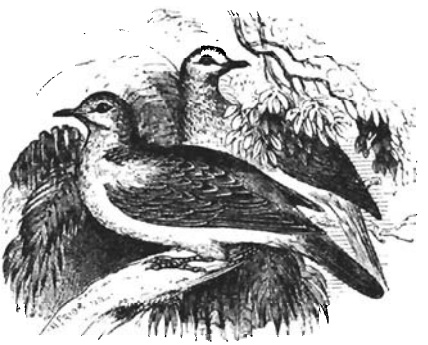


Having slain all the Sanhedrin, except two, in the first year of his reign (approx. BC37), Herod resolved to atone for it, by rebuilding and beautifying the Temple. This decision also had the effect of pleasing his Jewish subjects, and continuing the peace which he enjoyed. Preparations for the restoration took two years. 1,000 wagons were used to carry stone and timber; 10, 000 artificers to fit all things for the building; 1,000 priests skilled in architecture, oversaw and directed the works. Thus, in the 21st year of his reign, Herod had the old temple pulled down, and commenced the building of the new. The temple itself was ready for worship in 9½ years, but the rest of the construction continued for some time later.

holy place ["heaven itself," i.e., immortality], having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). He needed redemption, not from any sins that he committed, but from the nature that he inherited in common with the rest of mankind, which is mortal.*

Full of joy, Mary and Joseph made preparations to visit the temple to make the offering, and to present the child. The distance from Bethlehem to Jerusalem is not too great, only about seven miles (11 kms). The path lay through the beautiful mountainous district lying to the south of Jerusalem. On the back of a mule, or ass, accompanied by Joseph, Mary undertook the journey with her firstborn son, no different in appearance from others who may have been travelling to the temple at that time for the same purpose. Mary, of course, knew her son was different from any other, though it is quite likely that her familiarity with the child in all her motherly offices would dull somewhat that sense of difference.

Joseph and Mary were so poor that they could not afford the Lamb for the offering, even though the child born was the Son of God. Instead they offered two young pigeons — the offering of poverty — which they probably purchased from those who gathered in Jerusalem to sell such sacrifices. With the two birds in hand, Mary timidly approached the doorway that gave access to the court of the glorious, gold-bedecked temple whose magnificence she would have seen, radiant from afar, as they ascended the mountains. Taking the birds from her, the priest quickly offered them in the way appointed, and Mary was permitted to enter the court of the temple, to proudly present her firstborn son to Yahweh.



To the officiating priest, the Lord was but an ordinary child. It is also probable, that in view of the very poverty of his mother's offering, he may have viewed the babe and the ceremony with some degree of contempt. He probably went through the routine quite indifferent to the occasion, little realising that every such occasion throughout the centuries since the ordinance was first introduced, pointed forward to this time, when Yahweh's firstborn Son would be officially presented!

---

* We hope that we have not made this too difficult, and invite readers to put any questions they desire to ask. We were almost tempted to bring Mr. Phillips out of retirement to answer certain questions that arose in our mind as we considered this significant feature of the Law. Readers can write to Mr. Phillips at *Logos Office, Box 220, Findon, South Australia 5023.*

But if the priest was quite indifferent to the occasion, others were not.

There was an old man by name of Simeon who was at the temple, driven there that day by a tremendous inward urge. His name means *Hearing*, and he was one who hearkened constantly to the Word of Yahweh. In obedience to the instructions that he found in Isaiah 30:8, he "waited for the consolation of Israel," the salvation that Yahweh promised He would reveal.

Earnestly praying and beseeching God that He would send the promised Messiah to redeem His people, Simeon had received a divine message telling him that though he was old in years, he would not see death before he had seen Yahweh's Christ. Now, full of expectation and excitement, he awaited the gracious revelation.

And that day, with a tremendous feeling that something momentous was about to happen, he came to the temple.

In the outer court, he saw the young mother and her babe. They had all the marks of poverty about them. He saw the priest, with all the boredom of familiarity, officially presenting this firstborn son to Yahweh. But as he took in the scene, the urge in Simeon became so strong, that he knew that this child was the child promised: Yahweh's Christ. He realised that he was witnessing the official presentation of the one destined to redeem Israel. Full of joy, excited at the revelation granted unto him, and to the astonishment of Mary, he took the young child from her arms, and thanking God for His goodness and mercy, before the whole company, he uttered a public prayer: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all the people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

Mary listened in wonder to these words of the aged and venerable old man who had so affectionately taken her babe in his arms. She rejoiced at his words of prayer, for they entered fully into her feelings also. How wonderfully the words of Simeon expressed the purpose of Yahweh in her son! He had spoken of "Yahweh's salvation" (Luke 2:30), a play on the very name of Jesus, for Jesus means *Yahweh's salvation,* and Simeon had said: "I have seen Thy [Yahweh's] salvation." In doing so he had repeated what is contained in the Old Testament prophecies, which filled his mind (Isa. 49:6; 52:10).

And, of course, Mary knew from what she had already heard from Gabriel and from the shepherds, that her infant son was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people of Israel.*

It was a very happy moment for Mary, as she looked lovingly at the tiny face of her child. With Joseph she marvelled and rejoiced at

* It is most significant that Simeon should speak of the "people of Israel," and not merely of Judah, for it implied the full restoration of all the tribes.

the thrilling words of Simeon's prayer.*

Having proclaimed the glory of the Son, Simeon also spoke of his sufferings. The sober words he now uttered to the young mother showed that the pathway to glory lay through the dark vale of tears. For having also commended Joseph and Mary to God, he spoke directly to the mother of the Lord: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also); that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

These were prophetic words, warning Mary that sad days lay ahead. To the people of Israel the Lord Jesus would be as a stumbling stone, over which they would fall, though, ultimately, the nation would rise to a greater glory than it ever manifested before. Simeon also predicted the sadness of Calvary, when the Lord would die upon the cross, and a weeping mother would see the travail of her firstborn of whom she had expected to see only triumph, victory and glory.

He told, too, of how Christ would be a sign which would be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed. It would not be possible, predicted Simeon, for anyone to remain indifferent to Christ; his ministry would sharply divide the people, revealing them in their true characters, showing what they really believed in heart, tearing aside the veil of hypocrisy and the veneer of respectability that hid their true state.

Simeon also warned that the verbal conflict between the people of Israel and the Lord, would culminate in his death. Mary, herself, would not go unscathed, for a sword (really a javelin or dart), would pierce through her own life also. She would experience the bitterness of suffering. And as her life unfolded, the truth of Simeon's prophecy was revealed.

She suffered in the birth of her son, for she was not above cruel suspicion and reproach by others; she later suffered when difficulties increased and doubts arose even among her own children concerning the Lord; she suffered most of all when she witnessed the true horror of his death, his final humiliation upon Golgotha's stake.

It was those things to which Simeon was making reference in his prophetic utterance, but, of course, Mary did not understand their full import.

To her this was a happy, joyous occasion. She had access once more to the temple worship; her son, God's Son, had been presented to his Father; she had heard wonderful words of blessing from Simeon that confirmed all that she knew, and in which she saw

* Note that Luke does not write: "His father and his mother," but "Joseph and his mother." Joseph, of course, was not the father of the Lord Jesus; Yahweh was his Father. Joseph was merely the appointed guardian to care for the young child in his infancy.

predicted the coming glory of Jesus.

She wondered at it all, extracting from it the comfort and the joy that the occasion revealed, and pushing the somber warning of the future away, to the back of her mind.

She rejoiced as any young mother would do with her firstborn.

And now the little group was joined by another well-known personality in Jerusalem. She was the aged prophetess, Anna, a widow, well over 100 years of age.* With nothing in this life to console her, she sought comfort from Yahweh, and was therefore found daily in the temple at the appointed times to worship and serve Him. Every morning and evening, when incense was burned upon the golden altar in the Holy Place by the priest (Exo. 30:7-8), Anna was outside in the court of the temple, mingling her prayers with the ascending incense (Luke 2:37). She must have earlier witnessed the drama of Zacharias, when he came forth from the Holy Place, deaf and dumb after seeing the angel, and hearing the momentous message that he and Elisabeth were to have a son. She must have been excited as she heard of the omens which indicated that the promised Messiah would soon appear. Like Simeon she was waiting for the manifestation of the Christ.

And now, in the little babe in the arms of its mother, she saw him!

With Simeon she rejoiced in this evidence of Yahweh's goodness. Openly she spoke of him to the little group of people that was gathering around Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus in the court of the temple. And afterwards, when she returned home, she sought out her friends in Jerusalem who were looking for the coming of the promised Redemption of Yahweh, to tell them that the Messiah had indeed been born.

Meanwhile, Mary returned to the house in Bethlehem with her beloved firstborn, greatly excited by the events of that happy day.

---

* She had been widowed for about 84 years, and had been married for seven years before the death of her husband (Luke 2:36-37). During her widowhood, she had set herself apart that she might serve God without reserve. Her name is significant. Anna means *Grace*; Phaniel (Peniel) means, *The Faces of God* (El) from whence comes grace to Israel (see Gen. 32:30); Asher means *Blessed* or *Happy*, the results of grace. Thus, her name was like an exhortation, for it spelled out the message: From the *grace*, or favor, that comes from the *faces* (presence) *of God* there is *happiness*. In the sadness of her widowhood Anna had found a great happiness in the realisation of God's presence, and the grace she had received from Him, in the worship she rendered Him.

THE SONG OF THE ANGELS

As angels rejoiced at the dawn of creation (Job 38:6-7), so they did also at the birth of him who laid the foundation of God's spiritual creation (see Rev. 3:14).

This rejoicing was predicted by Isaiah in the following words: "Sing, O ye heavens; for Yahweh hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for Yahweh hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel. Thus saith Yahweh, thy Redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am Yahweh that maketh all things..." (Isa. 44:23).

The song of the rejoicing angels fulfilled this prediction. They sang of three things, yet to be revealed in their completeness, but of which there was seen a partial fulfilment in Christ:

[1] Glory to God;

[2] On earth peace, being complete fellowship;

[3] Goodwill toward men.

• The first was predicted in Isa. 49:3, confirmed in John 13:31; 17:4, 6, 22, 26; and is yet to be completely fulfilled in the glorified company of the redeemed at Christ's coming (Mat. 16:27; 25:31; 13:43).

• The second speaks of true fellowship, for the word "peace" implies true unity, and not merely the cessation of war. The Greek word signifies to *bind together* that which was separated. The world has never experienced true peace, for it has ever been at war with God and itself. The coming of peace was predicted in Isa. 66:12; 2:2-4; 6:6-7; Eze. 37:26; Joel 3:17-18, etc.; confirmed in John 14:27; and is yet to be completely fulfilled (Zech. 14:16).

• The third was predicted from the very beginning (Gen. 3:15, etc.), was confirmed in Christ (1Tim. 2:4; Eph. 1:9; Phil. 2:13), and is yet to be revealed throughout all the earth (Rev. 21:7). "Goodwill" implies the divine will expressed toward men for their good.

The rejoicing angels thus sang of the good tidings (the gospel) of great joy that would be made available to all people (Luke 2:10). They rejoiced at the birth of the Son through whom all these things would be made possible, for being keenly interested in the welfare of humanity (Heb. 1:14), they had long desired to see the Word made flesh, in the manifestation of the Son in fulfilment of the divine declaration from the very beginning. Peter wrote that "the angels desire to look into" these matters (1Peter 1:11-12).

Chapter 5

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

WHEN Simeon had taken the infant Jesus in his arms, he prophesied that this child would be "a light to lighten the Gentiles." Shortly afterwards, Joseph and Mary had a token fulfilment of this prediction. They had returned to the house in Bethlehem where they were staying for the time being, and were visited by a small company of Gentiles who had travelled many, many miles so that they might pay homage to the new-born King. They are described as "wise men from the east" (Mat. 2:1).

Who were these "wise men," and what moved them to make this long, difficult journey?

The Visit of the Wise Men

Far away to the east of Judea, remote from the tiny village of Bethlehem and the proud city of Jerusalem with its resplendent temple, there was a sect known in Persia and Babylonia as the *Magi*, the term used in the Greek language to describe these wise men. The Magi specialised in the study of signs and omens, but, apparently, there was among their number, a small group who clung tenaciously to the teachings that had been given them in times past by a prominent leader who had been placed over them.

That leader was the prophet Daniel.

During the course of his ministry in Babylon, he was made "Master of the Magicians," as Daniel is called in his record (ch. 5:11), and there is no doubt that a man like him would grasp every opportunity of expounding to those about him the things that God had revealed unto him.

This is shown by the attitude and speech of the kings with whom he came in contact. For example, Darius, the Mede, showed a great interest in, and an understanding of, the God of Israel which could have stemmed from the great prophet himself (Dan, 6:16, 20). He must have told the king of his hope, and of the Great Yahweh whom he served so faithfully during his long life in Babylon.

Among the things that had been revealed to Daniel, was the approximate time when the Messiah, the future king of the Jews, would be born (Dan. 9:25). It seems that he must have disclosed this information to the Magi (the magicians) over whom he had been placed, and that one little group at least, had preserved this teaching, passing it on from generation to generation. Like many in Judea at the time of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, this little group, in far-away Persia or Babylonia, was also looking for the fulfilment of Daniel's

prophecy, and the birth of the king of the Jews, the Saviour of the human race.

By calculation from the prophecy of Daniel, they knew that the time was at hand.

Then they saw a sign that greatly excited them: a great light, shining from a star, appeared in the heaven!

Skilled in astronomy, they knew that this was no ordinary star, and concluded that it must be a divine omen. But of what? By some means, which are not revealed, they aligned it with the imminent birth of the king of the Jews. Daniel's prophecy was about to be fulfilled!*

Full of excitement at the news, some of their numbers elected to make the long and difficult journey to the city of Jerusalem, there to honour and worship the newborn king.

They knew only of the impending birth, not where the king should be born. They naturally expected that it would be in Jerusalem, and that the people would be in a state of excitement and joy at the event. Having been led to Jerusalem, they were then forced to consult the Word of God to learn where they should seek for the Lord. The signs of the times, having aroused them to the significance of the times, they had then to study the Scriptures, to be properly guided in the divine interpretation.

It is generally assumed that three of their number made the journey, but there is no identification in the Scriptures as to how many there were in their company. We do know, however, that they caused quite a sensation when they reached the city of Jerusalem. Several months (perhaps three or four; see Ezra 7:8-9) would be occupied in this journey, so they would arrive with all the marks of travel on them. They expected that the Jewish people would be agog with excitement that their great King and Deliverer had been born.

---

* At what time did the star originally appear since it is obvious that it appeared more than once? Herod asked this question, and on the basis of the answer decreed that all children two years and under should die. A maxim among the Jews is that a son of a day is a son of a year. In other words, a child just over twelve months old came under the edict. The star must therefore have appeared a little over twelve months previously, possibly at the conception of the Lord. It probably appeared again at his birth (Mat. 2:2), synchronising with two angelic manifestations (the one to Mary announcing the conception, and the one to the shepherds announcing the birth). At this time the wise men set out from Persia or Babylonia, a journey that would occupy three months or more (Ezra 7:8-9), so that they would arrive a short time after the child had been presented in the temple. They presumably first considered the star astrologically, but were appraised of its true significance by God in some way. Holding the teaching of Daniel, they would align these things with his prophecies. This gave no indication of the place of birth, and naturally they presented themselves at Jerusalem. The Jews were thus warned of the significance of the times by the appearance of these Gentiles asking the startling question concerning the king of the Jews, the implication being that if Jews did not accept the person and mission of the Lord, Gentiles would.

They looked for rejoicing and celebrations of an outstanding character.

They saw nothing of the kind.

To their astonishment the people seemed completely unmoved by the momentous event that these "wise men" knew had taken place.



But though the people were unmoved as far as the birth of the Lord was concerned, they were not unmoved by the presence of these strangers in their midst. In fact, these travellers from afar caused a sensation. Their unusual dress, their peculiar accent, their alien manners, and, above all else, the remarkable question they asked, could not help but impress everybody.

"Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" they enquired, "for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him!"

The question staggered the people. King of the Jews? What did they mean by such a statement? There was Herod, of course, but the people did not have much time for him!

The wise men insisted that they had seen a star in the east that had presaged the recent birth of a king!

Herod Seeks For His Rival

Thus there was sensation upon sensation. The very appearance of the men was strange enough, but when the remarkable question they asked was added to it, it caused people to think. They recalled the rumours that had been passing from mouth to mouth for some time: the general expectancy of the promised Messiah, the amazing incident of Zacharias in the temple, the prophetic words of such as Simeon and Anna! And now this astounding question on the lips of Gentiles who had come so far to see a newborn king!

It set the whole city talking.

It came to the ears of King Herod, and troubled him.

Herod was a half-mad tyrant, so jealous of his position and power as to look with impatient hatred on the slightest opposition. His evil, suspicious nature was such that he had already murdered his wife and some of his children because he thought they had been plotting against him. He was determined to ruthlessly crush anybody who dared to stand in his path to power.

He had heard rumours of the coming king, and instantly his jealous, suspicious mind was alerted against a possible enemy. He knew that the Jews hated him, and would eagerly support any rival to his throne. And though he was nearing the end of his life when he must give it all up, the very hint of another king sent him into a fury.

Like Saul of old, he had become mentally deranged through suspicion, and as Saul had sought to slay David, Herod determined to kill David's descendant, the infant Jesus.

Yet in his madness he was cunning. He pretended he was greatly interested in the welfare of the new king, and called a meeting of the leaders of the Jews to enquire of them where the Christ should be born.

There was but one answer: Micah the prophet had clearly revealed it in his 5th chapter. Instantly they replied to the king: "In Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it is written by the prophet, 'And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes* of Judah; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule My people Israel'."

The Jewish leaders overlooked, or forgot to mention, one important detail of the prophecy: Micah also says that the king would be smitten before he would save and rule Israel (ch 5:2). They never quoted this to the king, doubtless because they could not believe that their Messiah would be smitten.

Meanwhile, the crafty Herod carefully pondered the answer. His cunning plot was succeeding. The answer he had received limited his search considerably. His unknown rival was in Bethlehem, a mere child! It would be best to destroy him with as little publicity as possible, because he did not want a riot on his hands! If only he knew where the babe was in Bethlehem, he could soon arrange for him to be put out of the way.

How could he find this out? A clever, diabolical plan formed in his mind. He would make the wise men become his spies, and supply the answer he wanted. And he would do this by giving them certain information, and pretending that he, too, wanted to pay his respects to the young king.

He called the Magi before him, and explaining to them the prophecy of Micah, commanded them to find the child and bring the news of his identity back to him.

"Go and search diligently for the young child," he declared "and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also!"

The Star Again Joyfully the wise men left the city of Jerusalem on their mission. They descended the winding road that follows the hills and valleys of Judea south of the capital, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and as they neared the latter place, they suddenly saw the star again before them. It moved

* In Micah the word is "thousands," but in Matthew the word "princes" is substituted because they ruled over the "thousands" and were thus representative of them. Later, this very prophecy was used to disprove the Messiahship of Jesus on the grounds that he had been born in Nazareth — see John 7:42.

slowly onwards, leading them into the village of Bethlehem, to stay poised over a humble dwelling in that small town.

They had come to journey's end; they were about to see the King!

Inside they met Joseph and Mary, and looked with wondering eyes upon the little baby, the infant king of the Jews.

It was a humble cottage. These people were undoubtedly poor; but there was no doubting the royal majesty of the child. The teaching of Daniel, the revelation from God, the mysterious star that had several times appeared to them and had now guided them in their journey: all told the truth of that fact.

They bowed before the young child, paying him homage* due to his position.

And then, before the wondering eyes of Mary, they opened the caskets they had brought with them, and displayed to her the gifts they had brought as appropriate for the occasion.

There was GOLD, the symbol of a tried faith (1Pet. 1:7), a gift suited for a ***KING***!

There was FRANKINCENSE, the symbol of prayer (Exo. 30:34), a gift appropriate for a ***PRIEST***!

There was MYRRH, a perfume used in the anointing oil (Exo. 30:23), a gift for a ***PROPHET*** (Rev. 10:9).

These gifts spoke of *faith*, of *prayer*, and of a *godly mission* and character.



But there was also the hint of sacrifice represented by at least one of them, for myrrh signifies *bitterness*. And the work of God oftentimes brings an element of bitterness with it, because men are evil (Rev. 10:9; Eze. 3:14).

Certainly such

* The word "worship" in Mat. ch. 2, has led to the mistaken idea that this child was God, the second person of a supposed Trinity. But the doctrine of the Trinity is nowhere taught in the Bible. God is set forth as "One," and the Lord Jesus as "mediator" (1Tim. 2:5) "between God and men." As to the use of the word "worship," it signifies *to revere,* and relates to homage such as can be paid to men as well as to God (see Mat. 18:26; Rev. 3:9; 13:12). In Gen. 33:3; 42:6 and 2Sam. 24:20, the same Hebrew word as is elsewhere rendered "worshipped" is there translated "bowed down," and in each case it was to a mortal. The Revised Version of the Bible says of the word rendered "worship" in Mat. 2:8: "The Greek word denotes an act of reverence, whether paid to man or to God." These points are worth noting in the margin of your Bible.

gifts were most suitable for him who was to be revealed as Israel's *Prophet*, *Priest* and *King*. They indicate that these wise men understood something of the future mission of the Lord Jesus.

Having bestowed their gifts, having paid their homage, what an amazing story of divine guidance and revelation they had to reveal to Mary. They would doubtless explain to her how that in far distant lands, some among the Gentiles had retained a knowledge of the things proclaimed by Daniel, how they had been moved by excitement as the time of the fulfilment of the prophecy drew near, of the sudden appearance of the star in the heavens, of their pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

And Mary, in turn, would have her account to give them of all that had taken place. The humble little cottage, in the obscure village of Bethlehem, became the scene of one of the greatest dramas of all time, as the most startling story in the records of humanity was told and retold.

Truly, the babe had proved a "light to lighten the Gentiles."

The Angel Warns of Danger

But what a shock the wise men received later that night. They had retired to rest, when they had a divine visitation. They learned in a dream that Herod's apparent interest in the baby king was but a cloak for the most sinister and murderous designs against him.

They learned, too, that not only the life of the babe, but the lives of all those closely associated with him, even their own lives, were in danger from the bloodthirsty maniac that sat on Judea's throne as king. They were warned to avoid Herod at all costs, and to get out of the country as quickly as they could.

Immediately they departed into their own country another way.

The greatest urgency was now required to remove the young child out of harm's way. The angel of Yahweh appeared to Joseph in a dream, with a message of the most solemn warning: "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and remain there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him!"

Joseph was startled out of sleep by this ominous message. He recognised that there was no time to lose. Herod's reputation for brutality was well-known. Hastily awakening Mary, and gathering together their few possessions, they left that very night for the land of Egypt, to the west, where they would be beyond the power of Herod to harm them.

Thus so early in life, the king of the Jews was driven from his own borders, and had to take refuge in the land of the enemy.

They remained in the land of Egypt until the death of Herod.*

Herod's Brutal Murder of Children

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, the brooding, murderous monarch sullenly waited. The picture of this old man, who was then slowly dying of an incurable disease, so dominated by jealousy and suspicion that he could not bear to look upon a helpless babe as a possible rival to his power, would be pathetic if it were not so evil. Possessed of an ungovernable temper, this brutal madman had ruthlessly murdered his way to power. The corpses of his beloved wife and her sons lay in their graves, placed there by executions and murders that he had ordered.

With growing impatience he now awaited the return of the wise men. But they proved too wise for him! Day after day went by, until, with growing fury, he realised that they had evaded him. He recognised that they had seen through his trickery and had discovered his plot. Mad with rage, he determined that nothing would stop him; he would destroy the infant king if all children had to die with him. He laid plans for the most diabolical of all the evil things he had done.

He recalled the time the Magi had told him the star had appeared, and coldly calculated that this would mean that the infant king was about twelve months old. So he ruthlessly commanded that all children in and around Bethlehem from two years old and under should be destroyed!



Herod overlooks the slaughter of the babes of Bethlehem, as depicted by a Renaissance artist. From the Florence Museum, Italy.

The vile, brutal decree was issued, causing a shudder of horror to pass through the whole land. But because men feared him more than their honour, it was carried out. A cry of anguish arose from stricken parents. It was like that other terrible day of tragedy four hundred years earlier, when Jerusalem had fallen to the Chaldeans, and the stricken

* Matthew quotes the words of Hosea 11:1 as appropriate to the circumstances: "Out of Egypt have I called My Son." As Israel, Yahweh's firstborn (Exo. 12:51; 4:23), came out of Egypt after being driven there by trouble, so also did Jesus the true Israel and firstborn of God. Matthew's use of this prophecy shows that Christ's sojourn in Egypt was typical of Israel among the nations (see Jer. 16:14-15). It is significant that history records there was no proper Passover held that year, for the disturbances incidental to the death of Herod were such that Archelaus, his successor, banned any gatherings of the people. Whilst the true "Passover Lamb" was absent in Egypt, therefore, Jewry was without its Passover. The same is true of today, for whilst the Lord is absent no proper Passover is or can be observed by natural Israel.

nation was taken into captivity. The people had been mustered at Ramah before being sent to Babylon in exile, like mourners at the funeral of the nation, which had been politically murdered. It seemed then as though their mother Rachel, figuratively wept for her children, joining her tears with those of many weeping mothers in Judah at this time, mourning the tragedy of Israel — the tragedy of a people who had turned from God and reaped the fruit of their folly.*

Now, once more, bitter weeping was heard throughout the land because of the brutal murder of the children of Bethlehem.

Recalled From Egypt to Nazareth

Herod had but little time left before death claimed him. Never did a man die more miserably. Suffering from a loathsome disease, and racked with pain, he tried unsuccessfully to commit suicide. Five days before his death, and convinced that Antipater his son was plotting against him, Herod ordered his execution which was carried out. As the end approached, his palace was filled with suspicion and fear. But at last, to the relief of all, death claimed him, and his record was closed.

There is something pathetic that the aged monarch, so soon to die, should have become so agitated over the question of the Magi; should have so grasped hold of such fleeting power, that he could not bear to think that a helpless child might become a possible rival to his throne; should order the execution of his own son as he lay on his death-bed. But such is life. It reveals how vain and foolish is flesh.

In Egypt, an angel appeared in a dream to Joseph to advise him of the death of the king, and to call the family out of Egypt:

"Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel," he was told, "for they are dead which sought the young child's life" (Mat. 2:20).

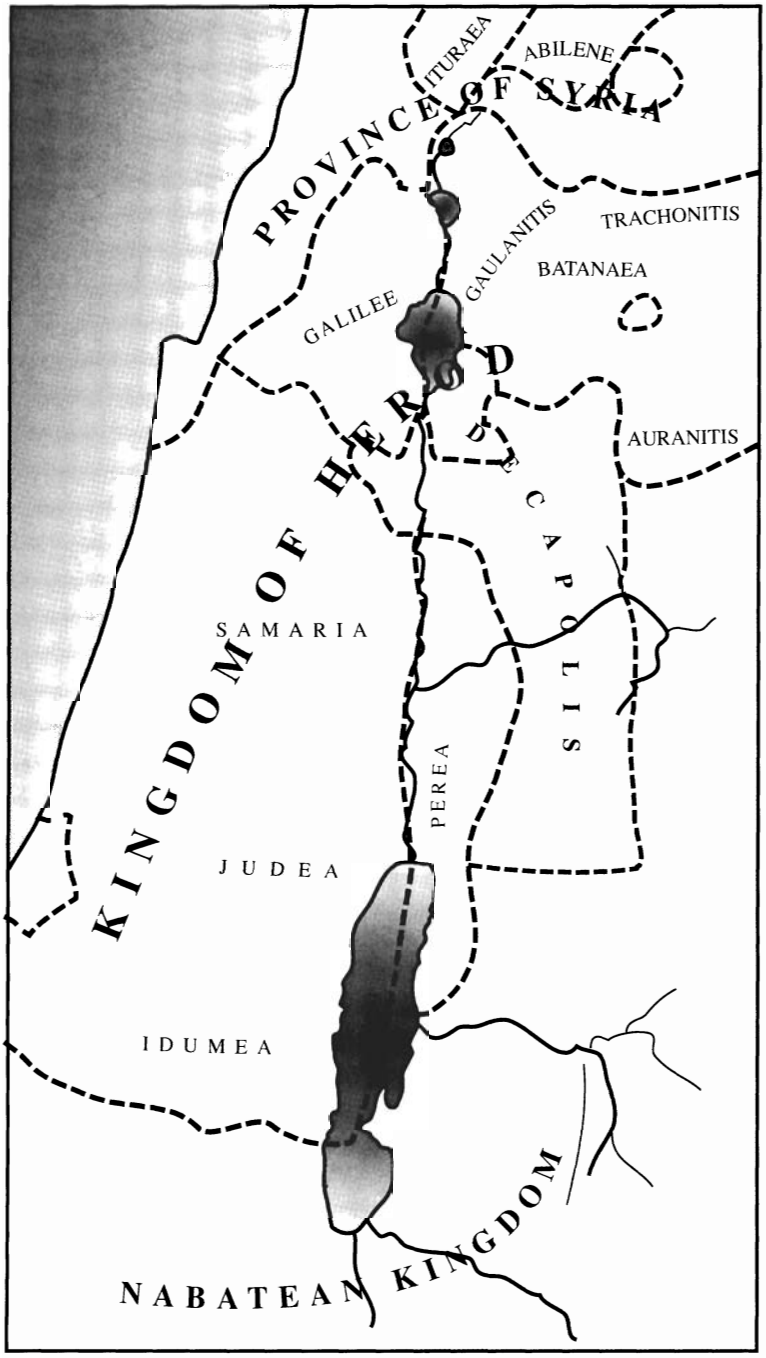
The "they" were Herod and Antipater his son whom he had recently caused to be executed. Evidently Antipater had assisted in the search for Jesus, probably fearing that a rival, no matter how young, could challenge his succession to the throne.

Be that as it may, both monarch and son were now dead, and Joseph was told to return back home.

But with this instruction there came rumours of events in Judea that caused him to hesitate to do so. He heard that an even worse tyrant now ruled, and he feared for the future of the child that had been placed in his care.

---

* The words of Jeremiah 31:15 were typically fulfilled at this time. Christ went into a far country, and this Gentile king exacted vengeance on the Jews. This foreshadowed the complete fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah, when "Rachel" (the nation) would be caused to weep through Gentile oppression at the absence of the king.


ITURAEA
ABILENE
PROVINCE OF SYRIA
TRACHONITIS
GAULANITIS
BATANAEA
GALILEE
KINGDOM OF HEROD
AURANITIS
THE CAPOLIS
SAMARIA
PEREA
JUDEA
IDUMEA
NABATEAN KINGDOM

Just prior to his death, Herod had changed his will for the fourth and last time. In it, he bequeathed his dominions to his remaining sons. Galilee and Perea were given to Antipas; Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Batanaea and Auranitis were given to Phillip; Judea was given to Archelaus. The names of these rulers occur every now and then in the record of the life of the Lord.

In Judea, Archelaus manifested the same ruthless, bloodthirsty characteristics as did Herod. On the death of his father, in BC4, he had repressed a Passover riot so severely that some 3,000 people had been slain. The Jews hated him. But he also revealed the same diplomatic qualities of his father. He prudently refrained from ascending the throne until Herod's will was approved by Augustus, the Emperor of Rome. This deference pleased Augustus, so that despite Jewish opposition, and that of Archelaus' younger brother Herod Antipas, who appeared as rival, Archelaus was confirmed in his position, excepting that he was granted only the title of ethnarch (ruler of the people) instead of that of king. His rival Antipas, however, was given only a tetrarchy.

The Jews had pleaded at Rome that Archelaus be not granted authority over them because of his great cruelty. Thus, when he approached Rome for confirmation of his appointment, his own citizens opposed him, saying, in effect, "we will not have this man to reign over us."*

Once in power, however, Archelaus became barbarously cruel. He ruled with appalling ruthlessness, and in an atmosphere of increasing fear, opposition and hate. Jews and Samaritans both dispatched embassies to Augustus complaining of his excesses, and his complete indifference to the lives and feelings of his subjects. Finally, his conduct became so bad, such a disgrace to the Roman Empire, that in the tenth year of his administration (AD6), he was deposed by Augustus and banished to Vienne in Gaul, and his wealth put into the imperial treasury.

In Egypt, shortly after the death of Herod, Joseph had heard rumours of the brutality of Archelaus, and feared to take the child Jesus back into Judea. He prayed for further instructions, and, as a result, instead of returning to Bethlehem, he ascended north into Galilee where Antipas, the brother of Archelaus, ruled, and took up residence again in the city of Nazareth where the Lord would be brought up.

---

* Compare the account of Archelaus' appeal to Rome, the resistance of his subjects, the authority granted him, and the exercise of his power, with the parable of the nobleman who went into a "far country" to receive for himself a kingdom and return (Luke 19:12-27). The Lord based his parable upon circumstances familiar to the disciples.

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. HEROD "THE GREAT"

Ruthless and ambitious, charming to his superiors but dreadful to his enemies, vigorous in war and a capable, active ruler in peace, Herod appears for a brief moment in the life of the Lord, but how hideous and evil he appears in that short time. The brutal, callous murder of the babes of Bethlehem was the climax of a lifetime of infamy and wickedness.

His name is significant. In Hebrew it means *The reigning* or *dominating one;* but in Greek it means: *The glory of the skin,* and instantly we are reminded of the "profane Esau" and his murderous hatred of Jacob (see Gen. 25:25).

Herod was an Idumean by birth, though he ultimately accepted the Jewish religion. His father, Antipater, bequeathed to him the government of Galilee, and with prudence and valor he cleared it of the thieving bandits who swarmed there. His skill in war brought him under notice of the Roman authorities, and by cunning and careful diplomacy he insinuated himself into their good graces. They rewarded him by promoting him to the position of King of Judea, then a province of the empire. At the birth of the Lord he had reigned about 36 years.

Herod's policy was to try to please Rome and to try and please the Jews. He did the first by ruthlessly stamping on Jewish nationalism, ready to burst into flame at the first puff of fanaticism; and he tried to do the second by encouraging the Jews to find their true destiny and fulfilment in their religion.

Thus, at great pains and tremendous cost, he extended and glamorised the temple in Jerusalem.

He was notorious for his cruelty. Josephus calls him "a man of great barbarity, and a slave to his passions." The slaying of infants was in complete accord with his odious character. His whole life was stained with blood. He arranged for the murder of Aristobulus, the brother of his wife, Mariamne, because the Jews of Jerusalem evinced affection towards him. In the seventh year of his reign, he put to death Hyrcanus, the 80 years-old grandfather of Mariamne, a man who had formerly saved his life. Mariamne, his beloved and beautiful wife, whom he professed to idolise, he publicly executed, and her mother Alexandra followed soon after. Alexander and Aristobulus, his two sons by her, he had strangled in prison, on groundless suspicions, leaving his grandchildren fatherless. He caused his son Antipater to be slain five days before his own death, and on his death commanded that the chief men of the Jews be imprisoned and slain when he died, that all Jewry might mourn (this decree was not carried out). The massacre of the babes of Bethlehem would be a small thing to Herod. Josephus, though not mentioning this, states: "Many slaughters followed the prediction of the new king."

So terrible were the intrigues, tragedies, and murders of Herod's court, so violent the king's uncontrollable rage, that with the death of Mariamne's sons, Augustus is said to have exclaimed: "I would rather be Herod's hog than his son."

He was called "Great" because he had distinguished himself in wars against his enemies, had showed great talent in ruling, had rebuilt the temple, had restored and ornamented the cities of Judea.

He died of a most painful and loathsome disease about March, BC4, in his 70th year, after reigning about 37 years. With great ceremony, the funeral procession of the dead tyrant left Jericho for its destination, south east of Bethlehem, where a great Mausoleum had been built for his body. Thus he was buried in the very area he had so recently deluged in sorrow by an act of the greatest barbarity.

Herod had a love of Greek culture and Roman ways, and tried to introduce these things into his realm to the annoyance of orthodox Jews. They praised him for the temple he had beautified, they condemned him for his introduction of pagan games, buildings and places of worship. But some eagerly embraced these foreign ideas, until, gradually, there arose among the Jews a party dedicated to the introduction of Greek culture. They became known as the Herodians, and were bitterly opposed by other sects among the Jews as being worldly in their attitude to life, undermining the strict separateness of Judaism.

So the evil influence of Herod the so-called "Great" lived on after his death.

For other details see page 92.

"HE SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE"

Commenting upon the return of Joseph to Nazareth, Matthew wrote that this gave point to that which was "spoken by the prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene" (Matt. 2:23). But where is this specific statement found in the prophets? The answer is nowhere! Was Matthew wrong? No, for he does not say that a single prophet wrote this statement, but that it was a truth spoken of by the prophets in general. The word "Nazarene" comes from a Hebrew root, *netzer*, which means "branch." *Netzer* is the word used in Isaiah 11:1 for the Lord who is there described as the "branch" that would grow out of the stem of Jesse. Both Nazareth the town, and Galilee the district in which it was situated, were greatly despised by the Jews (see John 1:46; 1Kings 9:11-13; Isa. 9:1), so that figuratively, the "branch" grew out of "dry ground" (see Isa. 11:1; 53:1-3). The prophets generally spoke of the coming of this "branch" (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-16; Eze. 17:22-24; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Thus Matthew was correct, and the fact that the Lord should be called a "Nazarene," a "branch," was referred to by the prophets.

Chapter 1

GROWING UP IN NAZARETH

NAZARETH is a small town, southwest of the Sea of Galilee, not far from Mount Tabor, situated among hills that rise steeply from the broad and fertile plain of Esdraelon, or Jezreel, as it is called. It belonged to the district of Galilee, a district which, in the days of the Lord, was densely populated, with numerous townlets and cities.

Large numbers of Gentiles had made their home in this part of the country, so that it was sometimes called "Galilee of the Gentiles." But Jews further south despised Galilee. They looked with contempt on Galileans as rough and uncouth, and disliked the peculiar accent people spoke.

Nevertheless, the chequered history of fertile Galilee, and perhaps the influence of the Gentiles who had made their homes there, had made their impact upon the Jewish inhabitants. They developed into a fiercely patriotic, religious and courageous people.

They hated the domination of Rome, and constantly rebelled against it. Rioting was thus common, and the tramp of Roman legions sent to crush rebellion, was often heard in wild and turbulent Galilee.

The Roman Governor lived in the city of Tiberias, situated on the shore of the Sea of Galilee; and because of the importance attached to that city, the vast fresh-water lake became also known as the Sea of Tiberias.

The Eldest of A Large Family

It was to this rugged and beautiful countryside and surroundings that Joseph and Mary returned in due time with the child Jesus. In their home-town of Nazareth, they again took up the way of life that had been interrupted by the decree of Augustus, and the birth of the Lord, some time previously.

As far as we know, Jesus never again visited the village of Bethlehem. He grew up in Nazareth, and became known as a Nazarene. Even during his ministry (as far as it is recorded) he never visited the place of his birth.

In Nazareth, Joseph took up the employment of a carpenter, a tradesman. Time went on, and other children were born to the family. There were James, Joses, Simon, Judah, and also several sisters. So it was a busy household. Mary had much to do to look after the family. The Lord grew up as the eldest of a large family, learning from practical experience, and at an early age, the need of harmony between brethren and sisters.

Early Preparation for his Life's Work

As Jesus grew, he developed wonderfully. He had a maturity far beyond his age, being an outstanding child, bright and observant. At that early age, he not only was instructed as any other Jew from the sacred books of the Old Testament, but quickly learned from nature many things that he was able to later use in the parables and illustrations he used to teach the people.

He observed how his mother made bread with leaven, how she carefully mended his clothes, swept the house, ground the corn and went to the well for water. He knew of children who played happily with one another, and those who sulked and refused to play.

In the field close to the town he watched the sower at work, saw how some of the grain wasted on hard soil, saw the birds swooping down to steal it, saw how some soil gave a better yield in harvest time than others.

Thoughtfully the young boy pondered all he saw and heard, and wove them into spiritual lessons in his mind.



Carpenter's shop in modern Nazareth

The shepherd was a familiar sight, perhaps a favourite figure to him. He knew that his great forefather, David, had been a shepherd, and doubtless from the lips of Mary, he heard how David had protected his flock from the lion and the bear. And there, on the hillsides, he listened to the shepherds piping to their flocks, talking to the sheep, tending them, caring for the needs of those who suffered some hurt. He learned of wolves ravaging the flock if the shepherd was not vigilant, noticed that the sheep were carefully put in folds to keep them out of harm's way, observed how completely dedicated were the shepherds to their duties, tending their flocks with loving care.

He also heard of robbers and thieves and bandits. As he roamed the countryside and hills, he observed the wildlife about him: foxes slinking through the fields, sparrows lying dead on the ground, the beauty of wild flowers, a beauty given by God though uncared for by men.

In the town of Nazareth he watched wedding processions and funerals, listened to the excited bargaining of traders in the streets,

saw destitute beggars pleading for help, learned of prosperous men building larger and larger barns to store things they would never use.

There was poverty in the home to which he belonged, but not pauperism. It was not a miserable home bitterly lamenting things that it could not afford, jealous of the possessions of others, but a happy home where the family recognised that it possessed a wealth that money could not buy — the riches of the Word of God.

There is little told us of the boy Jesus, but what is known suggests a bright, strong boy whose engaging manners, kind, considerate, and loving ways, whose brilliant understanding of things beyond his years, won him many friends (Luke 2:52). We see him with a reverent, questioning mind, a mind adequate — even from an early age — to take in lessons from the life about him as well as from the records of Israel of which he was constantly reading in the Scriptures.

He doubtless received lessons like any other Jewish boy, first from Joseph and afterwards from the teacher as he sat with others on the floor of the synagogue, listening with reverence to instruction from the Bible: his Father's Word!

The lessons were difficult, mostly in Hebrew. He had to learn to recite by heart, long Psalms and sections of the Old Testament, and as he studied these he thought upon the meaning of it all. The sacrifices of the Law taught him of the reality of sin and the need of redemption, and underlined for him that holiness of living that God required of His people. From the same source, he learned of faith, of hope, and of service in love.

He studied the prophecies, and learned of the Redeemer who was promised as the "seed of the woman" to bring redemption from sin and death, to stricken humanity. He learned of the seed of Abraham who would possess the promised inheritance; of the seed of David to whom would be given the authority of rulership.

From his heavenly Father he inherited an inclination towards spiritual things which caused him to more easily absorb the lessons of the Scriptures, and enabled him to quickly grasp the significance of the things he read. It revealed that he was no ordinary child, but was in fact *Emmanuel*, "God with us."

Thus at an early age he was impressed with the great responsibility that rested upon him, with the great ministry that had been set him, for he realised that he was the One promised in the Word of God. Recognising this, the young boy, manifesting a maturity far beyond his years, set himself then to obey his Father and his God in all that He should require of him.

The greatest power in his life was the Bible. In its lessons, under its influence, he was daily brought up. The results were seen in the character that gradually unfolded. He was lovable, kind, obedient, thoughtful, observant, keen, understanding, willing, patient and strong.

And as he grew from infancy to boyhood, he slowly lost the dependence he had on his mother.

Another Boy Grows Up In Judea, his cousin John was likewise growing up. He too, would have been educated in the normal Jewish fashion. He too, was observant of all that went on about him. But there was a marked difference. Jesus was a favourite with people; they loved the bright-eyed intelligent and active young boy, and wondered at the remarkable wisdom and character he revealed.

But in John there was a strangeness, an aloofness that did not always appeal. He had a strong, muscular body, and spent a lot of time wandering around the "wilderness of Judea," out in the lonely deserts, mostly on his own. His parents were very old, and the young boy was doubtless thrown on his own resources.

If the two cousins ever met at that early age, we read nothing of it. It is obvious, however, from Matthew 3:14, that John by then knew much about the Lord.

Though the boys possessed different characteristics, they also had much in common. They both had a fearless, straightforward attitude to life. Their clear, honest eyes saw everything for what they were. Neither could be deceived. And they both observed things which must have greatly saddened them.

Jesus saw in Galilee the rough, ruthless Roman legions brutally suppressing the revolts that were constantly starting up. He saw that the captured men were not treated honourably as prisoners of war, but were crudely and cruelly crucified along the high roads, and their pain-racked bodies left hanging in the open as a warning to others. Thus from an early age, he had before him examples of the revolting death that he would later suffer.

The horrible sights exposed to his view must have deeply affected such a sensitive and highly intelligent boy. It was all so crude, so wrong, so different from the beauty he saw in nature or the love of God revealed in the Bible, so different from the deep stirrings that he felt within him, and that drew him powerfully in love to his heavenly Father, and the things that pleased Him. He doubtless would turn to his mother for comfort at such times, and with the help of Joseph, Mary would try to guide and assist her highly intelligent young son in understanding. But this became increasingly difficult for her, as he soon outstripped both her and Joseph in spiritual knowledge, though being so young.

In Judea to the south, John observed injustices that made him seethe with indignation, and burn with a zeal to correct them. He saw the brutality of the rulers, the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders, the indifference of the people to the things of God he had learned to love.

He read in the Old Testament Scriptures of the reforming zeal of Elijah, of the fire that swept down from heaven to consume those who mocked at Elisha, of men of faith and courage who stood up boldly to protest against the prevailing evils in the nation, sternly rebuking the people for the folly of their ways.

There would be in him a sense of his own destiny. And as his mind grew in the things of God, and his own mission in life (which doubtless, his parents would have revealed to him) he awaited the time when he could go forth to scathingly rebuke the wicked for their crimes against God, and lead a reform as sweeping and widespread as that of Josiah. He looked with burning eyes on the examples of folly about him, and like Elijah of old, withdrew within himself more and more, awaiting the time when he would go forth on his crusading mission.

Thus in Judea, as well as in Galilee, the two boys grew up; boys who as men were to affect the course of history more than any other among mankind.

WHY ARE THERE FOUR ACCOUNTS OF CHRIST'S LIFE?

The Lord Jesus is set forth in Isaiah 49:3-6 as the ideal Israelite, and as the nation of Israel encamped in four great groups of three tribes each, so four accounts of Christ's life are necessary to properly reveal him unto mankind. Over these four divisions of Israel, there waved the four standards of the principal tribes (Num. 2:3, 10, 18, 25): a *Lion* for Judah; and *Ox* for Ephraim; a *Man* for Reuben; and an *Eagle* for Dan. These also formed the four faces of the Cherubim (Eze. 1:10), and represented royalty, service, humanity and divinity.

The four accounts of Christ's life reveal him in these four ways. Matthew refers to his *royal dignity,* constantly drawing on the prophecies of the Old Testament in confirmation of his majesty. Mark sets him forth as a *servant*, emphasising the work that he did for others, the miracles and service of love he rendered. Luke treats his life from the standpoint of his *humanity*, tracing his genealogy back to Adam (Luke 3), John shows him as *divine*, the manifestation of the Father, the Word made flesh, set forth in the declarations of God from the beginning and revealed in the Son.

The four gospel records, therefore, are like the four standards of Israel, exhibiting the Lord in different aspects which, when combined, reveal in detail his glorious, divine character and mission. The four accounts show that he will RULE (*Lion:* Matthew), because he learned to SERVE (*Ox:* Mark), and though found in FLESH (*Man:* Luke), he conquered through the SPIRIT (*Eagle:* John).

Thus, Matthew's Gospel seems designed primarily for Jews, and has for its main object the discourses or teaching of the Lord, demonstrating

from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Messiah.

Mark's Gospel provides a practical outline, dealing mainly with the Galilean ministry, and revealing the actions and miracles of the Lord, by which he served the people. He seems to have written mainly for Romans, for his book contains many Latin terms and phrases clothed in Greek.

Luke wrote for Greeks. His Gospel sets the matter out chronologically, and supplements the others by tracing events that they have omitted. He outlines the Perean ministry which the others do not, and supplements the Judean ministry which John deals with at length. He reveals Jesus as the perfect Son of Man, filled with compassion for suffering humanity.

John's Gospel sets forth the divine side of Christ, revealing him as the Son of God, and treats almost exclusively with the Judean ministry. It shows Christ as a man of the Spirit.

Thus Matthew's gospel was designed to appeal to the *Jews*; Mark's Gospel for the *Romans*; Luke's Gospel for *Greeks* (Lk. 1:3); and John's Gospel for *Believers*.

Four Rulers Excluded from the Record...

MATTHEW'S GENEALOGY

Matthew divides the genealogy of the Lord into three sections of fourteen each (v. 17), but he has been accused of altering facts to conform to this arrangement. Four rulers are excluded between Joram and Ozias (Uzziah) in v. 8, the rulers being: ***Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash*** and ***Amaziah***.

Was their omission an oversight, and if not, was Matthew justified in excluding them?

Their exclusion was certainly not an oversight, and Matthew was quite justified in leaving them out of his record for the very good reason that they were not truly of the house of David — but of the house of wicked king Ahab of Israel. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, foolishly entered into an alliance with the evil house of Ahab and married his son Jehoram to Athaliah (2Chr. 18:1). But Yahweh had pronounced the judgment of annihilation on that wicked house (1Kings 21:21-22; 2Kings 10:10), and the posterity of Athaliah was now brought within its compass. The Law proclaimed that Yahweh would visit iniquity unto the "third and forth generation of them that hate Him" (Deu. 5:9), and so the four rulers referred to above (all of them wicked and manifesting the characteristics of Ahab) are excluded from the true line of David. That line is restored by Uzziah, testifying that Yahweh is not only just but merciful. Their exclusion, therefore, is not an oversight, but a careful discrimination between the House of Ahab and the House of David, setting history in its proper perspective and sequence.

A Name Missing

In the third list of fourteen however, Matthew records only thirteen names. Verse 11 says: "Josiah begat Jeconiah *and his brethren* about the time they were carried away into Babylon." Now Josiah did not beget

Jeconiah, nor did Jeconiah have "brethren." Josiah did beget Jehoiakim, and Jehoiakim did have "brethren" (see 1Chr. 3:15). In Matthew's list as recorded in the A.V. there is an omission of Jehoiakim between Josiah and Jeconiah. Some Greek manuscripts do insert it, which regularises the third of Matthew's fourteens (see margin).

Genealogies can become absorbing studies (though we must not take them to excess (1Tim 1:4). Between Adam and Christ there are sixty generations, and in spiritual numerics, six has the significance of man; so here are the generations of man leading to Christ. These sixty seem to go in six tens, each tenth man being especially significant. The first is NOAH, the second is ABRAHAM, the third is BOAZ, the forth is UZZIAH, the fifth is ZERUBBABEL, and the sixth brings us to the statement: "Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom was born JESUS who is called CHRIST."

A Talk with Mr. Phillips...

ON HARMONISING THE GOSPELS

We discussed with Mr. Phillips as to whether a harmony of the Gospels was profitable, and if so how to go about establishing it in one's Bible. Here is an outline of the conversation:

Editor: *"Mr. Phillips, we have not troubled you for some time, but we would like you to tell us, for the advantage of our readers, whether you think that a harmony of the four Gospels is practicable or desirable."*

Mr. Phillips: "I believe a harmony is both practicable and desirable. It enables one to follow the life of the Lord in sequence, and it also helps to give a more detailed account of any particular incident. Remember, each of the four Gospels was written from its own particular point of view, so that the writer only included those incidents or sayings that served his purpose. These accounts must be gathered together in one if we would have a really balanced view of Christ's ministry on earth."

"Can you give me an example of how the harmony would help?"

"Certainly. Take John 6:1-2. We read that 'Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, and great multitudes followed him.' If we only had that account, the narrative would seem disjointed; but the other Gospel records enable us to fill in the details. Actually, nearly twelve months elapse between the end of John 5 and the beginning of John 6. During that time, the considerable events recorded in Mark 2:23—6:30 and Luke 6:1—9:10 take place. We learn from the other records the reason why Christ desired to go over the lake. He wanted peace and privacy. He had just heard the news of John Baptist's death (Mat. 14:12-13), and had just received the enthusiastic disciples back from their successful tour of the land (Luke 9:9-10). He was sorrowful over John's death, and saw the need to moderate the enthusiasm of the disciples. For that purpose he took a ship to go across the lake, but the multitudes did not permit him the privacy he desired. By bringing all these events together, one is enabled to grasp a better picture of what took place. We see the Lord burdened with trouble, anxious to instruct his disciples, desiring privacy that he might obtain

strength from communion with the Father – and all of this is denied because of the demands of the people. Can't you see the benefit that such a harmony of the Gospels presents?"

"Yes, I can. Now when I asked you that question, you turned straight to your Bible and gave me the answer. How were you able to do that?"

"Because I have marked my Bible on it. I have a special indicator in my Bible that I place at the end of a verse where another Gospel record gives an account of events omitted by one, and in the margin of my Bible I have a corresponding mark in the other place, and there I note what that incident is, and where it is found. I put this mark in red so that it stands out."

"Can you give me an example?"

"Certainly. In Luke 2:39 we read: 'When they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee to their own city Nazareth.' Luke, however, is giving a broad outline of what happened. Much occurred after the visit to the temple, and the return to Nazareth. Joseph and Mary first went back to Bethlehem, were visited by the wise men, fled into Egypt, and only after these events did they return to Nazareth. Luke gives the broad outline; Matthew supplies the details."

"And how do you show that from your Bible?"

"At Luke 2:39, I place the distinguishing mark in red thus: ////. In the margin as you can see, I have a corresponding mark in the same color. Whenever I see that mark, I am reminded that there are incidents missing that other writers supply. Then in the margin I write in black: **'Here follows: return to Bethlehem, visit of the wise men, etc. See Matt 2:1.'** At Matthew 2:23, where there is another break in the narrative, I have similar marks and a statement in the margin that directs me back to Luke 2:40 where the narrative continues."

"In these markings, what Gospel have you selected to commence the life of the Lord in sequence?"

"I have selected Luke because he claims to 'write in order' the record of the Lord (Luke 1:3). By that, I understand, that he is writing with a set plan and sequence. I have found that Matthew is not always in proper sequence. He seems to have selected incidents and placed them together to illustrate a certain principle, rather than giving them in sequential order."

"And what is the sequence up to the boyhood of Jesus?"

"Well, commencing with Luke, we have a continuous narrative until ch. 1:56, where we are told that Mary returned to Nazareth. We need to note, however, that Mary remained with Elisabeth until the birth of John, so that she witnessed the excitement of vv. 57-79 before returning home, as stated in v. 56. Then follows Matthew 1:18-25. From there we return to Luke 2:1-20, at which place we should note that Joseph and Mary with the infant Jesus left the inn for a house in Bethlehem (Mat. 2:11). The sequence then continues to Luke 2:39 where we should note that the continuity is carried on at Matthew 2:1-23, after which we must return to Luke 2:40."

"Could you set that out for me?"

"Certainly. Here it is:

The Birth and Boyhood of Jesus

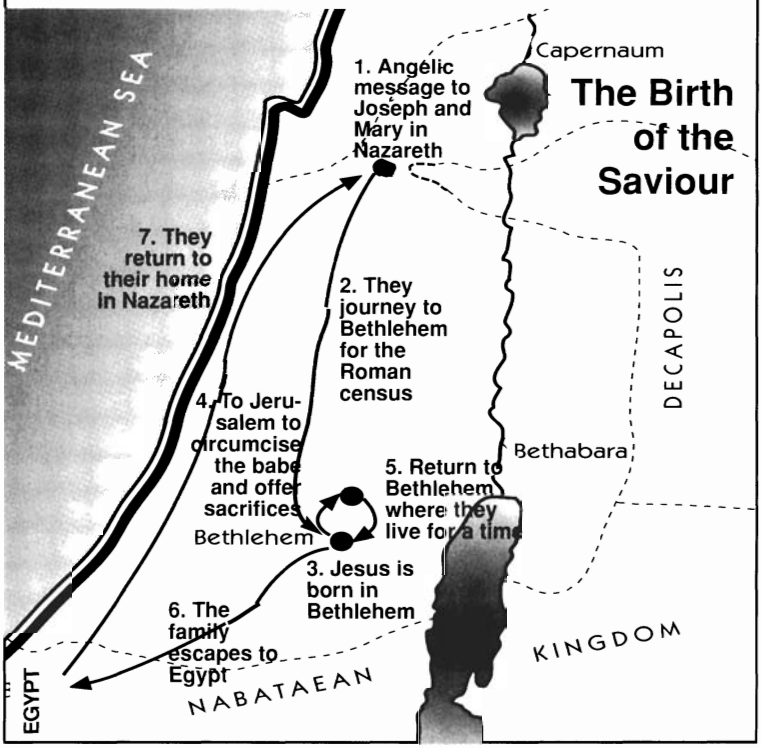
Introduction: **John 1:1-15; Mat. 1:1-17.**
Birth of John: **Luke 1:1-56 (vv. 57-79).**
Joseph told of impending birth of Jesus: **Mat. 1:18-25.**
Birth in Bethlehem: **Luke 2:1-20.**
Take a house in Bethlehem: **Mat. 2:11.**
At the Temple: **Luke 2:21-39.**
Visit of Wise Men, etc: **Mat. 2:1-23.**
Boyhood of Jesus: **Luke 2:40-52.**

"Thank you, Mr Phillips. That will do for now. How is the family keeping?"

"Very well, thank you! Have you seen my two young grandchildren: David and Paul? Why the other day..."

"I am sorry, I cannot stop now. I will hear about it some other time. Remember, I am a grandfather too! We will swap stories about our grandchildren later!!"

• ***Editor's note:*** Further details of Mr. Phillip's system of Bible marking the Gospel records can be obtained by writing to him, *Logos Office, Box 220, Findon, South Australia 5023*. For a harmony of the Gospel records see the pages listed in the Contents on page 8.



Chapter 2

THE LORD'S FIRST PASSOVER

THE 15th day of Abib, the first month of the Jewish calendar, was a most important date to the Jewish people, for then the Passover festival was kept. Jews all over the world celebrated the feast, and if possible, travelled to Jerusalem to do so, for that was the place at which God commanded it should be kept.

In accordance with the instructions of the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary faithfully went up to Jerusalem each year for that purpose. And, at the age of twelve, the Lord also accompanied them. He had arrived at the age when he had to assume greater responsibilities, and in doing so, take an important step toward the special ministry for which he had been brought into the world.

When a Jewish boy arrives at his thirteenth year, he is called *Bar Mitzvah, The Son of the Commandment* because he is then bound to keep the Law in all its requirements, and to understand its principles.

Jesus was no exception, even though he was the Son of God. And thus, on this year, he made ready to accompany his mother and Joseph as they went up to Jerusalem for that purpose.

He Journeys to Jerusalem

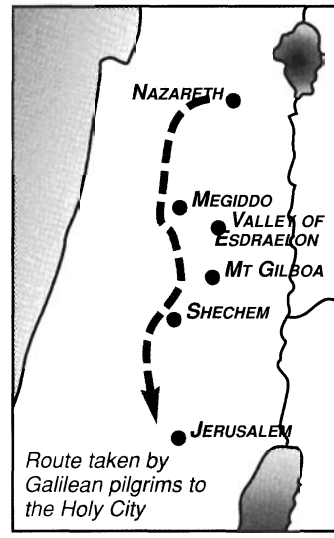
They left in company with their friends and kinsfolk. It was a happy, joyous occasion, for not only did it mean that they were relieved of all worldly responsibilities for the time being, but their holiday also had a spiritual significance. They travelled towards the city where Yahweh has placed His name, as a people called to His mercy.

The cavalcade from Nazareth wended its way down to the valley of Esdraelon, southwards towards the city of David. As it did so, it mingled with other companies like-minded. Sometimes small groups would be seen, whose foreign dress and strange tongue showed that they were from Gentile lands. All the nation seemed on the move, with people thronging towards Jerusalem from all quarters.

Like a giant magnet, this City of Destiny was drawing her children to the shadow of her wings. To that end they left all worldly cares behind them. Fields and vineyards remained unattended; olive groves were deserted for the time being; merchants' shops were closed. Normal work ceased whilst the people concentrated upon the spiritual significance of the great deliverance under Moses. They depended upon the goodwill and blessing of Yahweh, that they might not suffer loss because they dedicated their time to His worship in Jerusalem.

They passed through a land rich in memories of the past. There was *Gilboa*, scene of the tragedy of Saul; there was *Megiddo*, where

good king Josiah met his untimely death; there were the twin peaks of *Ebal* and *Gerizim*, where Joshua had led the people that they might renew their covenant with Yahweh in the land of Promise.



And what a happy people they seemed at such times! As they travelled they would sing the songs of Zion, conscious of the goodness of Yahweh to them in the great deliverance He had effected for them from Egypt, and the provision He had then made to shield them from the Angel of death that brought judgment against the oppressors of Israel. The Passover reminded them of how their enemies had been overthrown in the Red Sea, and the nation of Israel established upon a God-given law and covenant in Sinai. Perhaps the One who delivered them from Egypt would move to deliver them from the hated Romans who lorded it over them at that time!

So they may have thought and discussed among themselves as they travelled along the highways.

There was one in the vast, slow-moving company converging upon the capital from all over the Land, who entered into the spirit of the proceedings with the greatest insight and understanding. The boy Jesus would doubtless join in with singing the songs of Zion, and rejoicing with those about him in the great privilege that had been granted them.

Though so young, he would recognise the significance of the Passover more than anybody else. With his mind steeped in the history of the past, filled with an understanding of the things of God far transcending that of the people about him, and fully alive to the joy that awaits the true worshippers of God in the future, he knew that the Passover was but a means to an end — that, whilst it commemorated the great historic deliverance of Israel, it also pointed forward to the individual deliverance of those who partook thereof in the manner approved of God. And he was destined to play the conspicuous part of being the offering to effect the personal salvation of man.

And now, as a thoughtful, serious boy in the joyous and rejoicing throng, the Messiah was taking the first step in a ministry of obedience that would ultimately bring him to the cross.

Just before Jerusalem is reached, the road rises steeply to twist and turn in a continuous ascent of a few miles as it leads to the city

some 2300 feet (700 metres) above sea level. The going was more difficult now, as the company began the "ascent to Jerusalem," struggling up the long, steep, winding road. As yet the city could not be seen, for it was hidden from view by a seemingly endless series of hills which rise like mountainous petrified waves in a giant stormy sea.

But at one stage as the final rising before Jerusalem is topped, the city is seen standing boldly aloft on a peak beyond the last shallow valley: a shining crown of glory on the distant mountain. The noise of singing, which had doubtless faded somewhat whilst the tired company laboured up the steep road, now ceased altogether, and a hush fell over each successive group as it reached this spot.

There was the beloved city, the place where Yahweh has placed His name as the centre of His worship; the one spot above all others that symbolised the glory of the nation.

They bowed down and offered thanks to God.

With solemn, thoughtful, deeply pondering eyes Jesus must have viewed the city before him. For him it was indeed the *City of Destiny*. In it precincts, at a later period, he was to become the Passover Lamb, fulfilling that which had been celebrated so often, by so many, down the centuries. Though so young in years, he already knew his destiny, and recognised as he made ready to complete the journey, that the ominous shadow of the cross was even then reaching out to embrace him.

The Busy City

So they came to the city itself. Perhaps they encamped outside its walls. This was the custom of those who were not accommodated in the city by relatives or friends. If so, they may have selected a spot close to the Mount of Olives that stands not far from Jerusalem on its eastern side, and from the heights of which a glorious view of the city is obtained, spread out below.

From it, the solemn, eager boy would look down upon the City of David, the golden city of Zion. He would see the Garden of Gethsemane on a slope before the city, the brook Kedron which cuts its way along the bottom of the steep valley before the eastern wall of the city, and the gate above which gave access to Jerusalem and the temple.

Perhaps he recalled the history of the past. The time when David was rejected by his own people in favour of Absalom, and with a few faithful retainers, made his sorrowful way across the Kedron up the opposite slopes to this very Mount of Olives, to weep over the city that had treated him so harshly. If Jesus did so, perhaps he also peered into the future, and became dimly conscious of how, he too, would be rejected, and would repeat almost the same journey.

But, for the moment, there was not much time for sight-seeing. Hundreds of thousands of people were converging upon the city from all over the Land, and from fifty different countries beyond it. Sites were being selected, and hastily erected booths set up under which people might shelter during the course of the festival. Everything had to be ready, well before the 14th of Abib arrived, so that the city was a hive of activity.

But as the significant 14th of Abib approached, quietness gradually settled over the city and its outskirts as the people made ready to keep the Passover.

Preparing the Passover

It was early morning. The rays of the sun could be seen in the east. From the temple area, the peals of the trumpet were heard, echoing down the valley, to warn the people that the time had come to make preparation for the Passover.

The vast crowd awakened, and after a hasty meal, began to make its way towards the temple. Joseph and Mary, with the boy Jesus, made their way in the same direction. They were inconspicuous in the vast crowd that slowly shuffled along, until in the narrow streets of the city, it became a solid mass of humanity.

Gradually, as the crowd moved slowly towards the precincts of the temple, further sounds would be heard, mingling with the noise of people walking along the roads, engaged in excited conversation, creating a confusion of noise. There would be the bleating of lambs, the bellowing of calves, the cooing of doves, and the harsh, discordant, irreverent voices of impious humans, with minds absorbed in making gain on this solemn occasion — exchanging the money of Jews from foreign lands, selling animals or birds for sacrifice.

Such confusion and sights must have struck harshly on a sensitive boy like Jesus. But he could do nothing about it, and perhaps, with his pre-occupation of thought, and the excitement of the moment, he did not give much time to it. He would have watched Joseph purchase a lamb, would have followed him as he passed through the entrance of the temple, to take his place behind the long queue of worshippers that was forming, each with his sacrificial victim by his side.

Jesus was now at a most significant and sacred spot. Here Abraham had faithfully set about offering his son of promise in obedience to God's command; here David had seen the avenging angel of death hovering over the city and had hastily sacrificed; here Solomon had received divine instructions to build a house in which God should dwell.

Meanwhile, the sun had slowly travelled across the sky and it was now 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The time had come for the animals to be slain, and the blood sprinkled on the altar. It was a very impressive

ceremony. Levites were chanting appropriate psalms, groups of priests stood waiting to minister to the people while other Levites stood to assist them.

The seemingly endless line of worshippers slowly moved forward each to present his lamb for slaughter. Having offered his animal, Joseph returned to the place where he had chosen to eat it, and by his side went the eager, thoughtful boy. Perhaps Jesus said to himself on this first occasion of his participation in the Passover ceremony, "with desire have I desired to eat this Passover..."

But now the sun had sunk in the west, and evening had come. The head of the family, seated in the place of honour reserved for him, filled a cup with wine, and offering a blessing upon it, passed it around from hand to hand.

Next bitter herbs were placed on the table. Immediately the minds of those who were alert to the significance of what was taking place, flashed to its meaning. They recalled the hard bondage of slavery in Egypt, figurative of bondage to sin, a slavery that had "made their lives bitter" (Exo. 1:14).

As the bitter taste of the herbs reached each palate and was absorbed into the being, the people seemed to taste once more the bitterness of Egypt. But it was a bitterness that was "remembered" only (see Deu. 5:15). For, during the period of this festival, they had been commanded to abstain from "all servile work," a command that reminded them of the type of work their forefathers had been compelled to perform under Pharaoh (Lev. 23:8), but from which they had been delivered.

Cakes of unleavened bread were now passed around to be eaten, pointing to the lesson of what was required of them as God's redeemed people. Leaven is the symbol of malice and wickedness (1Cor. 5:8), and the eating of unleavened bread reminded them that they must not partake of such wickedness.

A further cup of wine was then offered, and now there was a pause. It was the duty of the son of the household,* in accordance with the instruction of Exodus 12:26, to ask the question that has been asked year after year at Passover by each Jewish family.

On this occasion, doubtless, Jesus, as the firstborn, asked it: *"What mean ye by this service?"*



Passover meal

*It was the custom of Jews to celebrate the Passover in households of no less than ten. Friends and relatives would join together to form groups of ten or more.

The answer came, most likely from Joseph: *"It is the sacrifice of Yahweh's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses..."* (Exo. 12:27)

Further discussion and explanation would then follow, bringing to light the significance of all that was being done.

In this manner the great night of deliverance in Egypt was re-lived once more; it was again symbolised and proclaimed, that "Yahweh liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt..." (Jer 16:14)

The fear and anxiety of Israel in Egypt was recalled. It was brought to mind how the people of Israel anxiously assembled in homes which had the door posts and lintels sprinkled with blood, and the family within awaiting the moment when they would hastily leave the land of slavery and death for ever.

The terrible cry that arose throughout the land as the firstborn in every Egyptian home lay smitten dead was remembered, as was also the great relief in Israel when Yahweh's firstborn nation was delivered. And it was further recognised that the Passover commemorated more than merely national deliverance from Egypt, it set forth the principle of redemption from the slavery of sin and death. It foreshadowed the atonement that Yahweh would provide whereby life will be brought to every Israelite who trusts in God and acts upon His instructions.

At this stage, two Psalms were sung (Psalms 113 and 114).

With what meaning would Jesus, with his wonderful grasp of divine principles, sing the following words, though only a boy of twelve:

Praise ye Yahweh. Praise,
O ye servants of Yahweh,
Praise the name of Yahweh.
Blessed be the name of Yahweh
From this time forth and for evermore.
From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same,
Yahweh's name is to be praised.
Yahweh is high above all nations,
And His glory above the heavens.
Who is like unto Yahweh our God,
Who dwelleth on high,
Who humbleth Himself to behold
The things that are in heaven, and in the earth!
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
And lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;
That He may set him with princes,
Even with the princes of His people.

He maketh the barren woman to keep house,
And to be a joyful mother of children.
Praise ye Yahweh.

Yahweh's power over the nations had been shown in Egypt; His care for the poor and needy was revealed to those then celebrating the Passover in the provision before them. The manner in which the barren would become the joyful mother of children was exhibited in Israel's history, for example in the case of Sarah.

But the young, twelve-years' old boy would know that the greatest application of the Psalm was to him personally. He was to cause praise to ascend to Yahweh in the greatest degree. He was to be elevated from a position of humility and degradation to the greatest heights of power.

Praise Yahweh for this!

And meanwhile, the lamb remained on the table. It had been roasted whole to remind those who partook of it, of the haste with which this was done the first time when the avenging angel of death was hovering over the land. It was roasted whole to speak of the unity of fellowship that each has with the other, and all have with God.

It was prepared and partaken in haste, as if those doing so were on the eve of an urgent journey. To remind those celebrating it that they were but pilgrims and sojourners in the earth, and that they must be ready to leave the present life for the Kingdom of God, at the very moment when God should call them.

So the lamb was carved and eaten, and those assembled renewed their vows before Yahweh. Once more wine was offered — the symbol of a new life manifested by crushing underfoot the fruit of the vine — and Psalms 115 to 118 were sung.

To most Jews the Psalms spoke of deliverance from Egypt, and the joy and gladness that came to the nation when it was established upon divine principles before all mankind. But the Psalms are really prophetic of the true Passover Lamb, as the Lord later realised, if he did not already understand it then.

Psalm 115 expresses the glory that accrued to Yahweh in the humbling of Egypt and deliverance of Israel — but it points prophetically to the glory that would accrue to the Father through the obedience of the Son.

Psalm 116 speaks of the joy of deliverance out of death, the living death experienced in Egypt as far as the nation was concerned — but the literal death in the grave as it applied to the Lord Jesus.

Psalm 117 recalls how all of mankind witnessed the amazing miracle of the redemption from Egypt, even as Rahab told the spies — but prophetically it pointed forward to the time when the gospel would be preached throughout the world in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Psalm 118 historically spoke of the established nation in the Promised Land — but is really prophetic of the future when all nations will be converted to Christ and will sing the praises of the true Passover Lamb in the great "House of Prayer for all nations" to be erected in Jerusalem. Then will those words be fulfilled, expressed in vv. 22-23, and Jews will sing them with staggering realisation of their truth: "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner. This is Yahweh's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."

The "stone" was there in Jerusalem, partaking of his first Passover feast in the person of the 12-year-old boy from Nazareth. With what zeal and understanding must he have thrilled to the significance of all that was being done that day; with what meaning he must have sung those Psalms!

Was he not the true Passover Lamb? Had he not for that very purpose been born, and come into the world?

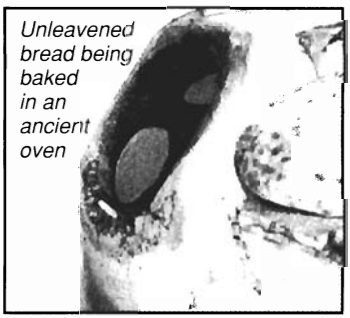
As he spoke, ate, drank, and sang, he determined that with the help of his heavenly Father he would suitably grace the great position purposed for him.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Passover commenced a week's service in what is termed the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, because for seven days only unleavened bread was eaten. This full week represented the whole circle of life, the seven thousand years duration of human existence upon this earth. It showed in parable form that the Passover Lamb was for all those down through the ages of mankind who would abstain from wickedness to serve God.

At the completion of that time, the divine purpose in the earth will be fulfilled, and the earth, delivered from every curse, and filled with the glorified, immortal people of Yahweh as completely as the waters cover the sea.

The true Passover Lamb atones for sins committed from the beginning of time until the end of the work of God in the earth; the benefits of the sacrifice thus provided extends backward as it does forward (Heb. 9:15). This was indicated by the seven days' Festival of Unleavened Bread, pointing to the whole circle of human life on earth.



Unleavened bread being baked in an ancient oven

So, for seven days, the Jews ate unleavened bread, as a token of what was required of those who hope to attain unto life eternal, no matter in what age they may live. If a person would be saved he must partake of the bread of life, abstain from sin, and seek hope and forgiveness through the Lamb of God's providing.

Special sacrifices were offered on each of those seven days, in addition to the normal morning and evening sacrifices.

The Lord entered into all the proceedings, as far as he was able, with the greatest zeal and enthusiasm.

We can imagine him, each morning in the temple, giving the utmost consideration to all that was occurring. He would concentrate upon it to the exclusion of all else, completely absorbed mentally in a world of spiritual beauty. He would hearken to silver trumpets as the priests sounded them over the offerings, drawing the attention of the people to the memorial character of the sacrifices (Num. 10:10), calling them, as it were, to partake of the redemption that God was offering through their means.

He would witness the elaborate ceremony conducted each day especially for this festival: two bullocks, one ram, seven lambs of the first year without spot, with the specific meal offering. He would see the animals slain, carefully washed both inside and out, dismembered, and finally placed upon the altar in their proper order: first the head, then the fat, and then the different portions of the body (Lev. 1:8-9). These represented the intellect, strength, and the whole being — all dedicated to God.

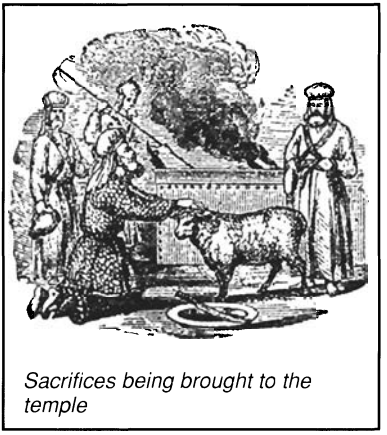
He saw that these pieces were so placed upon the altar as to enable the fire to easily pass through them, even as in the case of Abraham's sacrifice (Gen. 15:10, 17).

The poured out blood of the offering was symbolic of a life dedicated; it was a reminder that flesh is weak, and mankind must seek a higher way than that to which the flesh naturally tends. The washing of the carcase inside and out was a symbol of the cleansing effect of the Word (Isa. 1:16-18) upon a body "dead to sin" (Rom. 6:11), teaching the lesson that true righteousness is of the heart and mind as well as relating to external actions and outward ritual (Rom. 2:28-29).

The placing of the animal upon the altar in such a way that divine fire easily consumed it, and the smoke quickly ascended into heaven, brought home to the watchers that a divine zeal generated by the Word, must consume a person if he would offer himself acceptably as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1). And as the animal sacrifices remained there until completely burnt, it indicated the need of complete dedication of a worshipper to Yahweh, an "enduring unto the end."

The type of animals offered was also significant. The *bullocks* symbolised all labour, the *ram* pointed to the principle of desire, the seven *lambs* spoke of total reliance on God and His covenant. And what of the *meal offering?* It accompanied the burnt offering and was mixed with oil (Num. 28), teaching that man must labour (as the farmer had done so to produce the meal) to do the will of God, but

that he will only succeed if his efforts are combined with that which symbolises God's means to that end; His spirit revealed in the Word. In short, "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6).



Sacrifices being brought to the temple

The twelve year old boy stood in the temple watching the whole elaborate ceremony. He was impervious to everything else going on about him. Filled with an understanding of the Scriptures in relation to himself, he could see that it all pointed to the ministry of his own life. There must be, on his part, a total dedication of mind, strength, and being to his heavenly Father's will. So he must be consumed with zeal for God as the fire burned up the sacrifices. He must labour to do his Father's will as the farmer did to produce the grain and the meal. He must learn to put confidence in God and to lean on Him instead of relying upon the flesh.

All this elaborate ceremony, all these sacrifices, were really a parable of his own life. The labour of his life, his every desire, must be in conformity with what God required, and this, he could see, would only be possible, by completely throwing himself upon God.

But then, in addition, "one *kid of the goats* was offered for a sin offering." The goat speaks of waywardness, of sin. A "kid of the goats" is an undeveloped goat; it speaks of flesh, but flesh in which sin has not developed to be actively manifested. The Lord was to be a sin offering, but how could he be such if he sinned? Though he was of the same nature as all mankind, he never let the impulses of the flesh move him, he never sinned in thought or deed. As a sinless man, a kid of the goats, he later was offered on the cross.

As all this elaborate ceremony came to an end, it must have been borne upon the mind of the solemn, earnest boy of twelve whose concentrated gaze was fixed on all that was done, that he had witnessed the parable of his own life.

The bullocks, the ram, the lambs, the meal offering were all symbols of the dedicated life that he must offer as a "living sacrifice" unto the Father. The "kid of the goats for a sin offering" pointed forward to the final action of his life when he would be offered as such for the atonement of mankind. On the first day after the Sabbath during this festival a "sheaf of the first fruits" was offered as a wave-offering before Yahweh (Lev. 23:10). As the barley harvest ripened first, it was this that was offered (Deu. 26:2). Barley was considered of less reputation, a humbler grain than wheat, but here it has the

great honour of being offered first. The waving of it to and fro indicated activity before the Lord.

Here again, there was a symbol of the Christ. He is God's "first-fruits" (1Cor. 15:23). Like the barley, he "took upon himself no reputation" (Phil. 2:7), and significantly, rose from the dead "the first day" to take upon himself a special activity before the Lord (1Cor. 15:1-3).

Deeply thoughtful at all he saw, the young boy became anxious to discuss the matters with others. Already he had exhausted the understanding of Mary and Joseph in that direction. They could teach him nothing more. But there were doctors of the Law that could, perhaps help him, men skilled in the understanding and exposition of the Scriptures.

They frequented the courts of the temple, to sit and discuss together the significance of every detail of the revelation of God. The young boy hurried away to find them, that he might listen in to their discussion, and so increase his understanding of the things relating to his heavenly Father.

On their part, the learned doctors of the Law were amazed at the sight of so young a lad being so intent upon their discussions. It was a great joy to Jesus to hear them expound points of the Scriptures, and dispute with one another on the meaning of it all. With eager face, and with thoughtful, shining, intelligent eyes, he pondered the significance of all that he saw and heard.

The Missing Boy

It was a wonderful week for Jesus. Day after day found him in the temple, watching the priests perform their duties, bowing his head in prayer at the time of incense, following with understanding the daily sacrifice and the special offerings associated with the Festival of Unleavened Bread. He listened to the discussions conducted by men acknowledged as the most brilliant exponents of the day in Judah.

He revelled in the opportunity that the visit to Jerusalem presented to him, extracting every lesson possible from all that came under his notice. He became a familiar sight, frequenting the courts of the temple. He concentrated upon all that was being done to the exclusion of everything else, so that he lived in an entirely different world to that of the hardened, quarrelsome Jews about him, to whom the services, by very familiarity had degenerated into meaningless formalism, a lifeless ritual.

The learned doctors of the Law soon began to take notice of the serious, eager-faced boy who sought them out, and regularly sat down to listen to their discussions. Soon he was asking questions and then making his own observations. He loved every minute of it and could hardly tear himself away from the temple, even for the purposes of

eating and sleeping. And thus he missed the return home of the company with which Joseph and Mary journeyed.

He did not notice the preparations being made for this purpose. He was not present when all were ready to leave, and the cavalcade began its return journey. He was still at the temple, absorbed in all that was going on.

Joseph and his mother* did not know that Jesus was still in the temple. They started off home with all the others supposing that he was somewhere in the large company of relations and friends that commenced the journey together. But that night after a day's travelling, he was still missing. They realised that he had remained behind. It meant a further day's journey back to the city. Thus two days were occupied in going from and returning to the city. And there they found him — in the temple.

"My Father's Business"

They found him in the temple "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking questions." What a remarkable sight! The doctors, teachers and rabbis sat on benches in a semicircular form, raised above their disciples and learners who thus literally sat at their feet (cp. Acts 22:3). And there was the eager-faced, bright-eyed, twelve-year old boy, enjoying every minute of the experience, mind completely absorbed in the concentration he was giving to the things of God, both hearing the doctors and asking them questions.

And the questions he posed made the learned doctors of the Law realise that this was no ordinary boy in their midst. They were amazed



* Notice that Luke 2:43 carefully discriminates between "Joseph and his mother" emphasising the fact that Joseph was not his actual father.

at the depth of his understanding; the clear, powerful replies he gave to their questions astonished them beyond all measure. Though they did not realise it then, here, before them in the person of a twelve-year old boy, was the fulfilment of the Messianic Psalm (Psa. 119:99-100):

"I have more understanding than all my teachers:
for Thy testimonies are my meditation.
I understand more than the ancients,
Because I keep Thy precepts."

Whence had come this delight in the things of Yahweh? This wonderful grasp of divine principles at so early an age?

It is obvious that this was partly from God. He inherited from his Father an ability to grasp spiritual principles to a degree completely out of the ordinary; he was a genius in spiritual matters. Isaiah predicted of him: "The spirit of Yahweh shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of Yahweh" (Isa. 11:2-3).

But it was not all from God. There had to be a personal application of Jesus himself to the means that God has provided to all to be strengthened — that is, His Word. By study, meditation and prayer, he learned of His Father's plan and purpose, how to derive strength from Him, and so to lean upon Him. Thus Father and Son co-operated together in preparation of the mission to come.

The result was seen in this highly intelligent boy, with outstanding understanding of God's Word, sitting at the feet of the learned doctors of the Law, answering questions and making observations as though he were their equal.

But Joseph and Mary looked upon the scene in the temple with astonishment. They had been made anxious by the absence of Jesus, fearing that some harm might have come to him. It was a great relief to see him safe. But now, mingled with the relief that flooded her as she saw her young son, Mary also experienced a feeling of irritation. She felt that he had been thoughtless, and sought to upbraid him.

"Son" she said, "Why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee worrying!"

It was a rebuke, meant kindly, but it was a little thoughtless. Firstly, Joseph was not the father of the Lord; secondly, there was no need to "seek" for Jesus, for there was but one place that he would frequent in Jerusalem; thirdly, Joseph and Mary had themselves been a little thoughtless. They had made all preparations for the return journey, and had left, thinking that he was fraternising in a social way with others, not recognising his vital needs, his burning desire to exact the last ounce of help from the visit to the temple.

"How is it that you sought me?" he asked. "Do not you understand

that I must be about the things of my Father!"*

The *"things of his Father"* were the things that had brought them to Jerusalem. Why return until they had been fully completed? True, the festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread was over as a ritual, but Jesus observed it not as a mere institution, an empty formalism that once observed could be put aside, and the mind given over to other matters. He wanted to understand it in its depths, to really live it and to make preparation for the future.

His saying troubled them, but they could not quite grasp the full significance of it.

What did he mean?

He was not being rebellious, nor lacking in kindly thought towards his mother. He was trying to impress her with the vital fact of his mission in life. In his answer, he had taken up the very title she had used, "thy father" and given it greater power and meaning by expressing it as "*my* Father," turning it from Joseph to his true father: Yahweh.

Mary had claimed that he had been disobedient to his father (Joseph), but he tried to impress her that his sole desire was to do the things of *His* Father (Yahweh).

With their knowledge of the birth of the Lord, Joseph and Mary certainly knew that God was his Father and thus far could understand the words of the Lord. But there was a feature of his statement they did not understand. Jesus was trying to gently express the fact that the bond between mother and son must be relaxed to enable him to attend to his Father's things. This first Passover was the first intimation that in order to accomplish the will of his Father, normal family relationships must be severed, for complete dedication to the will of God was demanded of him. If his mother's desires were to conflict with this, then the Lord must continue on the path laid down in spite of her disapproval. As a father should govern the family, however, Mary must realise that she must assist Jesus to conform to what his Father required of him. It was the desire to serve God that had kept him at the temple, and not disobedience as Mary had implied. His life was to be a complete dedication to God even at the expense of family considerations; a dedication that he was later to ask of his followers (Luke 14:26).

Mary pondered the words of her son in her heart, but did not fully understand them.

---

* The A.V. renders the Lord's statement as "I must be about my Father's business." Others have translated it: "In my Father's house." Literally it signifies, "in the things of my Father." This seems the best expression to use here.

Chapter 3

JESUS GROWS TO MANHOOD

IN the little town of Nazareth in Galilee, the Lord grew up to manhood. Little is known of the following eighteen years of his life; a silence overshadows it. Yet they were important years. All that he learned and did then had a bearing upon his future work, and occasionally, out of that silence there flash one or two glimpses of the character that he developed under the guidance of his heavenly Father.

In Hebrews 10:5 he is described as "a body prepared." The word means fitted for the ultimate purpose God had in view. He had to be without sin, and to that end he had to seek a strength greater than the flesh. That strength he found in God. His ears were constantly open to the Word. "Mine ears hast Thou opened," he is represented as saying in the Psalms (Ps. 40:6). Isaiah prophesied concerning him: "The Lord Yahweh hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious neither turned away back" (Isa. 50:5).

He rendered perfect obedience to God, and was "subject unto" Joseph and Mary, as the Law required (Exo. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-2). As a Jew he learned a trade, which was required of every Jewish boy. He became a carpenter (Mark 6:3) and experienced the pleasure of working with his hands, creating something for the delight and use of others.

Other children, both sons and daughters, were born to Joseph and Mary, until quite a large family had to be cared for at Nazareth. With the increased size of the family, further responsibilities fell on the Lord.

The family experienced both joy and sadness, the greatest of all being the death of Joseph. It seems that this occurred as the Lord was nearing manhood, for then nothing further is heard of Joseph. Now the full weight of family responsibility fell on Jesus. He experienced the problems of parenthood. He became the bread-winner for the family, as later on in his greater mission he became the supplier of spiritual



A carpenter's shop in Bible times

bread for the family of God. As the guardian for his brethren and sisters, Jesus had to smooth over the problems of fractious children, assist Mary in caring for them in sickness, and to guide them in ways of righteousness as they grew up. It was a valuable experience, helping to equip him for the future. The Lord was no mere visionary, or theorist, but a man possessing practical experience of the very things he set before others.

"Jesus increased in wisdom, and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

What a pity that the false doctrines of the trinity and the pre-existence of Christ have obscured the beauty of this statement for most people! In contradistinction to the view that Jesus was God in the highest sense, or that he was a pre-existent angel, the Bible reveals a glorious picture of a boy gradually growing to manhood in such a way that he is a pleasure to both God and man.

Day by day he increased in wisdom and grace before God. How would that be possible if he were God? Or if he pre-existed? It would mean that he would have completely lost his previous identity, would have forgotten everything that he had previously known, and would have had to learn it all again! And if that were the case, where was the benefit of his so-called pre-existence?

No, the "man Christ Jesus," was "made like unto his brethren" (Heb. 2:17), and had to "learn obedience" (Heb. 5:8), and these truths could not be established if he were "very God," or a pre-existent angel.

The statement in Luke 2:52 suggests a boy in early teens setting himself to learn more about God, applying his mind with diligence that he might not only *know* but also *do*. Day by day saw an increase in wisdom; day by day saw an application of those things he learned.

There is an eloquence, even in the silence of the Bible, concerning this period. The Lord was quietly applying himself to that which would assist him in the future; he was storing a reservoir of understanding and wisdom which he could tap when the time came for him to use it. It was the time of preparation, and he did not waste opportunities. Later, he would be so busy that it would be difficult to snatch moments to commune with God or study His Word. So he gave his whole heart and mind to it in those early years.

He is an example to young teenagers today.

Though, of course, the special mission of the Lord, demanded a complete dedication of self to an extent not possible with others, yet his actions and demeanour point the way for us, showing what we must do if we would please God or our contemporaries.

Jesus had to lift himself high above the normal interests and pursuits of a young man, and the same is required of those who would "walk in his steps," though they may fall far short of his example. Jeremiah declared: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (Lam. 3:27), and this is demonstrated in the ideal of the Lord Jesus.

There was seriousness about him, a wisdom in applying himself to the things of life, that commended him to both God and man. As manhood came upon him, this tendency became strengthened; he manifested an increasing disposition to seek God, and to do His will, and was blessed in so doing.

He found favor also with his associates on earth. He was noted for his wisdom, his kindly disposition, his manliness.

Who could not help but be drawn to the fine young man who courageously and skilfully shouldered the responsibilities of the family in Nazareth on the death of Joseph. Whose thoughtful, intelligent face and bright, steady, penetrating eyes shone with the joy of understanding the things of God and applying them.

With what ability he must have led the family in its private devotions! How wonderful must have been his expositions and explanations of the purpose of God as they would read the scrolls of the Law or the Prophets! No wonder his brethren were with him in his early ministry (John 2:12), though later they began to doubt. His manner was gracious, loving and considerate. He was firm without being harsh, he was kind without being weak. His very presence was a help, and his influence was ever for good.

He became a familiar figure in the synagogue in Nazareth where he was found worshipping and where he was frequently appointed to read or instruct. In fact it became "his custom" to attend, so that he became identified with the divine worship that ascended therefrom (Luke 4:16).

His reputation for righteousness was widespread. His piety in word and deed was well-known and spoken of in many parts, so that even the austere John in the wilderness heard of his characteristics and recognised his outstanding virtues (Mat. 3:14).

He also grew in stature. He was no weakling, but enjoyed good health and a robust body. This was necessary



Artist's impression of the interior of the synagogue in Nazareth in Jesus' day.

for the arduous life before him. As a carpenter he was active with his hands and body, and as a student he was active with his mind. Both blended together to play a part in the development of the Messiah.

Periodically he visited Jerusalem to keep the compulsory festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, joining with the crowds that assembled at such times for such purposes, steeping his mind in all the teaching of the Law. It was the period of preparation for the work that was before him and he gave himself to the study of the Scriptures, to meditation and to prayer. He recognised that this constituted the food of the Spirit without which he could not grow in the things of God, nor would he successfully accomplish the mission that was before him without these exercises.

And in heaven God looked with pleasure on the Son of His love. The Lord found "grace" with his heavenly Father, with whom he was in constant communication through prayer.

Thus there developed through the influence of God, the greatest character the world has ever seen. He was more than flesh; he was "God manifest in flesh," and people saw the great difference that this revealed.

So eighteen years of preparation went by, and Jesus neared the thirtieth year of his life, the year when he had to commence his ministry.

In the city of Nazareth reports were received of a great spiritual revival that was sweeping the nation. They heard of a fiery speaker by the name of John who proclaimed a message like that of Elijah, who was gathering all the people to him, and who was proclaiming a baptism of repentance, claiming that the long hoped-for Messiah was about to appear.

His preaching was infectious and stirred the minds of Jews everywhere. Excitedly they discussed the significance of the message. If Messiah was near, then they must be ready to receive him. If Messiah was coming, then he would deliver them from the Romans! Thousands of people were flocking to hear John, and to be baptised of him. His reputation extended to Nazareth, and at the age of thirty Jesus knew that the time had come when he should manifest himself before his people as the Christ of God. He made ready to do the will of his Father in this also.

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

JOSEPH: THE LORD'S GUARDIAN

Joseph appears for a brief moment in the early life of the Lord, and then disappears completely from the scene. It is assumed from this, that he died shortly after Jesus reached the age of twelve years (the last recorded incident of Joseph in the Bible — Luke 2:42). This would explain why the

Lord at his death asked John to care for his mother (John 19:26-27). If Joseph were still living, such a request would be unnecessary.

After the death of the Lord, Joseph of Arimathaea, together with Nicodemus, came and begged the body of Jesus, carefully and lovingly laying it in the newly-hewn tomb prepared for the former. Thus in birth and in death, Jesus had a "Joseph" to care for him, though different persons: one was poor and the other rich; one was a humble, obscure carpenter and the other a prominent, well-known counsellor.

The action of this latter Joseph also forged another link between the birth and death of the Lord, for he was born of a virgin, and a virgin tomb received him at the last (see John 19:41).

The impending birth of the Lord imposed a severe test on Joseph, from which he emerged triumphant. The circumstances baffled him. He had a deep and abiding love for Mary, the pure young woman to whom he was espoused, and whom he was about to take as wife. And yet her condition suggested that she had betrayed him. He could not believe this of her, yet the evidence was so overwhelming that as a "just" and rather austere man, living according to the ordinance of the Law, he felt constrained to "put her away;" yet in his love and kindness, to do so "privily" (Mat. 1:19-20). He wished to express his disapproval and yet spare her from the ridicule of others.

His attitude, therefore, revealed him as a man who was both just and merciful, and yet about to act in a most unjust and cruel way because of his ignorance. It teaches the lesson that knowledge of the divine purpose is necessary to turn justice and mercy into true virtues.

But Joseph was prevented from acting as he contemplated doing because he was also a godly man, and "thought on these things" (Mat. 1:20). He pondered the problem carefully and earnestly, doubtless making it a matter of prayer, and received his answer. He learned the astounding news that Mary had been selected to mother the Redeemer of mankind, the Son of God. At once his doubts were banished, and his course of action made clear. He took Mary as his bride, and carefully tendered her in all the details necessary leading up to the birth of her son.

His action in this crisis shows the value of thinking carefully before acting even in what seems an obvious matter; and, most important of all, seeking the guidance of God in prayer. God will never fail those who carry their anxieties to Him.

Once convinced of the facts of the case, Joseph entered wholeheartedly into the part he was required to play. He assumed full responsibility over both Mary and Jesus, becoming Guardian and Protector of both.

And God confirmed him in this position. But now the angel went to Joseph, to advise him that Herod plotted the murder of the child; it was Joseph who arose and "took the young child and his mother by night and departed into Egypt" (Mat. 2:14); it was to Joseph that the angel again appeared, advising him of the death of Herod, saying "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel" (Mat. 2:20).

Joseph had the honoured position of protecting, guiding and super-

vising the development of the young child. And, in turn, Joseph found constant help from the guidance of heaven. In times of doubt or fear, he made it a matter of prayer (Mat. 2:22) and was directed along the course he should take.

He did not assume his responsibilities lightly. When the Lord was twelve years of age, Joseph saw to it that Jesus attended the Passover feast at Jerusalem. It was the custom of Joseph and Mary to be present at this feast (as at others) regularly, because the Law enjoined it, and when the time was ripe he carefully inducted the young boy Jesus into doing likewise.

The care and anxiety of Joseph in relation to the Lord is implied in the question of Mary when she found her son in the temple discoursing with the learned doctors: "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." Obviously Joseph did not take the responsibility of guardianship over humanity's Redeemer lightly. It concerned him deeply, and he gave it his most earnest consideration. What little there is recorded of Joseph reveals him as a man strict with himself but kind to others. He cares for Mary, he cares for Jesus, and in a different fashion, he cares for God.

The same characteristics seem reflected in "James the Just" who was the son of Joseph, and is believed to have penned the Epistle of James contained in the New Testament. James, like Joseph, is revealed as a just man, godly, austere, and yet with a tender kindness and care for those placed in his charge. Perhaps he reflected the characteristics of his father.

Joseph was a carpenter (Mat. 13:55) and evidently taught Jesus the same trade (Mark 6:3). Other children were born to Mary, both sons and daughters, so that Joseph experienced the pleasures and problems of parenthood. He was:

- A son of David and could claim royal descent (Luke 2:4).
- A pious Israelite, faithful in all the ordinances of the temple (Mat.1:19, Luke 2:22-24, 41-42).
- A kindly, charitable man, treating Mary gently in her time of need (Mat. 1:19; Luke 2:1-7).
- He assumed the position of the "father" of the Lord (Luke 2:23; John 1:45; 6:42), though in fact, he was not, for Jesus was ***the*** Son of Man, not *a* son of man (Luke 3:23).
- Perhaps the best index to the character of Joseph is found in the statement that the boy Jesus "was subject unto him" (Luke 2:51). This shows that Joseph's control of the home was fully in accord with the principles of God's Word; that he manifested a wisdom in all that he requested, to which one, like Jesus, could but concur. In short, Joseph was a godly man; just and austere in his demands upon himself, but kindly and considerate in his attitude and care of others. He was a fit and proper vessel to act as the Guardian of the Lord.

The Early Ministry of the Lord



Chapter 1

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN BAPTIST

ON worldly standards, John Baptist was not a well-educated man. He had not sat at the feet of learned doctors of the Law who frequented the temple in Jerusalem, nor joined the schools of thought where disciples of noted rabbis met to discuss their sayings and teachings.

John's education came from heaven. He sat at the feet of Yahweh, and listened intently to His Word. To concentrate better upon the mission before him, he had withdrawn from contact with men, left the cities with all their distractions, and sought the solitude of the desert. There in isolation, he gave himself to the study of God's Word, to long hours of meditation, to protracted periods of prayer, communing with God, and gathering strength for the onerous task ahead of him.

Preparation in the Desert

He lived the hard life of an ascetic, denying himself things that most people would view as the necessities of life. No sumptuous dishes graced the table of this Elijah-like prophet. It was on the simplest food that he thrived. Wild honey gathered from trees, and locusts* (classed among the flying, creeping things the Israelites were allowed to eat — Lev 11:22), formed his diet. His dress was equally austere. He was clothed in a rough camel skin, held together by a leathern girdle.

He thus practised self-denial and was not softened by luxury. In the harsh environment of the desert, as he brooded over the needs and perils of his time, he observed the desolation around him, symbols that spoke of the spiritual state of the people, so that when he came forth to preach to them, his language was coloured with the images so familiar to him. He spoke of barren trees fit only for burning — vipers fleeing before the flaming scrub, and of a nation that was as sterile of spiritual virtues as the desert is of growth.

His hard, solitary, austere life helped to mould his character, which was stern and unyielding; his isolated life of meditation and prayer disciplined him for his task of reformer. Thus he proclaimed a

* In *The Land and the Book,* Thompson states that in John's days locusts were sold as articles of food in regular shops for that purpose. They were plunged into boiling salt water, dried in the sun, and eaten with butter. But they were an article of diet of the very poor; by others this form of food was greatly despised. Some suggest that John lived off the pods of the so-called John Baptist tree, the "locust" (carob) tree — but this seems incorrect, as the locust was used for food by the very poor, and is recognised in the Law as an article of diet (Lev. 11:22).

message blended of severity and kindness.

It was necessary that he should be forthright and stern. He had to make an impact upon a people hardened by sin and given to luxury. This could not be accomplished by a gentle, easy approach, by a soft appeal to sentiment, by a series of sermons that would lull the people into the sleep of self-sufficiency. No, what was required was an uncompromising, indignant revelation of wickedness and error, a firm resolve to maintain this faithful testimony in the face of powerful opposition, a clear warning voice of rebuke, and a call for repentance and reform in view of the imminent appearing of the Messiah.

For he was to be the *Forerunner of the Lord,* preparing the way before him. He was to be the *Voice of Yahweh* in Israel, proclaiming the coming of His Anointed.

Over 400 years had passed since that Voice had been heard by the nation. From the days of Malachi, Israel had been without an open vision. The divine decree, proclaimed in the words of Micah, had been fulfilled: "Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them" (Mic. 3:6).

The prophetic sun set with the ministry of Malachi. Two significant words ("a curse," Mal. 4:6), concluded his prophecy, so that the Old Testament finishes with this ominous statement. It represents a warning testifying that the old covenant curses those who put their hopes for justification in it — calling upon them to seek the grace of God in the One who alone can remove the curse. And now, in John, the Voice of Yahweh was again to be heard in the greatest of prophets, who was to act as Forerunner of Yahweh's anointed Saviour.

Special preparation was required for that great mission, and John found it in the desert.

In solitude as far as man was concerned, but in constant communion with God, he made preparation for the future, meditating upon the Scriptures, seeing in them predictions of his own labours — the words of Isaiah: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness" (Isa. 40 — the prophecy of Malachi, whose name means *My Messenger*): "Behold I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me..." (Mal 3:1).

John's main work was to act as *forerunner* to the Lord, not merely to initiate a reformation in the nation. He knew that somewhere in the midst of Jewry, the Christ of God was walking among the people, and that he had been selected to introduce him to them.

At last the time of preparation came to an end. Specific instructions were given him of God. He was to boldly move among the people, proclaiming that the time was at hand for the manifesta-

tion of the Messiah in Israel. He was to call upon the people to repent, and be baptised as a token of his ministry, during which the Christ of God would be revealed.

At that stage, John did not know who was the Christ. He knew of his cousin, the carpenter Jesus of Nazareth, and of his righteous character (Mat. 3:14); he probably had met him at the regular feasts that were held in Jerusalem, which they would have attended in accordance with the Law of Moses; but he did not know then that he was the Christ of God. John disclosed this fact later on when he told his companions of the instructions he had received from heaven. He declared: "I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptising with water... He that sent me to baptise with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptiseth with the Holy Spirit..." (John 1:31-33).

What a dramatic mission! In the midst of the excitement of his reformation, whilst he was calling upon the people to repent and be baptised, John himself would be watching for the one whom Yahweh would reveal unto him was the Christ.

At last the "day of his shewing* unto Israel" dawned.

The Lesson of John's Preparation

Before proceeding to the actual ministry of John, let us consider the lesson of his preparation. He was called upon to spend long years in solitary isolation in the desert, preparing himself for the work before him. Day after day, month after month, year after year, he gave himself to this, alone. He dedicated himself completely, both physically and mentally, in order that he might fulfil the duty laid before him, because he realised that this was the greatest work that could be appointed him to do.

What of us? We are not called to do a work like that of John's, of course, but nevertheless, there is a work set before us, a work that we will perform more effectively if we follow the pattern set before us by these men of God. How often do we take up an important work of God without adequate preparation! We do so because we subconsciously think that the work of God is not as important as other work in which we might be engaged, or which takes precedence of our attention. John did not act like that. He was a man, with all the necessary qualifications to do Yahweh's work, into whom the Spirit of God had been poured, yet who had to give long, careful preparation in order to do it properly.

If we would serve Yahweh effectively we must recognise the need

* The Greek word *anadeixis* rendered 'shewing' (Lk. 1:80) signifies to enter upon an office. John was set forth as the divinely appointed Messenger of the Messiah, occupying the office of the Forerunner.

for proper preparation.

We acknowledge this in worldly matters. We know that a man will never become a good doctor, accountant, or engineer, unless he is prepared to give much time to study and practice in order to equip himself for the work before him. But this is not so readily admitted in the things of God. It is not always recognised that a person needs to be properly equipped for the all-important and wonderfully-privileged work of setting before men the gospel message, and that it takes time and careful preparation to accomplish this. Rather than rush into public work, a servant of God must engage in very thoughtful education and consideration of the important task, and thereby become better equipped for such labour.

As I write these words, and think about the long years of concentrated and intense preparation so patiently undertaken by John and men like him, I am reminded of long periods of wasted opportunities that my own life reveals. We are exhorted in the Bible to "redeem the time..." but I have wasted much time that could have been given very profitably, to the things of God.

I do not suppose that I am unique in that!

Young men and young women should learn early in life to give time for preparation in the things of God, that as experience develops, and age creeps up, they find themselves properly equipped to take over those duties that they might have opportunity to do. John's years of preparation provide a wonderful example for all those who would serve God with true devotion and dedication.

And there is no more important work than that.

John's Startling Appearance

John emerged from the desert with a fiery, direct and personal message.* "Repent ye," he demanded, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:2). The field of his ministry was the wild, hilly country of Judea, which leads down to the deep rift of the Jordan valley. Here rugged, barren mountains frown over steep, silent, sullen valleys. But the silence was now broken by the harsh, stern, peremptory voice of the Reformer, heaping upon the people words of rebuke and warning, calling upon them to be baptised for repentance in the river Jordan.

The response was immediate. His startling message, the novelty of his appearance, his austere mode of life, together with the general expectation of Messiah's coming to liberate them from the Roman yoke, combined to draw multitudes after him. It became popular to

*The Diaglott renders Mat. 3:2 as "The Royal Majesty of the heavens has approached," and that seems to be the real import of the message as indicated by the next verse, explanatory of it, which states that John came to "prepare the way of the Lord." It was in that sense that the kingdom had drawn nigh.

hear his uncompromising message, so that from towns and villages throughout the whole country, people from all classes of society flocked to hear him. Civilians and soldiers, the wealthy and the poor, priests and people, all came in their thousands to be spellbound by his harsh eloquence, and the power of his teaching.

How different he was to the normal teachers in their midst. The ordinary scribe or Pharisee, "sleek with good living and supercilious with general respect," were wont to stand before the people in luxurious robes and with broad phylacteries, to minister some sleepy words of edification based upon some hair-splitting theory associated with the formalism of the Law.

But John, by his very appearance, was sufficient to rouse people out of their lethargy. Long before his firm voice rang out vibrating with scorn and indignation, they felt the impact of his presence. They saw in the mantle of camel's hair thrown over his shoulders, the leathern girdle around his waist, the unshorn locks of hair on his head and face, a man of character used to extreme self-denial.

In his strong, determined bearing, and his forthright words of rebuke and warning, they recognised one who, like Elijah his prototype, would stand unquailing before the purple-clad Ahabs and adulterous Jezebels of the day.

And there were many such in those turbulent times. It was a period of violence and great wickedness, of political stress and flagrant corruption, a time when national feeling was rising in a tidal-wave of hatred that threatened to drown the current order in a flood of bloodshed.

Clashes between Jews and Romans were common, when the very temple area became sometimes the battleground of riots during the feasts in Jerusalem. It was frequently found necessary to increase the Roman Guard against the violence that often broke out.

Judea was restless, in a dangerous mood, anticipating a leader who would rid it of the shackles of Rome.

They looked in vain for help among the leaders of the day, for "vile men were high in place."

In Rome, the infamous Tiberius ruled, shocking even that wicked city by his excesses. In Jerusalem, the weak, cruel, insolent Pontius Pilate held sway, maddening a fanatical people with his extortions and massacres. In Galilee, Herod held court, presenting a vile example of ungodliness and lust. In the temple, Caiaphas and Annas divided the functions of a priesthood which they disgraced (Luke 3:1-2). Throughout Judea, lesser authorities ruled by corruption, or destroyed the principles of religion by a cold formalism that robbed Yahweh's Truth of its power.

No wonder the imagination of the common people was excited as much by the very appearance of John, as by the fiery message he

proclaimed. It promised so much more than the unsettled conditions they experienced.

They listened to him in awe and with respect. They observed his austere diet, and recognised that here was a righteous and completely dedicated man (Mark 6:20). His reputation steadily grew until he was acknowledged by all, even rulers submitting to him (Mat. 11:11, John 5:35), and his disciples were respected throughout the land (Mat. 9:14).

John's Stern and Forthright Preaching

We are not told in the gospel records how long John's ministry continued, but it is obvious, from the way in which his disciples were ultimately accepted throughout the nation, that some considerable time must have elapsed. Most likely, in accordance with an interpretation of Daniel 9:27, his ministry occupied some three and a half years.*

John chose Bethabara, on the eastern side of the Jordan, as a convenient place for baptising (John 1:28; RV). It has been difficult to identify this site, but many authorities believe that it was close to the place where Joshua led the tribes across the river to the Promised Land — thus nationally baptising them as they passed through the waters to commence a new life on the other side.

If so (and Bethabara signifies *House of the Crossing; Ferry-house*), it was a place rich in significance for the Jewish people.

The scenery is like the message of John, harsh and unyielding. The steep, hilly uplands of Judea fall away sharply to the deep rift of the Jordan valley, at the bottom of which the river winds its tortuous way southwards to the Dead Sea. The valley, hedged in by hills, catches and holds the fiery heat of the eastern sun.

Here the crowds gathered, to hear a voice that matched the severity of the scenery in its harsh, unyielding tones, to be scorched with a fiery message that burned into their consciences more powerfully than the effect of the sun above upon their bodies.

In clear, forthright, dogmatic terms, the Reformer set before the people the folly of their ways, warning them of inevitable judgment if they persisted in their course of action. He proclaimed the imminence of the coming of the Christ, pleading with them to prepare for that wonderful event by a renewed dedication of themselves to God.

Moved by the vividness and urgency of his preaching, the people

* Daniel 9:27 says that God would "confirm the covenant with many for one week." The same verse divides that week into two halves, in the midst of which (or "latter half" as the Septuagint renders it), Christ would be crucified. It seems, therefore, that the first "half," or three and a half years, relates to John's ministry, whilst the "latter half," or final three and a half years, points to the ministry of the Lord which ended with his death on the cross causing "sacrifice and oblation to cease."

submitted. Multitudes from Jerusalem and throughout Judea, flocked to this spot to be baptised of him, confessing their sins as they did so, publicly testifying their determination to seek God in truth and in anticipation of the coming Messiah.

A wave of excitement swept all classes of society, catching even the attention of the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. They came down to stand apart in little groups, watching the scene of activity by the river bank with cold, supercilious, disapproving contempt.

But the cold water of their contempt could not quench the fiery zeal of the Preacher. He had for them a special message, and as he saw them standing there, he directed it to them, singling them out from the multitude. Publicly he indicted them for an attitude of mind and an example to the people that must inevitably end in disaster. He condemned them for their cold formalism that produced no fruits of righteousness, for the poison of their teaching that demonstrated they were no more than a generation of vipers, the very brood of the serpent's seed, for their sterile leadership that left the nation unproductive and fit only for the axe and the fire.

The people listened amazed at the words of fire and feeling that poured forth from the lips of the rough, uncultured, desert-prophet as he indicted the lordly, sophisticated leaders whose rich dress demonstrated that they saw no need of abstinence or self-denial.

"O generation of vipers," declared John to the Pharisees, "who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance; and think not to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore, every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mat. 3:7-10).

"These stones" probably referred to the twelve stones that Joshua had set up, perhaps at this very spot, as representative of true Israel (Josh. 4:19-24): an Israel that Yahweh will ultimately raise up by resurrection, to be children unto Abraham — a status that the Pharisees claimed in word but denied by their actions.

The lordly leaders of Israel seethed with indignation as they felt the sting of John's words, and saw the effect they had on the multitude. They could do nothing for the time being, however, for the rising tide of his popularity was flowing so powerfully, that to openly oppose him would jeopardise their own standing with the people.

They remembered these words, however, and harboured a grudge against the prophet that later took the form of an insidious undermining of his influence. Though, perforce, they were "willing for a season to rejoice in his light," they really did not accept him. They hated him for his public rebukes, sought to question his authority (John 1:24-25), disputed with his disciples (ch. 3:25), and ultimately

rejoiced at his waning popularity (ch. 3:26; 4:1).

But that was later. Meanwhile they had to endure the public rebuke.

Now the people pressed for attention. Questions flew at the prophet, "What shall we do?" John's answer was clear and to the point. He was not a mere theorist with a doctrine of words but not of deeds. They must "repent," which means, not merely to be sorry for sins, but to change their minds and ways.* They must prepare for the coming of the Messiah. They must practise self-denial at the cost of their own convenience. "Let him with two coats impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat let him do likewise..."

The people listened and observed. They could see that the prophet was a living witness of the message he delivered unto them. He was a man who gave everything to serve God, who had but one cloak, who was satisfied with the rough food of the field... a man who lived the things he taught, whose life was a prayer in action, a daily communion with God who was ever-present to his mind.

Such a preacher is bound to find respect for his message!

There was a small group of publicans, or "tax-gatherers" (as the word should be rendered) present. They were hard-headed business men who recognised value when they saw it. They were impressed with what they heard and observed. They could see that this man was not delivering a sermon without power; nor told the people to do something he was not prepared to do himself. One of their number shouted the question that was in all their minds: "And what shall *we* do?"

Instantly there came the reply: Give away all thought of extortion; do not seek to find satisfaction in materialism; learn to serve God!

There were some soldiers present. They were men with no thought of materialism, who gave up their life to serve the State. "What shall we do?" they asked.

They were warned against violence, unfairness, and discontent: "Do violence to no man; neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14).

In short, John told the people of Judea that their lives had to become transformed. They were the "people of God," but did not manifest godly qualities. It was not required that they break up their homes, leave their businesses, give up their vocation, but they did have to so conduct themselves in the sphere of their normal duties that they honoured God by their actions.

---

* The word "repentance" is from the Greek verb *metanoeo*, and signifies, to change one's mind or purpose. It does not just mean to be sorry, though sorrow should result when wrongdoing is pointed out, but has the idea of changing direction. The Jews who heard Peter were made sorry (Acts 2:37), and were then told to "repent:" to change their understanding and attitude toward the things of God's revelation (v. 38).

He had a further message for all, that emphasised the urgency of the reformation: The promised Messiah was about to be revealed in their midst! The people indeed, had been wondering in their hearts whether John might not be the Christ destined, as they thought, to lead them against their enemies. The idea was attractive, and they had discussed it among themselves. Perhaps he would organise a crusade against the oppressing Rome; certainly they would be prepared to follow such a leader as the fiery, dogmatic John!

But the desert prophet swept aside the heady thought. He had no such desire or ambition. He was not the Christ, nor was he prepared to usurp the position or work that belonged alone to the Messiah. He was but the humble servant of the One who would shortly be manifested in their midst, One so exalted that the great prophet declared he was not worthy to unloose even the latchet of his shoe. The voice of the Baptist rang out through the clear, still air: "I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose; he shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire; Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable" (Mat. 3:11-12).

So he spoke of the purging influence of Christ's teaching. The fan he referred to is the winnowing fan, that acted as a bellows when the wind was calm. The figure is taken from the winnowing of grain, the action of the fan blowing the chaff into a heap after which it was burned, leaving the grain to be stored in the garner. John thus warned the people that Christ would carefully judge between the chaff and the grain.

The people may not have understood what he meant, but the advent of such a dramatic preacher, with such a stirring message, certainly excited them.*

The Baptism of Jesus

If the people were excited, so also must have been John himself! He had been told that during the course of his ministry, the Christ of God would be revealed, and doubtless, as day followed day, he would look expectantly at the people pressing around him, wondering whether he was there somewhere in the crowd before him.

But time went by and nothing happened. The people continued to throng about him, crowding down to the water's edge to witness the

* John's character reveals a blend of self-denial (Mat. 3:4), courage (Mat. 3:7; 14:4), humility (Mark 1:7), holiness (Mark 6:20), burning zeal (John 5:35). He was noted for his powerful preaching (Mark 1:5), his ministry of witness (John 10:41), his testimony of Jesus (John 1:29-36), the results of his ministry (Mat. (9:14), the honor paid him (Mat. 11:11), and his tragic death (Mat. 14:10).

baptisms, or to personally submit to it; listening to his clear, powerful voice as it rang out proclaiming, preaching, predicting and pleading. So powerful was the impact of his words, that his disciples were multiplying until they had grown to a distinct group throughout Judea. More and more people flocked to him, to be led down into the swiftly flowing stream of the Jordan, that their sins might be figuratively washed away down into the Dead Sea.



But still the Christ had not been manifested.

In due course, however, news of the reformation travelled north to Galilee, and to the little town of Nazareth. The Lord Jesus heard of it. He was then about thirty years of age (Luke 3:23), the age when priests are said to enter upon their duties, an age significantly mentioned seven times in Numbers 4: vv. 3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47, as the age when the Levites should commence active public work.

At last the Voice of Yahweh came to the Carpenter of Galilee, telling him that the time had come to put down his tools, and engage in a new form of work. His ministry as prophet, in preparation for his priestly and kingly duties, was about to begin.

He left Nazareth to visit the Preacher with the realisation that he was about to set forth into a new field of service that would take him to the stake on Golgotha's hill.

Down by the banks of the Jordan, he saw a tremendous crowd thronging the Forerunner. He heard his clear, firm voice, vibrant with feeling, as he preached to the people; saw the impact of his fiery eloquence upon them as they pressed forward to hear and to be baptised.

The Lord took his place among those who queued up for this purpose.

At last his time came.

John, emerging from the water, looked into the face of his cousin. He knew Jesus as an outstanding, righteous young man, a man without sin as far as he knew, a man whom, in his humility, he believed exceeded his own purity of life.

He did not realise, at that moment, that Jesus was the Christ.

John only knew that his baptism, designed for repentance, was for the wicked and rebellious, and not for such as the wonderful young

man before him, whose shining, intelligent eyes, whose solemn, thoughtful countenance and noble bearing reflected the upright life that he lived.

John dissuaded him. "I have need to be baptised of thee, and thou comest to me?"

But the gracious, wondrous reply came: ***"Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."***

John wondered at the meaning of the words that he did not, at that time, quite understand; but he could not resist the graciousness of their appeal. He conducted his cousin down into the water, and baptised him.

Jesus passed under the water, the token of submission to a living death, and then arose again.

To the people looking on from the the banks of the river, it was but another baptism. But to the Lord Jesus, it was a public declaration of his intentions, a foreshadowing of his own death upon the cross. Baptism is a symbol of death, burial and resurrection, and by being baptised, Jesus was publicly revealing that he had died to the dictates of the flesh, and lived only to do the will of His Father. He had no sins to atone for; but his action was a testimony of what is required of all. If men would please God, they must learn to die to sin, to deny the dictates of the flesh, and learn to do the will of God. Jesus was baptised, not merely for his benefit, but also for the benefit of others, to teach them what they should do. "Thus it becometh ***us*** to fulfil all righteousness," he told John. What he did in submitting to baptism, others must do if they would be saved. And though they cannot manifest the complete obedience he revealed, they can, at least, try to do so, and seek forgiveness for sins they commit, a forgiveness that will be granted them if they ask it in Christ's name.

John and Jesus came up out of the water, and on the bank of the river, the Lord bowed his head in prayer (Luke 3:21). It was a most solemn moment, and the watching crowd must have sensed it.

And at that moment, the startled John received his sign.

His attention was suddenly drawn to the heavens. It seemed to his wondering eyes as though they had been opened. It may have been caused by a bright shining forth of light, drawing, as it were, the curtain of heaven aside. Then he saw what seemed to be a dove, but what he recognised as the symbol of the Spirit of God, lighting upon Jesus, anointing him, proclaiming him to be the Christ (the Anointed), setting him officially in his office, consecrating him as Yahweh's prophet to the people.

It was the visible manifestation of the divine blessing, coming "upon the head of the (antitypical) Joseph, the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren" (Deu. 33:16).

It was in the form of a dove. And even that is most significant.

The dove was the only bird used in sacrifice under the Law, and in Hebrew is called Yonah (Jonah). The peculiar form by which Jesus was anointed by the Spirit thus identified him with the Jonah of the Old Testament, and later, he was to tell the people that the only sign that they would receive would be "the sign of the prophet Jonas; for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mat. 12:39-40).

The spirit alighting upon him in the form of a dove (a Jonah) was a foreshadowing of his destiny.

But all was not yet over; a Voice now sounded from heaven, the Voice of Yahweh: "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I delight" (Rotherham).

The term "the beloved," is frequently used throughout the Scripture for the Lord, and identifies him with the antitypical David whose name means *Beloved.**

Here was the antitypical Jonah, the antitypical David: the prophet, the sacrifice, and the king of Israel.

Here was the Messiah!

John realised, as he looked at his cousin with enlightened eyes, that this moment represented the climax of his life's work (John 3:30).

It was a solemn moment for both. The Lord was now to commence the public ministry which, beginning with the figurative death of baptism, was to end with the baptism of literal death upon the stake (Luke 12:50).

He felt the need of quiet communion with his Father and quickly left the crowds to seek it.

Deputation From Jerusalem

The effect of the reformation reached such widespread proportions that it could no longer be ignored. It became the subject of discussion on the part of the leaders of the nation in Jerusalem, and an official deputation of priests and Levites was sent to John to enquire as to whether he were the Christ.

Plainly, unequivocally, and simply, he replied: "I am not!"

Well, who was he? An answer must be taken back to the rulers in Jerusalem. So the questioning continued: "Are you Elijah?"

"No, I am not!"

"Are you the prophet Moses predicted would come (Deu. 18:15)?"

---

* Jesus is sometimes called "David" in prophecies relating to him, as, for example, in Eze. 34:23. The "one shepherd" of this verse is undoubtedly the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, and yet he is styled "My Servant David." The name "David," however, means *Beloved*, a title that was given the Lord Jesus at his baptism. See the marginal references at Mat. 3:17 for other Scriptures relating to the Beloved.

"No!"

"Who are you then? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What do you say of yourself?"

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as Isaiah predicted."

A voice! What did he mean by a voice? If he is only a herald, where is his authority to do the things he is doing? They pressed John with their questions: "Why do you baptise, then, if you are not Christ, or Elijah, or the Prophet that shall come?"

Again the answer came, but not very satisfactory, because they could not understand it: "I baptise with water, but there standeth one among you, whom you know not; he it is who coming after me is



The tortuous River Jordan with the wilderness of Judea in the background.

preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose!"

What did he mean? One among us! What did this fiery fanatic from the desert mean by these words? The deputation could make nothing of them, and returned to Jerusalem as ignorant as when they left.

And John must have been as puzzled as the deputation. For where was the Christ, anyway? Some 40 days* or more had passed since he was baptised, but then he had withdrawn himself, and was heard of no more. John must have felt at a loss as to what to do next.

Where, indeed, was Jesus?

---

* It is obvious from John 1:29 that the deputation approached John after the period of temptation in the wilderness, for it was on "the next day" that John again saw the Lord emerging from the desert, and gave public testimony of his Messiahship, whilst the following day (v. 35), the Lord began to gather disciples to himself. The sequence of passages relating to John's ministry as found in the four Gospels seems to be as follows:
[1]. Appearance of John in the wilderness of Judea (Mat. 3:1-4); [2]. He baptises at the Jordan (v. 5); [3]. He warns the Pharisees and Sadducees (vv. 7-10); [4]. He answers the questions of the people (Luke 3:10-14); [5]. He denies the rumours of the people that he is the Christ (Luke 3:15-18; Mat. 3:11-12); [6]. Jesus is baptised (Mat. 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22); [7]. Jesus leaves for the desert (Mat. 4:1); [8]. John is approached by the deputation from Jerusalem (John 1:19-28); [9]. The "next day" John sees Jesus coming unto him having returned from the temptation in the wilderness (John 1:29, 35, 43).

THE BAPTISM PERFORMED BY JOHN

A Conversation with Mr. Phillips.

Editor: "I have been reading of the ministry of John the Baptist recently. It certainly demonstrates clearly the mode of baptism."

Mr. Phillips: "There is no doubt about that! Note that it says of the Lord that he "went up straightway out of the water" (Mat. 3:16) showing conclusively that he was bodily immersed."

Editor: "Was there any difference in the form of baptism as conducted by John from that conducted by the followers of the Lord?"

Mr. Phillips: "No, the form was the same: all were fully immersed in water; the difference was in the significance behind the two baptisms."

Editor: "What was the difference?"

Mr. Phillips: "The difference is explained by Paul in Acts 19:4: 'John baptised with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus'."

Editor: "But is not repentance involved when one is baptised into the name of Christ Jesus? Did not Peter tell the people that they should 'repent and be baptised' (Acts 2:38)?"

Mr. Phillips: "That is true, but then Peter adds, 'in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.' That is the difference. John's baptism was merely for repentance. It proclaimed a change of mind and attitude on the part of the one baptised, but it could not bring forgiveness of sins. There had to be belief in the Lord Jesus for that. He told the people to look forward to the baptism of the Lord."

Editor: "Where is that recorded?"

Mr. Phillips: "In Matthew 3:11. There John Baptist says, 'I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I... he shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire'."

Editor: "And what does that mean?"

Mr. Phillips: "It means that John recognised the limitations of what he was doing. When he said that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit, he was making reference to the power of Christ's teaching (John 6:63; Eph. 6:17; 1John 5:6-8). A true baptism is a baptism of understanding, of fulness of belief, as Philip told the Ethiopian (see Acts 8:36-37). This Spirit-Word cleanses the heart to serve God, and prepares a person for service to God, like the washing of the animal under the Law of Moses prepared it for the burnt offering. The animal was slain, then dismembered, then washed thoroughly both inside and out, and finally placed in order on the altar to be consumed by fire (see *The Story of the Bible*, page 157). When the fire of God's Truth consumes a person, he becomes a 'living sacrifice' (Rom. 12:1), a burnt offering as it were. That is the 'fire' by which a person is baptised when he comes to the Lord Jesus."

Editor: "Was baptism practised before the days of John?"

Mr. Phillips: "Yes, indeed. If a heathen embraced Judaism, he was first instructed, then circumcised, and finally baptised. The Talmud (*Kerithot 9a*) taught: 'Your fathers were not received into the covenant except through circumcision, the baptismal bath, and sprinkling of blood; so they are not to be received (i.e., as proselytes) except through circumcision, the baptismal bath, and the sprinkling of blood'."

Editor: "That is very interesting. It means that Jews were familiar with the rite of baptism."

Mr. Phillips: "They were certainly familiar with the rite, but not for those Jews whom John commanded to be baptised. In their understanding baptism was for heathens entering Judaism, not for Jews who were already in covenant relationship with God through Moses' national baptism (1Cor. 10:1). But John's baptism taught them that though they were Jews, they were no more than heathens in God's sight, and were living like Gentiles. At the same time as John Baptist administered his baptism, however, he taught the people to look forward to the coming of the Messiah. It was, therefore, a pointing forward to what the Lord would accomplish, as baptism today is a looking back on what was then achieved. Because his baptism was merely for repentance, he told Jesus there was no need for him to be baptised; it was only for sinners. John could not understand why Jesus insisted upon being baptised, for he was not a sinner; but the Lord knew, for he saw in it a foreshadowing of his death upon the stake. Of course, at that time, John did not know his cousin, Jesus, was the Christ. Later, however, when the revelation came, he could see the full import of the Lord's action in submitting to baptism, and therefore, pointing him out to his companions, declared: 'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.' Thus, whilst John's baptism pointed forward to what would be accomplished, it presented no hope apart from the sacrifice of Christ which then lay in the future. Once Christ had offered himself upon the stake, baptism took on a new meaning, for now a person is baptised 'into his death' (Rom. 6:1-3). When Jesus went down into the water, he could well have had the words of the Psalm in mind, 'Behold, I come, O God, to do Thy will' (Heb. 10:7; Psa. 40:7-8). His baptism was a token of that fact, and ours must be also, for Christ taught 'He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved' (Mark 16:16). Belief, baptism and obedience are the three important steps to salvation" (see Mat. 28:20).

Editor: "Thank you, Mr. Phillips, that is very helpful.

Chapter 2

THE FAST IN THE WILDERNESS

THE experience of his baptism powerfully affected the Lord Jesus. He had heard the Voice of Yahweh publicly proclaiming his divine Sonship, testifying God's pleasure in the conduct of His Son. He had felt within himself the surge of the Holy Spirit which he now possessed without measure. He had been emotionally stimulated by the momentous occasion and the realisation that he was about to grapple with the real problems of his life's work, challenging the forces of darkness that held sway over the minds of men.

He had an overwhelming desire for solitude to think the matter through, and for close communion with his Father that he might gather strength and guidance to successfully perform it.

Forty Days of Communion

He wanted to be alone with God, and the seclusion of the wilderness provided the means. He hurried away from the busy banks of the Jordan, and sought the isolation of the desert. Here, for a time, he withdrew from the world, and a veil of silence hid him from view. It seems as though all creation was subdued whilst he gathered strength for the battle before him (Rom. 8:18-22). He was "with the beasts of the field" (Mark 1:13), but, as predicted in Psalm 91:13, they did not molest him. They had nothing to fear from the lonely, quiet, abstracted man, who had thoughts and feeling for nothing but God at the time. His mind was on a high plane of exaltation, so that the needs of the body were subordinated to it. All his desires were channelled into complete unity with his Father, so that even the pangs of hunger went unnoticed for a time.

He fasted for forty days.

Judean wilderness: scene of the temptation of the Lord.



The number is significant, and is constantly repeated in Scripture. Moses twice humbled himself in prayer and fasting for 40 days (Deu. 9:9,18), Elijah fasted for 40 days (1Kings 19:8), Israel's probation in the wilderness lasted 40 years (Num. 14:33-34); the punishment of a man worthy to be beaten was 40 stripes (Deu. 25:3); Egypt was humbled for 40 years (Eze. 29:11-13); 40 days purification followed the birth of a boy and twice 40 for a girl (Lev. 12:4-5); the rain continued 40 days and nights (Gen. 7:4, 12); Jonah warned Nineveh of impending disaster for 40 days (Jonah 3:4); Christ taught his disciples 40 days between his resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:3, 9); and after 40 years preaching of the gospel by the apostles, the Jewish State was destroyed in AD70.

The number 40 thus has a special significance, and points to probation, humiliation, affliction and punishment.

Doubtless during these forty days of fasting, the Lord Jesus meditated upon the Scriptures that predicted his trials and sufferings, and thus in prayer and thought lived the period of probation and humiliation that was before him.

At the end of that time he hungered (Mat. 4:2).

The Devil Comes to Jesus

Forty days of intense mental concentration had their natural emotional reaction on the Lord. He felt completely exhausted, and physically at the lowest point of resistance. His body began to claim attention; he felt a consuming hunger.

In this condition, the tempter found him.

The tempter (Mat. 4:3) is also called the Devil. This word does not relate to a wicked angel presiding over the hell of sulphuric flames, but is from the Greek *diabolos*, which signifies "false accuser; adversary; calumniator." The Greek word expresses that which causes one to pass over, or fall over, a line — the "line" being the standard of righteousness set by God.

The word "devil" is used in the Bible in many ways. Jesus told his disciples that one of them was "a devil" (John 6:70); he called Peter "Satan" on one occasion when Peter spoke unwisely (Mat. 16:23). Human nature is identified with the "devil" in Heb. 2:14, and the civil authorities of Smyrna are given that title in Rev. 2:10. The word signifies any person, thing or influence that is opposed to God. It never relates to a fallen angel of heaven, for such a doctrine is not taught in the Bible.

Who was the devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness: a person or an influence? Was it someone speaking with him? Or was it human nature asserting itself?

Some feel that it was Jesus himself, and that the temptation came from within his own mind. They suggest that very natural, but

ungodly, thoughts came into the mind of Christ which he instantly repelled. For example, how natural would it be for a man to want bread after hungering for forty days!

But there are serious objections to this suggestion.

For example, it is clearly recorded that "the tempter came to him" (Mat. 4:3), and the word, in the original, means to approach him. An entirely different Greek word would be used to denote "to come into existence," as if a thought suddenly presented itself to him. Additionally, after the period of temptation was completed, Matthew records that "Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him" (ch. 4:11). If the "devil" represented the natural mind of Christ, then "angels" must similarly represent the spiritual "mind of God." But is it not true that throughout his trial, the Lord Jesus upheld the "mind of God" in all those circumstances? Therefore it cannot be affirmed that he was void of his Father's Word during the period of temptation.

Further, the basis of the temptation was not to make stones into bread, but to demonstrate that he was the Son of God *"If thou be the Son of God..."*. Surely Jesus would not doubt that fact! He knew that Joseph was not his Father; he had felt the influence of God upon him from childhood; he had recognised God as Father at the age of 12 without any doubt; he had recently come from the experience of Jordan where he had heard the divine Voice proclaiming him to be the "beloved Son;" he had felt the Holy Spirit filling him without measure, and he had been in communion with the Father for forty days!

Could such an one doubt that he was the Son of God?

It seems difficult to believe so.

And note that his divine relationship is the basis of the temptation — not merely the satisfaction of hunger!

The Tempter did not say: "You are hungry, make bread out of these stones;" he said, "IF THOU BE THE SON OF GOD, command that these stones be made bread."

In the following temptations, the "devil" went further, he quoted the Bible to justify a sin. Would the Lord, with his mind filled with the Scriptures, knowing them as no other man, helped by the Spirit that guided him into all wisdom, and possessing the Mind of his Father, use the Bible to support a sin?

It seems unthinkable. And further, the Tempter actually *misquoted* the Psalm! Psa. 91:11 includes the important words "to keep thee in all thy ways," but this vital qualification was omitted from the question of the Tempter!

Who, then, could the devil have been?

He must have been a Jew, because he spoke of Jesus as the Son of God; he must have known the Scriptures, because he freely quoted

them; he must have had some significant influence in the country because he invited the Lord to submit to his lead, and to share the proposed victory of "all the kingdoms of the world (Gr. *kosmos*, the existing order of things; i.e., the Roman Empire).

That is about all we can say of him.

He could have been a priest in high position, or a leader among the Pharisees or Sadducees; certainly a man with great influence. It is obvious that there were many of these who were then awaiting the coming of the Messiah, in the hope that he would lead the nation from under the thraldom of Rome, to the glory that was promised it when Messiah would come (Mic. 4:8; Isa. 2:2-4). Some of these leaders had been down to hear John, and had discussed among themselves as to whether he was the Messiah. Indeed, such a question had been asked John, with possibly the veiled suggestion that he might become a national leader delivering Jewry from its enemies — only to be severely rebuked by the Baptist. No doubt, some of these leaders had been present at that dramatic moment when the Lord stepped forth from the crowd to be baptised, and the light of heaven had been seen flashing down upon him, and the voice of heaven heard thundering out its message. Perhaps they thought that if he were, indeed, the promised Messiah about whom the Scriptures spoke of such glory and triumph, they would bring him into their counsels of State.

If so, it was not the only time that Jews called upon Jesus to assume the position of earthly leader. On another occasion, at least, the Jewish people tried to "take him by force, to make him a king" (John 6:15).

But was he really the Son of God?

They did not want to make a mistake, but when they came looking for him, he was missing.

A search was made for him, and at the end of the 40 days, he was found in the desert.

So the Tempter came to Jesus. Here was an excellent opportunity to test and see if he really were the Son of God, or whether a mistake had been made at the banks of the Jordan.*

* Such seems to be the idea if the "devil" was one of the Jewish leaders of the time.

Chapter 3

THE TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS

A consuming hunger dominated the Lord Jesus after his forty days' fast in the wilderness, and the Tempter played upon this in his first attack. Scattered about the ground were stones, curiously shaped in the rounded forms in which loaves of bread were made by many housewives in Judea, and they provided the suggestion for the first temptation.

Appeal To The Lust Of The Flesh

"If thou be the Son of God," declared the Tempter, "command that these stones be made bread!" "...*If* thou be the Son of God!" was a taunt the Lord was also destined to hear as he hung helpless on the cross (Mat. 27:49). Thus, at both the beginning and end of his ministry he had the same challenge flung at him, as though the devil then "returned for a season."

The presence of the stones gave point to the temptation. The pangs of hunger work all the more powerfully when they are stimulated by a lively imagination, and as the Lord glanced at them, he would feel the desire to satisfy his need more keenly.

And why not do so? Is it not legitimate for men to eat? Did not Yahweh satisfy the famishing Elijah with food? Should not the Son of God be cared for in all necessary things? Do we not enjoy the preservation of life through the miraculous work of God in providing our food in season?

All these questions might be answered in the affirmative. But the Tempter was not concerned with those matters; he was not even concerned with satisfying the hunger of the Lord. He wanted the Lord to demonstrate by miracle two things: [1] That he was the Son of God; and [2] that he could and would, satisfy the needs of the flesh.

But the Lord had not come into the world, nor had the Spirit been given to him for that purpose. His was a life of denial, not of satisfying the flesh. The apostle Paul recorded of him: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered..." (Heb. 5:8).

It was necessary for Jesus to set an example of absolute denial of the flesh in order to serve God completely. He had complete trust in the Father to provide him with the necessities of life, and was content to wait His convenience. Never once was the Spirit used by him to satisfy his own personal needs or wants of the body. Never once (even under extreme provocation) did he allow even the most legitimate desires of the flesh to deflect him from the course of duty.

He set the pattern of his life in rejecting this first temptation.

He reminded the Tempter of the history of Israel in the wilderness. Yahweh had suffered the people to hunger, and then had fed them with food from heaven, in order to impress upon them a most important lesson. The experience of Israel demonstrated an important principle, and the Lord now reminded the Tempter of it.

"It is written,* Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Yahweh" (Deu. 8:3).

"It is written." The Lord directed his adversary to the Scriptures which are capable of sustaining people under trial, and which provided a complete answer to the question, "Art thou the Son of God?"

Thus, in this first temptation, the adversary had called upon the Lord to demonstrate his sonship by revealing his ability to satisfy the cravings of the flesh. In answer, Jesus had pointed to the Scriptures which reveal the need of denying the flesh to serve God.

Appeal To The Pride Of Life

In answer to the first temptation, Jesus had declared his complete trust in God to provide the necessities of life in His own good time.

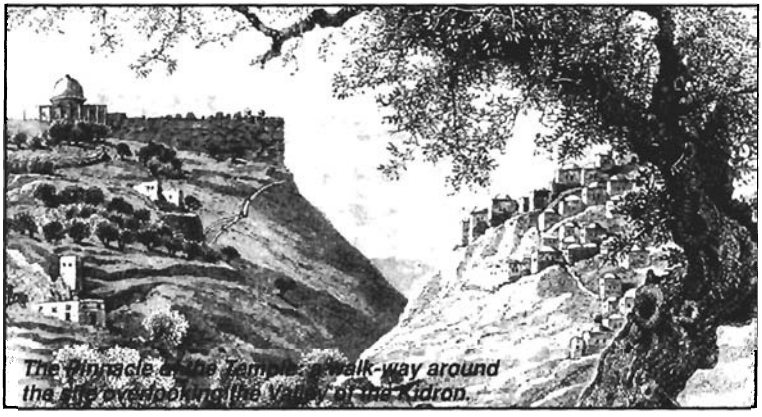
The Tempter now attacked him on that very point: *his trust in God*. In a vivid description, he took Jesus in thought to a pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem, perhaps to the top of Solomon's porch which overlooked a deep, rugged valley. It was itself some 150 ft. (45 mts) high, and built on a wall over 400 ft. (122 mts) high. From this dizzy height, the head might well swim as one looked down into the rocky valley far below.

As he described this spot, the Tempter put forth his second temptation. Jesus had rebutted the first challenge by reference to Scripture which emphasised his trust in God. Now the Tempter cunningly used these very methods to set before the Lord his scheme.

"If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time, thou dash thy foot against a stone!" It was a clever, but specious use of Scripture. The Tempter was appealing to fleshly pride by suggesting a dramatic demonstration of divine care. People would more willingly follow a leader capable of such overshadowing supernatural influence, and protection.

But the Tempter had actually misquoted Scripture: something the

* In the Greek, the phrase "it is written," is in the perfect tense, indicating that which remains and abides. The principle enunciated by the Lord on this occasion is an abiding eternal lesson: the importance of continually consulting the Word for direction in the circumstances of life.



The Pinnacle of the Temple, a walk-way around the city overlooking the Valley of the Kidron.

Son of God would never do. Actually, Psalm 91:11-12 reads: "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee *to keep thee in all Thy ways*..." and these words limit the promised protection, to the end in view. The Psalm does not mean that God would protect His Son if he deliberately threw himself down from such a height, but it meant that if he kept close to his Father, his ministry would be a success and he would have divine protection from all his enemies to that end, until the time came to deliver up his life in the way appointed.

This attack was all the more subtle inasmuch as the Tempter had quoted the Bible in support of his suggestion. How often is this done by worldly men! How frequently are the Scriptures misused and misquoted to support that which is wrong in both teaching and practice!

The Tempter did that on this occasion.

But again the Lord rebutted the suggestion by a further reference to the Bible which put its teaching in proper balance. He answered: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God..."

The word in the original (Gr. *ekpeirazo*) rendered "tempt" is a more intensive form than the verb usually used. It signifies to tempt to the extreme, to presume on God's protecting power, to rely upon His miraculous intervention to save from the results of one's own presumption and folly.

That is entirely different to an innocent, childlike trust. A real trust is based upon complete belief in God; to tempt Him is to seek some means of proving His ability or power to save. The former is based on confidence; the latter is founded on doubt. But the Lord's complete command of Scripture, sharpened by the Spirit itself (Isa. 11:1-2), enabled him to instantly see the evil in the suggestion, and to completely rebut it by reference to the very means the Tempter used in an attempt to give power to his words.

Appeal To The Lust Of The Eyes

A final temptation remained. As the promised Messiah, it is the purpose of God that he should rule the world. But the Lord knew clearly that the path to glory lay through the shadow of the valley of death, for the cross must come before the crown.

He had expressed as much at his baptism, when he had declared, "thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," for his baptism was a symbol of death, burial and resurrection.

But the Tempter had a short cut to glory! Figuratively, he took Jesus up in a high mountain, and described in a panoramic vista the glory and majesty of world power. It was a very attractive and seductive view that he set out, a position of political eminence even then held by the infamous and gloomy Tiberius, Emperor of Rome. The Tempter, whoever he was, exercised considerable political influence and power in the nation (Luke 4:6), and believed that with the aid of the promised Messiah, all the world could be brought into subjection to him and to the Lord. To obtain this power and glory, however, Christ would have to submit to his leadership, to "bow down before him," and would have to follow the plans he had skilfully contrived to that end, and which he was confident would bring success. "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me," he declared.

The Lord knew that the idea was impossible, even if it were desirable. The Tempter doubtless imagined that if Christ were the Son of God he would have all the powers of the universe at his command, no matter whether he obeyed the will of God or not. His was the same philosophy as of the serpent who expressed as much to Eve in the very beginning (Gen. 3).

But that was not so.

Though Jesus was the Son of God, he still had to conquer over self before there would be placed into his hands "all power in heaven and in earth" (Mat. 28:18).

The Tempter imagined that with Christ's power harnessed to his national ambitions and plans of conquest, success would be assured, and the prophecies which speak of world dominion stemming from Jerusalem, would then be fulfilled.

Christ knew differently. His understanding of the Word revealed to him that he was to be manifested as the "Lamb of God to be offered for the sin of the world" before he could be revealed as the "Lion of the tribe of Judah." To reverse this order of things was impossible; to seek political glory without laying the foundation for saving men's lives, would be to defeat the main purpose of his birth (1Tim. 1:15); it would have been disobedience! He instantly rejected the idea.

Turning to the Tempter, he commanded: "Get thee hence, Satan;

for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

Once more, his command of Scripture stood him in good stead. Again, the thought of sin presented by his enemy was expelled by the power of the Word. The Tempter could see that it was impossible to shake Christ's resolve. Jesus knew that there was but one way to gain the end in view, and that was by complete obedience to the will of God, as expressed in the Word. That Christ determined to do, and three times stated his determination to the Tempter.

So the Tempter left him, but only for a time. Christ was to be exposed to many more trials and challenges from the leaders of the nation before his ministry of salvation should end upon the cross.

Meanwhile, "angels came and ministered unto him." They supplied him with food, strengthening him in his determination to serve his Father. Thus, instead of Jesus submitting to the Tempter, angels ministered unto him, testifying to his triumph over the flesh.

What The Temptation Accomplished The Lord's three replies came from two connected chapters of Scripture: Deuteronomy chs. 6 and 8. They have for their background three significant incidents in Israel's deliverance as a nation: the provision of manna in the wilderness (Deu. 8:3), the deliverance from Egypt (ch. 6:12-13), and the supply of water from the rock (ch. 8:15).

The manna, water, and deliverance all point forward to the work of Christ.

The three temptations express the three possible forms from whence temptation can come. John wrote: "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1John 2:16).

The first temptation had played on the *lust of the flesh,* as the Tempter used the natural hunger of the Lord to draw him from complete trust in the Father.

The second temptation appealed to the *pride of life*. From the dizzy heights of the pinnacle of the temple to which the Lord was taken in thought, the adversary explained the effect such a miracle as he suggested, would have on the people of the land.

The third temptation paraded the *lust of the eyes* before the Lord, as the Tempter described to him the kingdoms of the world and offered him the power and glory of them.

In Luke's narrative (ch. 4:13), the temptation in the wilderness is described as "every kind of temptation" (according to Rotherham's translation). He varies the order of the temptations to conform to John's statement in 1John 2:16, whilst Matthew's account records them in the order in which they actually occurred.*

* Note how Matthew puts them in sequential order, by the use of such words as "then" (Mat. 4:5), "again" (v. 8), "then" (v. 10).

A FOUR-FOLD VIEW OF CHRIST IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

Each book presents the subject from a different point of view.

JESUS IS { ***King*** in Matthew; ***Servant*** in Mark; ***Man*** in Luke; ***Son of God*** in John }

	Written for	*Illustrating*	*General Character*	*Method*	*Theme*	*Based on*	*Dominant Word*	*Symbolism Eze.1*	*Significance*
MATTHEW	Jews	Jesus as Messiah	Theological	Discourses	Kingship	Past	Fulfilled	Lion	Royalty
MARK	Romans	Jesus as all powerful	Practical	Miracles	Power	Present	Straightway	Ox	Service
LUKE	Greeks	Jesus as the perfect man	Historical	Parables	Son of Man	Future	Compassion	Man	Humanity
JOHN	Believers	Jesus as manifestation of God	Spiritual	Exposition	Son of God	Eternity	Believe	Eagle	Spirit

All the desires and strong feelings of the flesh can be summed up in these three forms of temptation. They remind us that a person who allows mere emotion of the flesh to guide him into what is Truth, or what course of action he should follow, had three most powerful arguments against doing the will of God!

It is most significant, that sin first made its appearance in the world after the flesh had been played upon through these three emotions. Eve looked at the forbidden tree and saw that it was "good for food *(lust of the flesh),* and pleasant to the eyes *(lust of the eyes),* and a tree to be desired to make one wise *(pride of life),* and took of the fruit thereof" (Gen. 3:6).

She desired to be "as God" (RV.), a hope that is actually set before all those who do His will (see Zech. 12:8; Rom. 5:2; 2Pet. 1:4; Rev. 3:12). But she took the wrong way to attain this honoured state, grasping at that which was then forbidden her.

Where she failed, the Lord succeeded.

She brought sin into the world; the Lord manifested the righteousness of God.

Whereas she grasped at equality with God, the Lord thought it "not a thing to be grasped" (Phil. 2:6; RV.), but instead "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Because of that: "God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

This humbling of himself in obedience, this exaltation of the Lord

in triumph was foreshadowed on that lonely day when accosted by the Tempter, the Lord rejected every form of temptation and at the last, angels came and ministered unto him.

The preparation of his mind during the forty days' fasting and meditation, his triumph over the trial to which he was ultimately subjected, helped to fit the Lord for his public ministry which now began.

WHO WAS THE DEVIL?

Opinions differ on this, and it is a case of every person being fully persuaded in his own mind. We must bear in mind these facts. Jesus was of our nature; a nature described in Rom. 5:12-19. Flesh, as now constituted is evil, and must be conquered. In that regard, in his physical make-up, Jesus was no different to anybody else (Heb. 2:17; Phil. 2:6-8). The flesh with its lusts must be put to death (Gal. 5:24). In Christ, the victory commenced at birth, for by conception Jesus inherited a bias toward God which with further education and training could be developed to the point that he could successfully battle with the flesh. This was further supplemented by the outpouring of the Spirit with its effect (see Isa. 11). This "strengthened" him for the task before him (Psa. 80:17). Thus God was "in Christ" for the purpose of the salvation of humanity (2Cor. 5:19; 1Tim. 3:16). See Sunday School Instructor Questions: 41-46. Fortified by God from birth, with mind filled with the Spirit-Word, Jesus was not as susceptible to the lusts of the flesh as others who had not that advantage — even as a spiritually minded man is not so governed by lust as a completely depraved man. There is no unfairness in this, for so much more was expected of the Lord (see Lk. 12:47).

But it did set forth a most important principle, for it showed that man cannot conquer in the absence of divine help (see Psa. 100:3; Isa. 60:21; Phil. 4:13). We can obtain that help through the Word and Prayer, and the victory of Christ teaches that we must seek it if we would conquer.

Christ was God manifest in the flesh, and was one with the Father (Jn. 10:20). It is therefore difficult to think that this mind would be in the conflict suggested by the temptation, if the devil was from within. It would mean that he would doubt his own virgin birth, that with a mind raised to highest exaltation after 40 days of spiritual contemplation, he would misuse Scripture to induce a sin by deliberately suppressing an important section of it.

Assuming that the devil was a person, he must have been a Jew for he was familiar with Scripture; he was one anxiously awaiting the Messiah, for he quoted passages relative to such; he exercised considerable authority, for he claimed that such had been delivered unto him. He evidently wanted to be certain that Jesus was the Messiah and proposed that he should co-operate with him in conquering the world. The suggestion that he should make bread would demonstrate his ability to

feed his followers; to 'worship' the devil would show his readiness to press on to world conquest; to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple would reveal that God was with him.

The devil could have been a high member of the Sanhedrin, or perhaps one of the high priests. The former had approached John (Jn. 1:19), and was told by John that the Messiah had appeared (Jn. 1:26); the latter challenged Jesus on the very basis of this temptation at his trial (Jn. 20:63).

The first temptation would demonstrate that he could satisfy personal wants.

The second temptation would show that he would submit to what was considered proper direction.

The third temptation would reveal that he had the endorsement of God.

For Jesus, however, there was, but one path to the crown, and that was through the cross. He had to conquer the flesh before he could claim the world, and thus he set the temptation aside.

EVENTS IN THE GOSPELS

HARMONISING THE GOSPEL RECORDS

In order to obtain a sequential record of the life of Jesus, it is necessary to carefully consider each incident, and place it in its proper setting. Sometimes, two almost identical sayings or incidents relate to different times, and it is necessary to carefully note the fact. For example, both Luke (ch. 13:18-22) and Matthew (ch. 13:31-33) record the parables of the grain of mustard seed, and the hidden leaven, in exactly the same order, and almost identical words, but they actually relate to entirely different times and circumstances.

Some system of Bible marking is helpful, to show where breaks occur in individual gospel records, and how these are filled in by the other accounts. We suggest such a system below, and recommend that such a chart be included in your Bible, to help to identify the incidents when you read the records of the four Gospels.

INTRODUCTION AND INFANCY

	Mat	Mk	Lk	Jn
The angelic message to Zechariah and Elizabeth			1:5-25	
The angelic message to Mary			1:26-38	
Mary visits Elizabeth			1:39-56	
Angelic message to Joseph	1:18-25			
The birth of John Baptist			1:57-80	
The birth of Jesus			2:1-20	
Circumcision and naming of Jesus	1:25		2:21	
Consecration as firstborn			2:22-39	
Visit of the Magi	2:1-12			
Flight into Egypt	2:13-18			

Continued on page 203

Chapter 4

THE FIRST FOLLOWERS

FROM the wilderness, the Lord made his way back to the fords of Jordan where John was still teaching and baptising the people. Some six weeks had passed since he had left that historic spot for his ordeal in the desert.

The day before, John had been approached by the deputation from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem asking from whence he derived his authority to teach and baptise the people. He had declared that he was not the Christ, but that the Christ, unknown to them, was in their midst.

John Publicly Testifies Of Jesus

On the day following, John, seeing the Lord approaching him from the desert, gave public and emphatic testimony that he was indeed the Christ who should come into the world. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," he declared to those about him. "This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.* And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptising with water!"

He explained to those about him how that he had been sent forth to preach and to baptise, with the thrilling message, "Upon whom you shall see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptiseth with the Holy Spirit."

Now he identified that one as Jesus.

John's testimony made a deep impression on some who heard it, though nothing more was done by them at the time.

On the next day, however, as John was standing with two of his disciples, he again saw Jesus, and again gave public testimony regarding him. "Behold the Lamb of God!" he declared.

---

* In what sense was Christ "before John," since John Baptist was actually about six months older than the Lord? The Greek word is *protos*, and signifies, first in time or status. The very same word is rendered "chief" in Mark 6:21 (RV), Acts 13:50; 17:4; 28:7; 28:17, etc., and the context demands that it should likewise be similarly rendered in John 1:15, 30: "He is preferred before me: he is my chief." This makes sense, but to say that he was preferred before John because he existed before John does not necessarily follow, for frequently in the Scriptures, those younger in years have been preferred before their elders — Joseph, Isaac, Jacob, and David, being cases in point. The Diaglott renders John 1:15, 30, as "After me comes a man, who is in advance of me; for he is my superior."

Andrew, John and Peter Follow Jesus

Two disciples of John (Andrew and John)* who were standing with the Baptist, looked thoughtfully and curiously at the retreating figure of the Lord. To them the statement of their leader identified Jesus as the redeemer of Israel. Probably they did not realise then all that was involved in the title: that it spoke of the sorrow, suffering, and death of the Lord. They doubtless recalled the remarkable events that had taken place six weeks earlier, when the Lord had stepped out of the crowd to be baptised, when a lightning flash was seen from heaven, and the voice of God had thundered forth, and the drama of that moment.

Now, as they looked at him, they felt drawn by his influence. There was something compelling about him that caused them to detach themselves from John and follow Jesus.

The Lord turned, and saw them following him.

"What do you want?" he enquired.

The two men now looked directly into the face of the Lord. As they looked into his eyes, and observed the solemn, thoughtful, intelligent appearance of his countenance, they felt the power of his presence more than ever.

"Master," they replied, "where do you dwell?"

They implied by this that they wanted to privately discuss matters with him, that they might more clearly see that they were not making a mistake in following him.

"Come and see," was the answer.



The ford at Bethabara — some twenty miles from Cana of Galilee, in the district of Bethshean; identified by some with the ford Abarah, north of Beisan, the place mentioned in John 1:28.

* We are not specifically told that the other disciple was John, but the probabilities are that it was. As writer of the Gospel in which this is recorded, he does not give his name, thus following a procedure that is adopted throughout that record (see John 13:23; 19:26, etc.).

It was then about the "tenth hour" (John 1:39), about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. This was shortly after the time when the evening lamb was offered upon the altar in the temple at Jerusalem, giving additional point to the declaration of John: "Behold the Lamb of God!"

Andrew and John went with the Lord to the place of his abode, and remained with him all night. It must have been a thrilling occasion for the two young men, for what they heard from the lips of the Lord, completely confirmed them in their early impression.

They were confident of his Messiahship.

The work of John Baptist, as far as they were concerned, was over; he had led them to Christ.

Andrew had a brother named Simon for whom he had a deep affection. Anxious to convey the good news to him, he hurried off to find him, for he knew the Simon was likewise impatiently awaiting the appearance of the Christ.

"We have found the Christ!" was his excited greeting to his brother.

He brought him to Jesus. It was a dramatic moment. These two men were to vastly change the character of the world by their impact upon it. The Lord looked at the one man who was to be his leading apostle; and the fisherman Simon looked at the man he was to respect as his Lord and Saviour, and in whose cause he was to die.

Simon doubtless saw a man in countenance, solemn, thoughtful, alert, a man with a noble bearing manifesting an outstanding personality. Jesus saw a young man, energetic, eager, impetuous.

"Thou art Simon the son of Jona," he said. "Thou shalt be called Cephas."

Simon means *Hearing*, Cephas means a *Stone*. We know the latter name better by that of the Greek, "Peter." The Lord's words were prophetic, for many months were to pass before this name would be officially conferred upon the disciple (Mat. 16:18). But, meanwhile, the statement of Christ impressed Peter. Firstly, he had pronounced his name without having been introduced to him, demonstrating something of the wonderful power he had; and secondly, by proclaiming that his name would be changed, the Lord showed that he had some special mission in mind for this new recruit who stood before him for the first time. He was known as "Simon the son of the Jonah (and as Jonah means *Dove*, his name expresses: *The Hearing One, son of the Dove*), he was to become Cephas, the *Rock*, in which the Dove (the power of the Spirit) could dwell.

The Holy Spirit had already been made manifest in the form of a dove (Jonah), when it came upon Jesus at his baptism, and these disciples of John were doubtless aware of that fact.

Philip and Nathanael Follow Jesus

Andrew, John and Simon were from Galilee, and doubtless had left their homes to visit John and hear him preach. Jesus also was from Galilee, for the village of Nazareth was in that district. The Lord's initial work in Judea was now completed, so on the next day, he set out to return to Galilee, probably to Nazareth some 56 miles (90 kms) distant.

But on the way, perhaps at a crossroads, he turned aside to gain a further disciple. This was Philip, a man who was closely studying the Old Testament Scriptures, and waiting for the manifestation of the Messiah. He had recently been giving particular attention to all that Moses and the prophets predicted concerning the coming of the Christ (John 1:45), and was therefore in a proper state of mind to accept him when he appeared.

Whether he had been with John at the time the Lord was baptised, and thus had seen the sign from heaven and heard the Voice, we are not told. All we know is that the Lord went out of his way to find Philip (John 1:43), and when he came upon him, he uttered but two words, "Follow me."

But those two words were enough. There was power in the glance of the Lord as he looked on Philip, and Philip felt the magnetic draw of those eyes as he stood up to respond.

He was of Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Simon, so that a bond of unity was created by this fact alone, a unity of fellowship made all the stronger because of their mutual understanding of the Scriptures, and their desire to see the Lord's Christ.

Philip was certain that Jesus was the Christ, and was anxious to tell his friend Nathanael. Apparently it was with Nathanael that Philip had been studying the Law and the Prophets regarding the coming of the Messiah, the two friends helping one another in their investigations.

Like Andrew with Simon, Philip rushed off to tell his friend the exciting news.

But he did not have quite the same spontaneous reception from Nathanael as Andrew had received from the enthusiastic and impetuous Simon.

Bursting in upon him, Philip excitedly declared:

"We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (cp. Luke 3:23).

But Nathanael, the student, wanted more evidence than an excited friend. He could hardly believe that despised Nazareth was the hiding place of the Messiah.

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" he asked.

"Come and see!" was the compelling answer of Philip.

The two men walked together to where the Lord awaited them.

"Behold," said Jesus as he saw Nathanael approaching. "An

Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!"*

But Nathanael was not prepared to be taken in by what could amount to mere flattery.

"How do you know me?" he asked.

"Before that Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you," was the amazing reply.

The answer staggered Nathanael. He knew that it was normally impossible for Jesus to have seen him under the fig tree; he realised too, that his friend Philip would not have deceived him by revealing to Jesus his habit of so doing.

But Jesus touched upon a point that was very close to the heart of Nathanael, the student. He spoke of the spreading fig tree under which people would shelter in its shade in order to devote themselves to meditation and prayer. And Nathanael's devotions, at that time, were much given to the study of the prophecies of the Messiah.

As Nathanael looked with new understanding into the magnetic countenance of him who was to be his friend and saviour, all his doubts were instantly dissolved. "Master," he said, in wonderment, "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel!"

This was a simple declaration that Nathanael acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, for the prophets had revealed that such would be both Son of God and King of Israel (2Sam. 7:14; Psa. 2:7; Isa. 9:6-7).

But Jesus did not leave it at that. He continued to Nathanael: "Because I said unto you, I saw you under the fig tree, believest Thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these!"

The Lord paused to impress what he was about to say upon his disciples, and then, as they listened wonderingly, he continued: "Truly, truly, I say unto you, Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

The Lord was speaking of the future. After his resurrection, "all power in heaven and in earth" would be delivered unto him (Mat. 28:18; 1Pet. 3:22), and when he returns, as Son of man to execute judgment (see John 5:27), he will come with the angelic hosts of heaven (Mat. 25:31), who will assist him in the labours which will be before him.

Nathanael will be there in that day to witness it.

Andrew, John and Simon Leave Jesus

Thus the Lord, at that time, had made contact with but five men, all of whom now looked upon themselves as his disciples. But that did not mean that they then completely dedicated themselves to his

* "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile," is a wonderful summary of a godly character, and seems to be set in contrast to Jacob the *Supplanter*, in whom there was guile. The blessing of God caused Jacob's name to be changed to Israel — a *Prince with God.*

ministry. Shortly after their return to Galilee, Andrew, Simon and Peter, left the Lord to resume their work. Their official call came after John's imprisonment (Mark 1:14-18), so that for a time, though they were acknowledged as disciples of Jesus, they did not continue with him.

This does not seem to have been the case with Philip and Nathanael, however. It appears they continued with the Lord. Perhaps their joint studies in the Scriptures relating to the prophecies of the Messiah prepared them to accept him and to dedicate themselves more completely to him once he made himself known to them. Certainly, there is no better means of preparation to receive Jesus (both now as then) than to study the Scriptures in relation to him. If our minds are filled with the Word, we only need to receive a call, "Come and see," to realise that he is, indeed, the one therein revealed.

Be that as it may, it seems that at that time, only two of the disciples continued with the Lord.

Features of **John's Work** *in relation to* **Jesus**

1. **JOHN WAS THE FORERUNNER** heralding the Majesty (Mat. 3:2; Isa. 40:3-8; John 1:23), and preparing a People for the Lord. Similarly, the Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24).
2. **JOHN WAS THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM** (John 3:29), who brings the Bride and Groom together — his joy is complete and he then leaves the scene. Similarly, the Law was given until the seed (faith) should come (Gal. 3:19, 25).
3. **JOHN'S FUNDAMENTAL TEACHING** was the "unprofitableness of flesh," for he declared: "all flesh is as grass." The Law was given to demonstrate the sinfulness of sin (Rom. 7:13).
4. **JOHN WAS IN THE WILDERNESS** (Luke 1:80), a term used as the Hebrew title of the Book of Numbers. In the wilderness of Judea he was fed by the Providence of God. Locusts are used to represent the devouring judgments of God (Joel 1:4; Deu. 28:38; Mal. 3:11), and honey is the symbol of His righteousness and true judgments (Psa. 19:9-10). John baptised at Bethabara, the "place of crossing or passage," near Gilgal where Israel crossed the Jordan under Joshua, and were nationally circumcised (Josh. 5:1-9).
5. **JOHN RECOGNISED THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS,** even though John would have had more personal esteem than Jesus in the eyes of the people (John 1:15, 30). He (Jesus) was "preferred before me" (or "superior in dignity"). Cp. the expression used by Jacob in his blessing of the firstborn: Gen. 49:3 — the

"Excellency of Dignity" was the blessing for the priestly aspect of the firstborn) ... for he was before me" (i.e. foremost in position and authority — John 3:30), for he "must increase and I must decrease."

6. **JOHN'S WORK WAS TO REFLECT THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE LAW** in the life of an Israelite (cp.Luke 7:26, 29, where the result of his work turned many to the Lord, thereby justifying God). The Law and the Prophets were until John (Luke 16:1).
7. **JOHN'S NAME MEANS "YAHWEH IS GRACIOUS."** God's grace to Israel was reflected through the Law, but "abounding grace" came by Jesus Christ (John 1:14-17).

EVENTS IN THE GOSPELS

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Continued from page 196

	Mat	Mk	Lk	Jn
Childhood				
To Nazareth	2:19-23		2:39	
His development			2:40	
Youth				
The enquiring boy			2:41-50	
The obedient son			2:51	
The developing youth			2:52	
Induction into the ministry				
John preaching and baptising	3:1-12	1:2-8	3:1-18	
(Until imprisoned by Herod)			3:19-20	
Jesus baptised by John	3:13-17	1:8-11	3:21-23	
Jesus' temptation	4:1-11	1:12-13	4:1-13	
Jesus wins his first disciples				1:19-51
Jesus attends a wedding (first sign)				2:1-11
Jesus visits Capernaum				2:12
Opening Ministry				
Jesus cleanses the Temple				2:13-22
First Passover				
Through his signs many believe				2:23-25
Nicodemus visits Jesus				3:1-21
Jesus baptises in Judea				3:22
John baptises in Aenon				3:23-24
John witnesses in support of Jesus				3:25-36
Jesus leaves Judea for Galilee via Samaria	4:12	1:14	4:14	4:1-4
Teaching the woman of Samaria				4:5-26
Instructing her people				4:27-42
Preaching in Galilee	4:12	1:14	4:14-15	4:34-45
Returning to Cana				4:46
Jesus heals the nobleman's son (second sign)				4:46-54
Jesus is rejected at Nazareth	4:13		4:16-30	

Continued on page 224

Chapter 5

THE FIRST MIRACLE: WATER INTO WINE

JESUS had received an invitation to a marriage in Cana of Galilee. It could have been that in order to keep this invitation, he had left the fords of Jordan to travel north to this district. It was probably the marriage of some relation. His mother was there before Jesus, acting in some official capacity, directing the servants as to what they should do.

Cana of Galilee was the hometown of Nathanael, and as the invitation to Jesus included his disciples, Philip and Nathanael, at least, would have gone with him to the marriage.

Called To A Marriage

In those days, a marriage feast was a long, protracted affair, sometimes lasting for seven days if those responsible could afford it (Jud. 14:12). And, sometimes, unexpected guests would turn up to strain the resources of the provisions that had been set aside for the occasion.

That happened at the wedding Jesus attended.

A wedding feast was a happy, joyous occasion, when full reign was given to lavish hospitality. To fall short in that direction was considered a terrible disgrace, and was well calculated to throw the whole proceedings into a state of deepest gloom and misery for those responsible.

Inadequacy of Wine Brings Disgrace and Disaster on the Feast

Thus when the wine fell short on this occasion, it was considered a matter of great crisis. And Mary, in her position of authority at the wedding, seems to have felt particularly responsible. It was whispered that the wine was giving out. What was to be done? Who could she turn to? Joseph was dead, but her eldest son was present, upon whom she had been accustomed to rely in her own house.

Perhaps he could think of something to do!

Cana of Galilee in the 19th century



She turned to him in her distress. "They have no wine!" she declared.

"Woman," replied the Lord, "what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come."

What a strange reply!

Yet it was a most significant one.

Why did Jesus call his mother,

"Woman," instead of "Mother"?


Cana today

He used this expression, not in disrespect but with greatest tenderness, even as he did on later occasions (see John 19:26; 20:13, 15). But it was an expression to gently remind Mary that her son stood in a special relationship to God and had been provided for a particular mission. The time had come when Jesus should be revealed, not as the son of Mary, but as Christ the Son of God. Thus the relationship of mother and son had to be relaxed to permit him to perform the will of God.

He had hinted at this when, as a twelve year old boy, he had told Joseph and Mary that he must be about his Father's business (Luke 2:49); he revealed this even more powerfully on another occasion, then still future, when he defined mother and brethren as those who do the will of his heavenly Father (Mat. 12:48-50), and later, when one openly blessed his mother for bearing him, he replied that more blessed are they that hear and do what he proclaimed (Luke 11:27-28).

On this occasion, he added the words, "What have I to do with thee," not meaning to be disrespectful, but indicating that having commenced upon his public ministry, his life was now fully dedicated to the will of God.

There was a natural desire on the part of the Lord's relations that he openly manifest himself before all, that all might glorify him for what he was (John 7:3-7). Doubtless Mary, knowing his higher destiny, desired to see him honoured in her sight, and recognised that his public ministry had, indeed, begun. She knew that he was born to be King of the Jews, and desired that he reveal his authority and power.

But neither she, nor his brethren, realised the suffering and shame that would be heaped upon the Lord before the hour of triumph would dawn. They thought his career should reveal a steady progress to glory, and did not understand that the cross must come before the crown.

They did not realise that the hour of glory had not yet arrived.

The Miracle

The words of the Lord, as recorded in John 2:4 (AV) in cold print, might seem harsh and unfeeling. But Mary evidently did not view them in that light. There must have been something in the glance of the Lord that put her at ease, and made her realise that he was about to do something to relieve the situation, but she knew not what.

Turning to the servants, she commanded, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

At the entrance to the house stood six large waterpots of stone, containing about eight gallons (36 litres) each. They were there for the ceremonial purifying of the Jews. Jewish guests would wash their hands and arms there, not because they were dirty, or needed to do this, but in order that they might be legally cleansed, according to their traditions (Mark 7:3-4; Luke 11:39; Mat. 15:2).

"Fill the waterpots with water," commanded the Master.

The servants filled them up to the brim.

"Now draw out, and bear unto the governor of the feast," he continued.

What? Bear water out to the governor!

It was an amazing thing to ask.

Yet they had been commanded by Mary to do exactly whatever her son commanded.

So they went and drew the water, but as they did so, they were amazed to see it turn into wine! (v. 9).

Staggered at the miracle, they took it to the ruler of the feast, and he, too, having tasted it, pronounced it to be of the very finest quality! Not knowing that a miracle had been performed, he felt it was strange that such good quality wine should have been held back until the last. He declared: "Every man at the beginning sets forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but you have kept the good wine until now!"

By this miracle the honor of the marriage feast was upheld, and joy and happiness filled the house where previously had been fear of disgrace and dismay.

What The Miracle Revealed

All the miracles of the Lord had a spiritual significance. He did not perform them merely as clever sensations, but in order to teach profound lessons. He had been sent to manifest the divine glory to Israel (John 1:31), and the miracles that he performed were a means to that end. They were designed to draw attention to the power he possessed, and to illustrate the teachings he expressed.

In the Gospel of John there are eight great miracles recorded, which were "signs" (the Greek word *semeion* signifies "signs" as in the RV), revealing to Israel (both natural and spiritual) their



Artist's impression of the wedding at Cana

needs, and who alone could supply them.

The eight signs of John's Gospel are as follows:

1. Water into Wine (John 2:1-11) — teaching that Israel lacks the means of joy which Christ alone could supply.

2. The Ruler's Son cured (John 4:46-54) — teaching that the Lord alone had the power to cure the desperately sick nation of Israel.

3. The Impotent Man made strong (John 5:1-17) — teaching that Christ can strengthen those who recognise their helplessness.

4. Feeding the 5,000 (John 6:1-14) — teaching that Jesus can provide the necessary food unto life.

5. Calming the sea (John 6:15-21) — teaching that he can control the storms of life.

6. Restoring sight to the Man born blind (John 9:1-41) — demonstrating his power to give spiritual vision.

7. The raising of Lazarus (John 11) — Proclaiming the resurrection, both national and individual.

8. The tremendous harvest of fish (John 21:1-14) — Indicating the increase in the harvest of labour after the resurrection.

These "signs" provide eight steps to joy; the means to ultimate glory and the divine purpose. Though these "signs" were revealed unto the Jewish people, they also demonstrated what the Lord can do for any who seek him in truth; for Israel's needs are theirs also. Thus, they will:

1. Find joy in his service;
2. Receive new life;
3. Obtain strength to overcome;
4. Be granted spiritual food to sustain them;
5. Find consolation amid the storms of life;
6. Have their eyes opened to the richness of Truth;
7. Be raised from the dead;
8. Find the fulness of their labours in the age to come.

What To Look For In The First Sign

The marriage commenced on "the third day." That is significant, for in the Bible, the number 3 signifies completeness, and resurrection. The earth rose out of the water, and fruit out of the earth, on the third day (Gen. 1:9-13), so that a form of life first appeared on that day.

It is significant that, following the resurrection, the marriage of the Lamb to his Bride will occur (Rev. 19:7). That will be a time of great joy and happiness.

Even the name "Cana" seems to imply resurrection, for it signifies *The Place of Reeds,* coming from a root word signifying "to erect; to cause to stand up."

• The "sign" thus spoke of a **MARRIAGE** — and reminds us of the

coming marriage of Christ to his Bride, after the resurrection.

• It referred to a **CALL**. The disciples were called to the marriage because of their association with Jesus. They did not have separate, independent invitations. That is the case of all those called to the Marriage of the Lamb in the future.

• It revealed a **NEED**, and the need was for wine. Wine pointed forward to the blood of Jesus and to the atonement in him through which a person can receive the joy and gladness of fellowship with God. The vital significance of wine we will express later.

• It expressed the **REPUDIATION OF FLESH,** in the words of the Lord addressed to his mother, and which revealed to her the new standing that he must assume in order to completely serve his Father. This new relationship demanded the sacrifice of fleshly interests, both for mother and son. This is a relationship all in Christ are called upon to reveal.

• It showed the principles of true discipleship in the **COMMAND**, "whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

• It symbolised that the **LAW WAS INSUFFICIENT** of itself, and revealed that faith is the supreme need. The waterpots stood for the righteousness of the Law, which, however, could not provide joy and happiness at the marriage feast. Note that there were "six" waterpots of stone, and that "six" is the number of man (Rev. 13:18). Christ used the things relating to the Law to bring the joy of salvation to those called to the marriage.

• It demonstrated the need of **FAITH**, for the servants who "drew the water" had to do so in faith, and in the assurance of the righteousness of the command given them. Who would think of drawing mere water?

• It revealed the **QUALITY OF DIVINE BLESSING,** for notice what the ruler of the feast said. He declared that "man at the beginning" sets forth that which is good, but after that which is worse. But this was reversed by the Lord. Look at the history of mankind: Adam and Eve started well, but their record ended in disaster. Men commence with good resolutions to do the will of God, but so often drift away. With Christ, however, the best is yet to be revealed. Though there is joy and happiness in serving him now, it is nothing compared to the great pleasure that awaits his faithful servants in the Age to come.

• It sets forth the **CONTRAST BETWEEN MOSES AND CHRIST.** Christ's first miracle turned water into wine, the symbol of rejoicing in new life. Moses' first miracle turned water into blood (Exo. 7:17). The Law of Moses only revealed that men are sinners and worthy of death; the sacrifice of Christ reveals the grace of God unto life.

Finally, consider the significance of wine as set forth in the Scriptures.

It is shown to be that which makes glad (Psa. 104:15; Zech. 10:7);

it is used to represent divine teaching (Isa. 25:6; 55:1), prosperity (Isa. 36:17; Joel 2:19), love (Song 1:2, 4; 4:10; 5:1). Christ used it to represent his blood which atones for the sins of humanity, bringing them happiness and peace (Mat. 26:28; Heb. 9:22).

Wine is a very apt symbol for all this. The ripeness of the grape, its bloom, causes the juice to ferment, thus bringing forth a new form of life, for fermentation is a sign of life in the wine. By maturing, this is brought to perfection. Thus wine is a symbol of a new life, produced by crushing underneath the flesh, and matured by time. The grape must be ripened for wine to be produced, and this is brought about by the action of the sun upon the fruit. Wine is thus a beautiful symbol of a new life produced by the warmth of the sun, by the flesh being trodden underfoot, and the juice perfected by maturity. When wine is understood in that light, it makes comprehensible the statement of Jotham that it "cheereth God," and this was beautifully revealed in the first miracle-sign performed by the Lord Jesus.

It must have had a powerful impact upon the watching disciples, impressing Philip and Nathanael that they had not made any mistake in following the Lord Jesus.



Water jars found in first century Jerusalem. They are 65-80 cms tall, holding up to 80 litres, and weighing up to half a tonne.

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

MARY: THE BLESSED WHO BELIEVED

"Blessed is she that believeth for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45). With these words, Elisabeth addressed Mary her cousin, when she visited her prior to the birth of her son John.

In contrast to Zacharias, Mary had believed Gabriel when he spoke to her of the coming birth of her son, and willingly placed herself in the hands of Yahweh (Luke 1:38). She had revealed complete belief, trust and faith in all that had been told her, and submitted to all required of her, though it brought her under trial and distress.

Her name is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Marah*, signifying "bitterness" (Ruth 1:20), and Mary experienced much bitterness, as Simon predicted (Luke 2:35). She was sorely tried as to character, for at first Joseph refused to believe, and contemplated rejecting her (Mat. 1:18-20); she suffered privations, living in extreme poverty (Luke 2:7); she knew fear, for threat of murder had been directed against her and her Son (Mat. 2:13-14); she experienced insecurity, fleeing as a fugitive to Egypt from the anger of Herod (Mat. 2:20-21). She knew the loneliness of widowhood, the cares of a large family, a mother's pain at seeing her Son misunderstood, derided, crucified as a criminal.

Yes, *"a sword pierced through her own life also"* (Luke 2:35).

But as the waters of Marah were sweetened by the tree cast into them (Exo. 15:22-27), so there was sweetness to the troubled spirit of Mary in the reassuring words of Gabriel (Luke 1:30) to be revealed, in due time, by the *Stem* (tree) of Jesse she had helped to produce. Through her, the Seed of the Woman had been produced (Gen. 3:15); through her childbearing, all those (of both sexes) who "continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety," will find salvation (1Tim. 2:15).

Mary impresses as being trustful, courageous and yet gentle. She gave herself unreservedly to whatever Yahweh required of her, and in this she showed outstanding trust. She shouldered the burdens of life that rested so heavily upon her in such a fashion as to reveal that she was a woman of courage as well as of trust. Yet she was gentle and self-effacing. This is shown by the way she submitted to the guidance and care of Joseph at all times, permitting him to take control of her life, and that of her Son.

And these virtues of trust, courage, and gentleness stemmed from her faith, a faith which found expression in the wonderful song of joy and thanksgiving that burst from her lips when she met Elisabeth after the visit of Gabriel. A song that proclaimed her hope, for, as she sung, not only would "all generations called her blessed," but blessed because of what would be accomplished through her Son. Yahweh's mercy would be revealed to those that fear Him from generation to generation (Luke 1:50), but, on the other hand, He will "scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts; put down the mighty from their seats, and exalt them of low degree," helping Israel and fulfilling the promises to Abraham (vv. 51-55).

Mary's song is very similar to that of Hannah at the birth of her son, Samuel. Hannah saw beyond the birth of her son, and the rivalry between Peninnah and herself, to the rivalry of the two women of the Apocalypse (Jezebel and the Bride of Christ), and to the triumph of the King Messiah. She concluded her song with the statement: "He [Yahweh] shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed [Christ]" (1Sam. 2:10). And this, at a time when there was no king in Israel! Hannah's song proclaimed the promise; Mary's song the partial fulfilment.

Mary evidently rejoiced in her Son's public assumption of the Messianic office, and fully believed in him. But she ventured improperly to direct his actions at the marriage in Cana, and thus drew from him a respectful but firm rebuke. She must understand that in his work she could share only as a disciple. While as her Son he gave her reverence, as the Messiah and Saviour he could only regard her as a disciple needing as much as others the salvation he came to bring.

A similar truth was brought out on the next occasion on which Mary appears. Jesus was teaching the people, and she with his brethren desired to see him. Apparently they wished to restrain him from a course which seemed to be bringing him opposition and peril. His brethren were losing faith in him, and swayed by their influence, Mary became confused, and joined them in their determination to restrain him. This brought forth the implied rebuke of the Lord: "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mat. 12:46-50).

It impressively set forth the lesson that he enunciated to the Jews on another occasion, that "flesh profiteth nothing." Fleshly relationships count for nought if the Truth is denied. Mary and his brethren must accept his higher role as Son of God, and Saviour of the world.

From this time on, the household of Mary became hopelessly divided. The Lord's brethren did not believe him (John 7:5), and although Mary did, she was evidently disturbed and confused at the manner of his ministry. She had thought, with others, even the disciples, that the time of glory had come, and did not realise that it was the epoch of suffering. She had not clearly understood Simeon's prophetic words to her, and though she knew, as nobody else, that her Son was the Son of God, she was concerned and worried by the course events were taking.

This concern and worry stemmed from her lack of understanding.

But she believed in him. And on the last fateful journey to Jerusalem, she was with him. With a mother's love, as well as with a disciple's sorrow, she beheld his sufferings and crucifixion, as from the cross the Lord spoke to her. He gave her into the care of his beloved disciple John, doubtless knowing that she would receive more sympathetic treatment from him than she would from his disbelieving brothers, and accordingly "from that hour that disciple took her unto his home" (John 19:25-27).

But Mary's deep sorrow turned to joy a few days later with the news of the resurrection, and in the light of that wonderful event, she doubtless

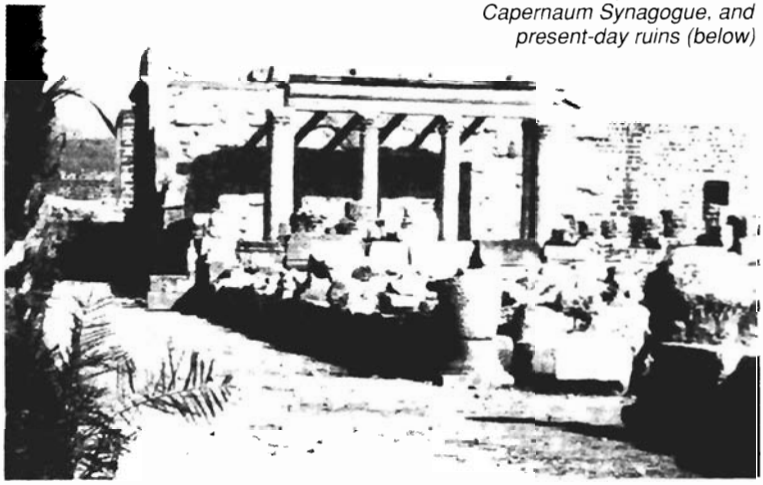
saw clearly the whole purpose of God with herself and her Son. The resurrection not only revealed to her the Truth, but dissolved the doubts of the rest of her children, so that the family was again united in the glorious revelation then made. Mary was with the apostles in the upper room in Jerusalem, and with them, too, were the previously disbelieving brethren of the Lord (Acts 1:14). Thus out of the depths of gloom and suffering there emerged a glorious light opening up for the whole family of Mary, a marvellous future, uniting it around the person of the risen Lord.

The reference in Acts 1:4 is the last mention of Mary in Scripture. Tradition has much more to say regarding her, and the Apostasy has deified her, but in so doing has destroyed the beauty revealed in the lovely character of the trustful young girl of Nazareth, the self-effacing young wife of Joseph, and the faithful, poverty-stricken widow-woman of the despised Galilee who, in spite of all her doubts and confused mind, still believed in her Son and followed him to the stake at Golgotha.

A glorious future awaits Mary and all those like her.



Artist's impression of the Capernaum Synagogue, and present-day ruins (below)



Chapter 6

A SHORT VISIT TO CAPERNAUM

ABOUT 15 miles (24 kms) northeast of Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine, there stood the busy town of Capernaum. It was situated on the shore of Lake Galilee, and was a centre of some importance. A Roman military post had its headquarters there (Luke 7:1-10), and it was also the seat of a tax-collector (Mark 2:1,14). From its hilly surroundings, a glorious view of the fresh-water Sea of Galilee stretched away in the distance, so that with its importance, and its beauty, its people were very proud of their city.

It was "exalted unto heaven," declared the Lord on one occasion, "but it shall be brought down to hell," into the grave of destruction (Mat. 11:23).

And that is the state of the city today, for it has completely vanished from view. Archaeologists are not even sure of its site, and though most authorities identify it with the ruins called *Tell Hum*, in which a synagogue has been excavated, they are not certain that this is the actual spot.

Capernaum has sunk down into its grave of oblivion, as the Lord predicted.

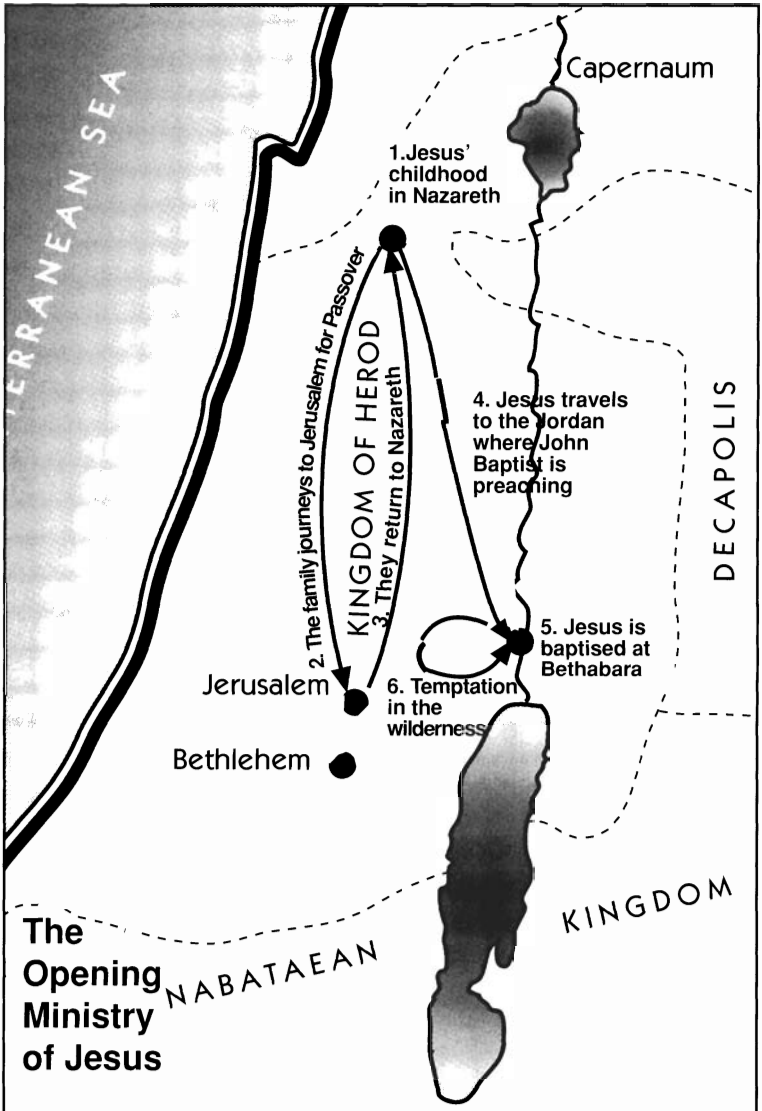
The Lord Makes Capernaum His Home Town

But in his day it was a busy, thriving city, and one, too, that he was to grace more and more with his presence, performing remarkable miracles there, and making it his headquarters in the north, so that ultimately Capernaum came to be called "his city" (Mat. 9:1; cp. Mark 2:1).

The wedding feast of Cana over, the Lord went to Capernaum in company with his mother, his brethren and his disciples (probably only Philip and Nathanael). We are not told the purpose of the visit. It seems, however, that friends or relatives of the Lord resided there,* and perhaps it was for the purpose of calling on them that they proceeded to this spot. Doubtless those friends, or relatives, looked after the little company whilst they stayed at the city, and perhaps the Lord revealed to them the great purpose that Yahweh had with him.

We do not know. All we know is that he did not remain there very long (John 2:12), before returning to Nazareth.

* We read that he "dwelt" there (Mat. 4:13) suggesting a settled place of abode, and that he was called upon to pay the temple tribute there (Mat. 17:24), indicating that he was identified with the city.



MEMORISE THE SAVIOUR'S LIFE **(see pp. 148, 217).**

With this sketch map, and *The Story of the Bible*, you can learn to memorise the incidents of the life of Jesus in sequence. This map sketches the beginning of his childhood to his induction into the ministry at his baptism in the Jordan.

THE public ministry of Jesus is broadly divided into four sections in which he ministers throughout the land, commencing in the north, and travelling south towards the city of Jerusalem itself before returning to the Galilee area:

1. The Preliminary Ministry,
2. The Galilean Ministry,
3. The Far-northern Ministry,
4. The Judean Ministry.

The Preliminary Ministry took him to the city of Jerusalem, where he dramatically introduced himself to the people by driving out from the temple those who made merchandise of religion. He returned to Galilee via Judea and Samaria, teaching the people as he went. This first section of his ministry occupied but a few months, and involved the following works:

[1] — IN JUDEA.

***a.* AT JERUSALEM** — *He begins in the City of Destiny, at the Great Passover Festival.*

(1) — Jesus cleanses the temple (John 2:13-22).
(2) — Through his miracles many believe (John 2:23-25).
(3) — He preaches to Nicodemus (John 3:1-21).

***b.* IN THE COUNTRY** — *His campaign is merged with John's.*

(1) — Jesus and John both baptise disciples (John 3:22-24).
(2) — John's testimony concerning Jesus (John 3:25-26).
(3) — John is imprisoned (Luke 3:19-20).
(4) — Jesus leaves Judea for Galilee via Samaria (John 4:1-4).

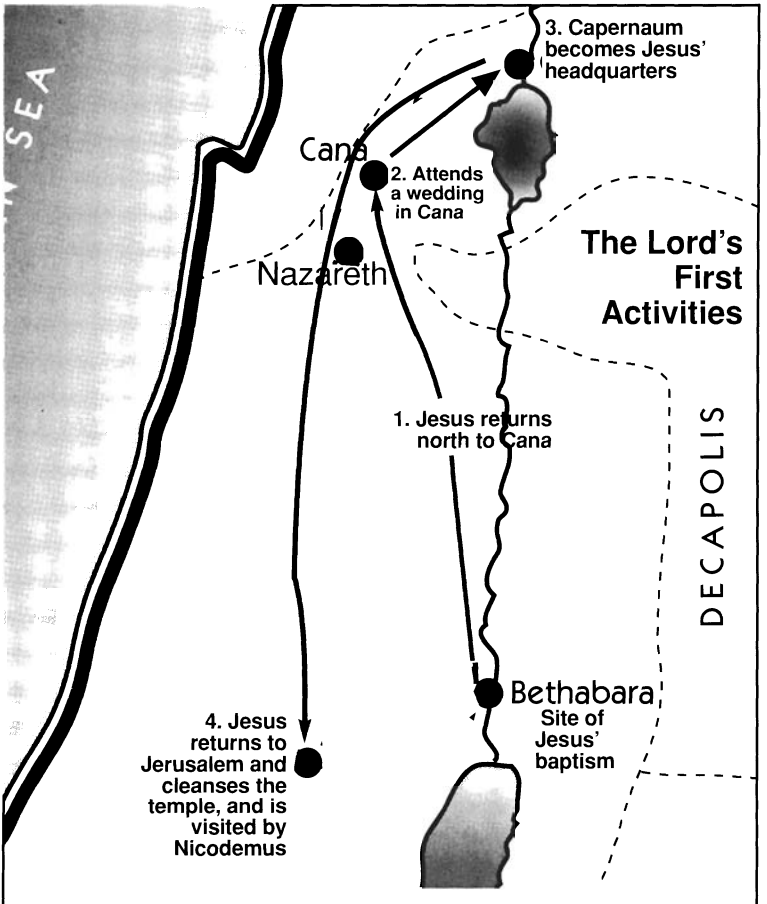
[2] — IN SAMARIA. He is recognised as "the Saviour of the world."

(1) — Jesus speaks with a Samaritan woman (John 4:5-26).
(2) — The woman calls upon her people to hear him (John 4:27-30).
(3) — He appeals to his disciples (John 4:31-38).
(4) — He preaches to the Samaritans and they believe (John 4:39-42).

[3] — IN GALILEE — Jesus established his centre for preaching.

(1) — He returns to Galilee (John 4:43-45).
(2) — Heals the nobleman's son at Cana (John 4:46-53).
(3) — Preaches in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30).
(4) — Rejected at Nazareth, he makes Capernaum his headquarters (Luke 4:31-32).

With a little effort, and using the above summary, this part of the Lord's ministry can be easily memorised.



The first of four visits that the Master undertook to the city of Jerusalem for Passover during his public ministry. Although only two such visits are specifically mentioned, it is assumed that, in accordance with the Mosaic Law, he would have presented himself to the temple on each occasion. The first and the last represent a most important event, for on both he cleansed the Temple, and very clearly stated that the Jews had made that holy place, into one defiled by their wickedness. After his first visit during his ministry, he preached throughout Judea, returned through Samaria (where he met the woman at Jacob's well), and then moved north to Galilee. Rejected by the people of Nazareth, he made Capernaum his headquarters.

Chapter 1

CHRIST'S DRAMATIC CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

THE Passover about to occur, Jesus, in common with Jews from all over the world, made his way up to the city of Jerusalem. Crowds thronged the roads, as when he had first travelled to the capital for this purpose at the age of twelve. It was the same colorful scene as then; the same happy, jostling, carefree crowds, converging on the City of David from all countries to occupy dwellings in Jerusalem if they had friends living there, or to camp in its outskirts if they had nowhere else to go.

The Lord Visits Jerusalem for the Passover

Though the scene remained the same, and would have become a familiar one to the Lord by that time, there was a great difference as far as he was concerned. On the first occasion, he went as a curious, eager-faced boy, absorbing with his keen mentality all that he noted about him; now he went with solemn, thoughtful countenance, with the realisation that this visit would inaugurate his public ministry.

He went searching for something. This is suggested by the use of the verb "found" in the statement: "He *found* in the temple those that sold oxen."

What was he looking for?

He went to the temple as God's representative, to continue the ministry of the prophets in a public way, and therefore he was going to see if the plague of "*fretting* leprosy" (representing active sin) as reported by those who went before him, was still in evidence in the political "house of Israel."

Under the Law of Moses, certain instructions were given concerning the case of a house reported having a fretting leprosy in its walls. This was a dankness which corroded the brickwork. So the house was subjected to certain inspection, report and treatment, and if it did not respond, two final acts remained to be done:

[1] To remove the affected stones and replace them with other stones;

[2] If this remedy failed even then to respond, it was required to break the whole house down, as not fit for habitation, and remove the stones from out of the city to an unclean place (Lev. 14:40-45).

The Lord was figuratively about to carry out the first of those two instructions. At the beginning of his ministry, he went into the temple, and drove from out of its precincts those that "made merchandise" of

religion. In this, he figuratively removed the worst of the affected "stones" (the elders of the nation), and gave those in authority a last opportunity to amend the ways of the people.

But the House of Israel refused to respond, so that at the close of his ministry he was compelled to inspect the temple again, once more driving from it those who polluted its holy precincts. The "leprosy" had re-asserted itself, and the nation was found in a worse condition than before. At that time the Lord reported that the leaders had turned his house (the temple) into a "den of thieves" (Mat. 21:12-13), its condition having worsened since the beginning of his ministry.

The temple was but a symbol of the whole nation. In Mat. 23:38 he declared: "Behold your house will be left desolate." It had been found incurably infected with a fretting leprosy of sin, and was about to be broken down, and cast into an "unclean place," in fact, scattered among the nations.

Driving the Canaanites From the Temple

The streets of Jerusalem were packed with people, all converging on the temple for the Passover. The Lord among them sorrowfully observed the light-hearted, thoughtless, irreverent way they gave themselves to the divine worship. There was little evidence of proper feeling for the occasion; their presence was the mere formalism of a habit.

As the crowds neared the temple area, another sound gradually asserted itself; the noise of animals to be offered in sacrifice, together with the shouts of those who were there to sell them. Mingled with this confusion, were the calls of those who had set up their stalls to change the foreign money that some brought from other lands, in order that they might pay the yearly temple tribute of a half shekel in local currency, as was required. Hundreds of thousands of animals were offered during a Passover festival (Josephus mentions some 256,000 being offered on one such occasion), and many who came from distant parts had to purchase animals on the spot. Those who had permission to sell these in the temple area, made a tremendous lucrative business from it.



Artist's impression of the Lord driving the traders from the temple.

As the Lord entered the temple gate, the full enormity of the horrible sight was presented to his view.

He saw all the activity, the noise, the impatience, the greed of gain that is typical of an eastern market. There was none of the quiet dignity and orderliness that should be associated with the worship of Yahweh. He heard voices rising in fierce argument; he saw cunning, calculating faces intent upon worldly profit; he heard the bartering and bargaining of drovers and pilgrims as each tried to overreach the other; he saw men with great wicker cages filled with doves, the offering of the poor, which they put up for sale at exorbitant prices; he saw others behind their tables, ready to exchange money at a discount, their greedy eyes shining with the lust of gain, as before them were set heaps of coins of various denominations.

All this noise, and shouting, and arguing, and bartering, drowned out the chant of the Levites, as further inside, in the court of the temple, the service was even then being conducted.

It was religious hypocrisy of the worst kind.

The Lord observed the scene before him with growing indignation. He felt hot with the zeal of Yahweh, as he saw how indifferent these traders were to the fact that His holy place (Psalm 132:14) was being so desecrated.

Something had to be done to cleanse his Father's house!

Collecting some cords of twisted reeds that lay about, he made a scourge of short rope, and brandishing this, he proceeded to drive the animals from out of the precincts of the temple area, into the streets beyond. As the frightened animals turned to flee, so did the hardened traders. Confusion reigned as the panic-stricken beasts forced their way out into the streets. The money-changers tried to protect their coin-filled tables from the stampede, but the Lord, in his zeal, overturned their tables, scattering the money on all sides to be trampled under the feet of men and beasts. He next turned his attention to the men who stood with the great wicker cages filled with doves, the sacrifice of poverty.

"Take these things hence," he sternly commanded. "Make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."

There was no resisting the hot, pure indignation of the Lord, no standing before those piercing, accusing eyes, no answer to the forthright challenge of wrong-doing. The traders knew that they were really breaking the temple law (even though the priest connived at all that was done), and, according to tradition, if a charge was proved against them they could incur the penalty of death.

Gathering up what money they could retrieve, taking up their wicker cages and their cooing doves, they slunk from the temple area, to take up their positions in one of the adjacent streets.

The watching, wondering disciples (perhaps the studious Nathanael and Philip) recalled a prophetic statement of a Messianic Psalm of David, that exactly described the circumstances: "The zeal

of Thine house hath eaten me up!"

Undoubtedly, their leader was the Messiah promised.

These traders in the temple had made merchandise of religion. In doing so, they revealed that they were not true Israelites, but acted as spiritual Canaanites, a people accursed of God. The word "Canaanite" signifies *a trader*, and its use throughout Scripture points to its application to the spiritual merchants of modern Babylon, those who are one day to mourn because "no man buyeth their merchandise any more," a merchandise which (among other things) included the "bodies and souls of men" (Rev. 18:11-13; mg).

As Christ drove from the precincts of the temple those who had turned it into "a house of merchandise," so he will destroy all false religion at his return, all forms of ungodly trading in spiritual matters. Zechariah 14:21 declares: "In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite (RSV: "trader") in the house of Yahweh of hosts." He will destroy their influence in that day, as completely as he drove the traders from the temple, 2000 years ago.

Thus his action on that occasion, foreshadowed what he will more effectively accomplish throughout the earth at his second coming.

Christ's Strange Sign of Authority For So Acting

Why did not the traders resist the Lord? Why did they not turn on him and boldy defy him, armed as he was with but a harmless weapon comprising a short whip of twisted reeds or rope? What caused these hardened men to act like their animals, and in stumbling, fearful confusion, to retreat from before him?

They did it because in the face of his righteousness they became self-convicted of sin. As they observed his fearless denunciation of wickedness they were turned into cowards. And, perhaps, they also recalled a law of the Jews that stated that anyone guilty of profaning the temple could be put to death, a law which also declared that anybody could press such a charge.

It was not the whip they feared, but the attitude of the Lord, their own consciences and the power of the law. Christ brought home to them the reality of their offence, and weakened them in any resistance they might otherwise have offered. The determined, fearless attitude of Christ, the majesty of his burning indignation, the steady, piercing look of divine wrath that he turned upon them, made them afraid of him, and caused them to flee.

His action brought a sensation in the temple area, but it is significant that nobody questioned whether it was right that the temple area should thus be cleared of traders, but they only challenged him as to whether the Lord had the authority to do what he had done.

"What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" the Jews asked him.

His answer confused them. He replied: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up!"

They could not understand him. His statement seemed ridiculous! Naturally, they identified his words with the material temple at which they worshipped. It was a most spectacular building, erected at tremendous cost of money, men and material, representing some 46 years of effort by the most skilled of workmen. Now this strange, young man, who had manifested himself in such a dramatic, dogmatic manner, claimed to be able to rebuild it in three days! It was ridiculous, the statement of a fanatic — and worse! They answered: "Forty-six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?" (John 2:20).

Such a claim as he had made did not even deserve a response; the people turned from him to attend to the pressing matters of the moment.

Nor could the listening disciples make anything of the statement. Nathanael and Philip, students of the Word as they were, could quickly see the application of Psalm 69:9 to the action of the Lord in driving the traders from the temple, but did not understand to what he was now referring. It was only later, after the resurrection of Jesus had taken place, that they suddenly remembered his words on that dramatic day, and a great light dawned upon them that he then had been speaking of the temple of his body.

But there were some among the onlookers and listeners at this time who had a clearer conception of what the Lord meant by these words, than his disciples or the general public, and who long remembered his claim.

Three years later, at his trial, the very words he used on this occasion were twisted and distorted and brought up as evidence against him when the authorities had him in their power, and were clamoring for his death (Mat. 26:59-60). His words were later mockingly flung in his face as he hung upon the stake (Mat. 27:40). Perhaps they thought, as they then saw him hanging there, that he had received his just deserts for the indignity to which he had subjected them earlier.

Moreover, they seemed to have had a fairly clear conception of what he meant, for when at last he was laid to rest in the tomb, the Jewish leaders came to Pilate saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again." The only time that Jesus used such expressions, in all that is recorded of him, was on this occasion. These highly placed Jews evidently closely analysed the words he used, and, in measure, grasped their meaning.

But they did not believe him. To them he was the "deceiver."

What the Lord meant by "this temple" What did the Lord mean by the strange statement he made? To answer that, we must understand what the temple represented. It was the dwelling place of Yahweh, where He met with His people. The symbol of His presence was the shekinah glory that originally shone, as a blinding light, in the Most Holy above the mercy seat and between the cherubim.

But though that shekinah glory had been present in the tabernacle, and in the temple built by Solomon, it was absent from the temple in Christ's day.

It was a glorious building from the external appearance, but within it lacked that which alone could give it true glory.

Instead, God dwelt in Christ. In him people saw the glory of the Father, when they observed him with discerning eyes, as some of them did (John 1:14). The majesty of his character, the wisdom of his words, the power of his deeds stemmed from the indwelling of Yahweh. They were the manifestations of God in him (2Cor. 5:19), so that one of his names was Immanuel, meaning, *God with us* (Mat. 1:23). When Christ claimed to be the temple, therefore, he was claiming that God was with him, dwelling in him by the Spirit, and that he was the true temple of which the material building was but the type.

As the true temple, he claimed to be the meeting place between God and man, so that if anybody wished to approach Yahweh in acceptable worship, he must do so through him, the risen Christ: thus he was the temple to be raised after three days in which it was hidden from the sight of man in the tomb.

Further, in calling himself the temple, he was warning them that the time was coming when the literal temple in Jerusalem would cease, because it could not save men, and that, instead, salvation could only come through him.

Later, the apostles understood all this, and proceeded to teach it. It became a point of controversy between the Jews and the early ecclesias, and formed the basis of the charge that was laid against Stephen when he was brought before the Sanhedrin and charged with heresy. The Jews accused him: "We have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14).

And in his defence, Stephen told the people that they must look beyond a material Temple of mere wood and stone to save them, for, "The most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet" (Acts 7:48).

That was the principle the Lord demonstrated on the dramatic day

when he drove the traders and their animals from the temple area, when he overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and ordered the sellers of doves to take their merchandise hence. His authority for such bold action stemmed from Above. He was the true temple, and God dwelt in him. Because of that he had the right to do what he did, and in spite of the hostility and anger to which he was then and afterwards subjected, they could not destroy him completely, any more than they could destroy God. Let them destroy that temple, let them sever by death the unity that existed between the Father and the Son by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Master whilst he remained in life, and in three days he would again be built up.

So it proved to be, three years later, at his death and resurrection.

EVENTS IN THE GOSPELS

PREPARATION FOR THE MINISTRY

Continued from page 203

	Mat	Mk	Lk	Jn
General Galilean Ministry				
Jesus makes his headquarters at Capernaum	4:13-17	1:14-15	4:31	
Simon and Andrew are called	4:18-20	1:16-18		
James and John are called	4:21-22	1:19-20		
The people are amazed at his preaching		1:21-22	4:32	
A demoniac healed		1:23-28	4:33-37	
Peter's wife's mother healed	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39	
Many healed at Capernaum	8:16-17	1:32-43	4:40-41	
A morning prayer — he leaves the people		1:35-38	4:42-43	
Preaching throughout Galilee	4:23-24	1:39	4:44	
Sermon on the Mount	chs. 5,6&7			
Teaches Peter true Discipleship			5:1-11	
Healing a leper	8:2-4	1:40-45	5:12-16	
Jesus heals the palsied man	9:2-8	2:1-12	5:17-26	
The call of Matthew	9:9	2:13-14	5:27-28	
Matthew's Feast	9:10-12	2:15-17	5:29-32	
Jesus discusses fasting with the Pharisees			5:33-39	
Jesus discusses fasting with the people		2:18-22		
Cures the impotent man at Bethesda (third sign)				5:1-16
Second Passover				
Plucking ears of corn on Sabbath (returning from Jerusalem)	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5	
Healing withered hand on Sabbath	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Partial circuit of Sea of Galilee	12:15-21	3:7-12		
Appointment of the Apostles		3:13-19	6:12-16	
Sermon on the Plain			6:17-49	
Healing of Centurion's servant	8:5-13		7:1-10	
Restoring life to widow's son			7:11-17	

Continued on page 279

"46 YEARS WAS THIS TEMPLE IN BUILDING"

The cruel, brutal Herod was the builder referred to. His exceeding unpopularity among the Jews caused him to seek for means to gain their affection. The temple provided him with the opportunity of doing so, and of gratifying his own ambition at the same time. He determined to make it an outstanding monument to himself. He began to build it anew about BC20, employing some 10,000 men to do so, taking down and restoring whole sections at a time. He finished it so as to be fit for use in nine years, but additions were constantly being added to it. The work had commenced about 16 years before the birth of the Lord, and he was now 30 years of age (Luke 3:23). Some forty-six years had been occupied on the project. Not even then was the work considered to be complete. Extensions continued to be added to it until just prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD70 when the temple was completely destroyed. It was as though Yahweh, in contempt for such ostentation, swept it all out of His sight.

Viewed from the Mount of Olives, which overshadows the site of the temple, the city must have been a dazzling sight. Situated on a plateau which drops sharply to the east above the brook Kidron, it had a perfect stage setting. The gleaming white walls of the temple were formed of cyclopean blocks of stone, gold shone on its facade, and the enormous mass of the sanctuary with its courtyards, porticoes and towers impressively dominated the scene. To the right (the north) was the square tower of Antonia, the barracks of the Roman garrison, and clustered adjacent to it were the sumptuous palaces of the priests and the wealthy. Below was the town, and guarding the approaches to the sea, was the Tower of David, rebuilt on the same terraces where once the poet-king had sung his psalms of praise. Rising to a height of over 150 feet (45 mtrs), it was an invincible strongpoint, and here some forty years later, the defenders of Israel were to make their last stand against Titus' legions.



One writer has written: "The temple was a marvel to the world for its colossal constructions of marble, its costly mosaics, its fragrant woods, its glittering roofs, the golden vine with its hanging clusters over the entrance door, the embroidered veils, enwoven with flowers of purple, the profuse magnificence of its silver, gold and precious stones" (see also *Josephus, Ant.* 15, XI, Sect. 3-5).

All the money, the effort, the labor expended upon this temple meant nothing to Yahweh, for it was only so much fleshly glory. It was thus destroyed in AD70. But it will be raised again on the third prophetic day of a thousand years, at Christ's second coming, when Israel will rise to its full glory (Hos. 6:2-3). Then will the temple be built under the supervision of the Lord himself (Zech. 6:12), a building more magnificent than any that has ever yet graced this earth.

Chapter 2

MIRACLES AT JERUSALEM

THE dramatic action of the Lord in driving the traders from the temple brought him prominently before the public eye in Jerusalem, and the things that he did immediately following that moment helped to increase the people's interest in him. For on that very day, he performed many outstanding miracles (John 2:23). Though they are not recorded in detail (see John 21:25), these incidents made a tremendous impression upon the people. They could see that he was an outstanding personality, like the prophets of old. They realised that no one could do the things he did unless God were with him, and in acknowledging this, they recognised that he was a teacher sent from God (John 3:2).

People Flock To Hear And Applaud Jesus

Soon all the city was talking about the new teacher who had so vigorously asserted himself in the temple area, who had so remarkably performed miracles, and who so brilliantly expounded truth. Even after the Passover period had come to an end, and people had dispersed to their homes, they still spoke of him, carrying the message of his work into all parts (John 4:45).

Meanwhile, in the city they flocked around him, desiring to hear him, applauding him for what he did. They believed in him and offered to join any following that he might establish.

This public adulation did not unduly move Jesus.

"Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men" (John 2:24).

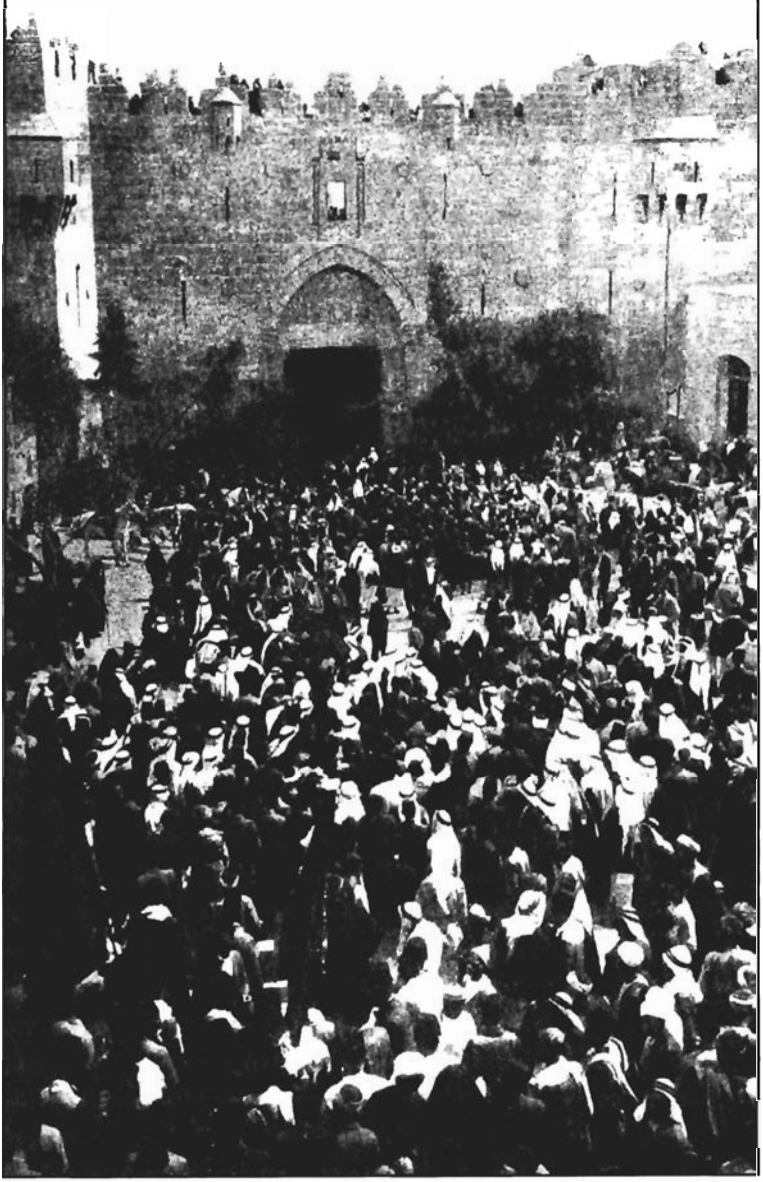
The word "commit" is the same in the original as that rendered "believed" in the previous verse. It signifies to "*trust; to impose confidence*." Jesus saw the multitudes thronging him, heard them applauding him, listened to their professions of belief in him, but put no confidence in the noisy, popular acclaim of the people. He could read their minds, discern their motives, and could see that they were very shallow in their attitude. The very ones praising him now would persecute him later. He knew this. He did not put confidence in numbers, nor in the flesh, but quietly awaited for the right individuals to manifest themselves.

"He needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man."

And what is in man? Paul replies: "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing!" (Rom. 7).

Jesus was soon to reveal, to a most important visitor, what he required in his true disciples.

Crowds gathering at Jerusalem at the Damascus Gate



Chapter 3

NICODEMUS SEEKS JESUS

AMONG the crowds watching Jesus, observing the miracles he did, and listening to the words he spoke, was a man that carefully and thoughtfully pondered the scene before him. His name was Nicodemus (*Victor of the people*). He was a wealthy man, a member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme council in Jewry, and thus an influential ruler of the Jews. According to Jewish tradition, he was well-known as a man of unbounding wealth, great liberality and outstanding piety.

He was also a man who was genuinely anxious to worship Yahweh in truth, and who had the honesty of purpose and independence of mind, to seek out truth and obey it, come what may.

He types those of a truly converted heart.

He Comes By Night He appears three times in Scripture (John 3; 7:50; 19:39), and on each occasion he is labelled as the man that "came to Jesus by night." But God-guided circumstances brought him out of the dark night of doubt and ignorance, into the full glare of the glorious light of truth.

The three references to him in the Bible emphasise the three stages in a person's life towards true conversion. Nicodemus first ***came*** to Jesus (John 3:2), then ***spoke*** to Jesus (John 7:50), finally openly ***honored*** Jesus (John 19:39).

And, significantly, he honored the Lord at a time when most men (including his disciples) lost faith in him.

At first, however, he was not quite sure of Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth. He recognised that no one could perform the miracles this man did except God be with him, and he also acknowledged the wisdom and authority of the words that Christ spoke. He was therefore prepared to concede that Jesus was undoubtedly a man of God.

But was he the Christ, the promised Messiah?

It would be a mistake for Nicodemus to openly identify himself with Jesus if these claims were to prove false after all.

Jesus had already incurred the wrath of the temple authorities by his drastic action in driving away the priest-sponsored traders, and it would have been folly for the cautious Nicodemus to openly declare himself for the new teacher at that stage.

It might ruin his prospects for the future.

So, if he wanted to see Jesus, it must be in secrecy, under cover of night.

But God has a future for Nicodemus, so that at the last he threw away all caution to openly and boldly declare himself a disciple of the Lord.

But that was three years later. Meanwhile, cautiously, he left the shelter of his home, and under cover of night, made his way to where the Lord was staying. This was probably somewhere on the Mount of Olives, under the starry canopy of heaven, where so many of the pilgrims camped, whilst visiting Jerusalem for the Passover, with but booths for shelter.

"Born From Above" Having found the Lord, Nicodemus shared in one of the most important conversations of all time, one that expressed truths demanding the closest attention.

Nicodemus was a deep, careful student of the Word of God. The Lord acknowledged his qualifications by addressing him as *"**the** teacher of Israel"* (John 3:10; Diaglott), and this could have meant that he was the third member in importance in the Sanhedrin, bearing the title of *chakam* or "wise man." In any case, he was a teacher qualified to understand the revelation of Yahweh, and the Lord addressed him as such.

Nicodemus commenced the conversation: "Rabbi," he declared, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

The answer was a strange one.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above [as in the margin] he cannot see the kingdom of God!"

What did the Lord mean?

His words are filled with significance.

Take his opening expression as an example. The words, "Verily, verily," come from the Hebrew "*Amen, amen,*" and in Revelation 3:14, *Amen* is given as one of the titles of Christ. Such a preface showed that what followed was dogmatically true, and not open to dispute. If he is acknowledged as a "teacher come from God," then it must be accepted without question, that a man must be born "from above."

Jesus, himself, was a literal illustration of what he meant. From whence did he derive the power to conquer the flesh? From his Father (2Cor. 5:19; Isa. 11:1-3; Rom. 8:3). For that purpose, in order that he might be strengthened to overcome the power of the flesh he bore, he had been literally born from above, by the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:35), so pointing the way whereby a man might overcome. In Christ Jesus, a person is "begotten again" by the incorruptible seed of the "Word of God" (1Pet. 1:23), and thus becomes "a new creature" (Gal. 6:15). And this seed is "from above," from whence cometh "every good gift and every perfect gift" (James 1:17).

To be "born from above," therefore, is to believe and apply the Word of God in such a way that it finds its reflection in one's life. This can only be done by emptying oneself of all pride and self-importance, and filling oneself with the Spirit-Word, striving to think, act, and live in accordance with it.

Without such a birth, one cannot mentally perceive the things of the Kingdom now (John 3:3), nor enter it in the future when it will be set up on earth (v. 5).

The answer startled Nicodemus into deep thought, but even so he could not grasp its meaning. He had heard the phrase used before, for when a Gentile embraced Judaism, it was likened to a new birth by which the Gentile was born anew into the family of God. But for Jews — members of the privileged race — to need such a birth seemed wrong. Above all, that he — a true Israelite, a rabbi, a member of the Sanhedrin, a man acknowledged by all for his learning and piety, a zealous keeper of the Law — should be in need of a new birth from heaven, was something he could never accept! What was the new birth that this man Jesus had in mind? Perhaps it was a doctrine of transmigration that the new teacher was advocating? In confusion, he addressed the Lord again:

"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

"You Must Be Born of Water and Spirit"

The Lord continued his dogmatic instruction. A "teacher sent from God" should not be doubted or questioned. He did not try to simplify the matter for Nicodemus, recognising that Israel's foremost teacher had the ability to absorb and apply what he placed before him. Besides, he wanted him to think deeply upon the things of God. He did not attempt to answer in detail the question put by Nicodemus, but brushed it aside by a statement of the greatest importance: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Actually the word "born" in this conversation with Nicodemus really means "begotten." Previously, the Lord had told him that unless a man was "begotten from above" he could not *see* or *discern* the Kingdom of God (v. 3); now he declared that unless a person was begotten of water and Spirit he could not *enter* the kingdom (v. 5).

It was something for Nicodemus to ponder over.

A man must be begotten of water and Spirit to enter the kingdom of God, and such birth comes "from above."

There are three main stages in the process of a birth, namely, Conception, Quickening and Birth.

To be "begotten of water" implies a completely new way of life brought about through baptism. This required, firstly, that a person

must *die* to the old way, that he might be *born again* to the new (see Rom. 6:4). What are the three stages that will bring about such a birth?

Conception (begettal) can be likened to the interest that is aroused when the Word of God (the "incorruptible seed" of 1Peter 1:23) enters a person's heart for the first time.

Quickening comes when his understanding is developed as he studies the Word.

Birth of water results when he obeys from the heart the form of doctrine delivered him by submitting to baptism (Rom. 6:17). A person emerges from the water as a "child of God" (1John 3:2), a changed creature.

What of birth of the Spirit, by which participants will "enter the kingdom"?

The same process must take place.

Conception can be likened to when the Spirit-Word (John 6:63) is manifested in baptism.

Quickening comes when that Word is put into practice, and the baptised person walks by the power of its influence (Gal. 5:25).

Birth of Spirit will result when this corruptible body is changed to incorruption at Christ's coming, and will then constitute a "spiritual body" (1Cor. 15:44).

It is rather remarkable, that Nicodemus is mentioned three times in the Bible, and on each occasion reveals, in his attitude toward Christ, a progressive development such as those suggested above. In coming to Jesus (John 3), there was *conception*; in speaking for Jesus (John 7:50), there was *quickening of interest*; in honoring Jesus (John 19:39), there was *birth*, as he boldly declared himself for Jesus and stood forth as one of his disciples.

Whereas Jesus Christ was constituted Son of God by birth of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:35), by birth of water (Matt. 3:17), and by birth of spirit at his resurrection (Rom. 1:3-4), we can only become sons of God by the similar process: birth of the Word in understanding; birth of water in baptism, and, later, by birth of the Spirit in immortality.

These are some of the facts presented by the Lord to Nicodemus. It was certainly not easy instruction that the wealthy Jewish leader received as he sat gazing thoughtfully at Jesus on the dark slopes of Olivet that night.

The matter could have been explained much more simply, but Christ had a special reason for not doing so. He wanted Nicodemus to exercise his mind upon these truths, because that is the best way to permanently change a person's outlook and character. "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; it is the honor of kings to search it out" (Pro. 25:2).

Flesh and Spirit And so the Lord continued his discourse: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born from above (see margin). The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but can not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

What did Nicodemus think of those words? They challenged the very foundations of his belief! Previously he believed that a "new birth" related only to a Gentile embracing Judaism, but now this "teacher from God" was claiming that "flesh is flesh" whether Jew or Gentile, and that unless something was added to flesh it availed nothing in God's sight, even though one might have descended from Abraham! Was it true that a Jew, equally with a Gentile, must seek something greater than fleshly descent, even spirit?

And was it true as this teacher was claiming, that as the wind blows where it wants to, without flesh being able to dictate where it should blow, so the influence of the Spirit-Word, breathed forth by God, is not limited to nationalities, but "blows where it likes," being open to Gentiles as well as to Jews?

If so, Nicodemus had to change his concept of truth!

Perhaps he now grasped a little more clearly what the Lord meant when he said that he must be "born of the Spirit." The power and influence of the Word of God was the means to that end. Like the wind blowing through the forest, the sound is heard, its impact is seen, but it, itself, remains invisible, and the onlooker does not know its place of beginning or its destination. What an apt illustration of the influence of the Spirit-Word upon a person.

People suddenly see a change in a man. His tastes, habits, and attitude to life alters. They wonder what has brought this about. He tells them, "the Bible." They look into it, but being only men of flesh, they cannot make anything of it (see 1Cor. 2:11). Thus, though they see its influence in his life, they cannot really discern what has caused it, and they cannot appreciate the outcome of it, or the destiny of the one so affected. They do not believe in the Bible, nor in the return of Christ and the hope of eternal life. Therefore, they know nothing of the coming birth of the Spirit, and though they discern a changed attitude in their friend (as we might see a tree bending before the wind), they do not comprehend the origin nor destiny of such a change (no more than we know where the wind came from or where it is going!).



So it is with those who are destined to be born of the Spirit.

We Must Manifest God In Our Lives

Nicodemus listened amazed to all the Lord told him. If it were true, then he must change his whole attitude to truth! With troubled countenance he looked at the young prophet, this teacher from God, before him. He could not believe what he had heard. It would mean that his natural birth as a Jew, the rite of circumcision, the meticulous attention to daily, monthly and yearly religious exercises, even the observance of the Passover, was all in vain apart from this "new birth" that the man Jesus was talking about.

"How can these things be?" he asked.

"Are you the teacher of Israel, and knowest not these things?" came the uncompromising reply.

Nicodemus should have known. Moses had taught the need of the new birth (Deu. 30:6); Jeremiah had done likewise (Jer. 31:31-34); Ezekiel had predicted it (Eze. 36:25-33). All the prophets had done so. Had not God declared: "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings?" (Hos. 6:6). Had not Micah proclaimed: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Yahweh require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to humble thyself to walk with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8; mg.).

The Lord continued his discourse with Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."

What was Jesus now claiming? First, that he was born from above, for he declared that the "Son of man" came down from heaven. In using this term that emphasised his humanity he was showing that he did not come down bodily from heaven (he had no corporeal physical existence before his birth of Mary). Next, he claimed that he was still "in heaven," or, as the term means, in complete communion with the Father.* Finally, he claimed that he was the manifestation of God, so that all he said and did, was through the influence of the Father. Thus he applies both the singular and plural number in speaking to Nicodemus: "I (Jesus) say unto you, We (God speaking through me) speak..."

Thus the Lord claimed that he was the manifestation of God, and in doing so challenged Nicodemus to act accordingly. Nicodemus too, must reveal God in his life, and he could only do that by reaching for this higher truth that Jesus was placing before him. They were difficult doctrines to grasp. Nicodemus had found it hard to understand the earthly things relating to the kingdom of God, and if

* See the use of a similar phrase in John 1:18, and in Ephesians 1:3; 2:6 which teaches that believers are said to be "in heaven" when residing on earth.

he could not grasp those elementary matters, how could he receive the "heavenly things" which Christ set before him? The things relating to God manifestation, and the birth of the Spirit?

It was all very difficult, as Nicodemus would have been the first to admit.

And, further, how can a person build into his life divine characteristics?

Jesus demonstrated the way; it was the way of sacrifice, and this he now brought home to his visitor.

Sacrifice Is The Key To Spiritual Success

In order to manifest the things of the Spirit-Word, a man must be prepared to sacrifice the things of the flesh. That was the next point Nicodemus had to learn.

The Lord's ministry was an illustration of that.

To teach this important truth to Nicodemus, Jesus drew upon an incident in Israel's history with which the teacher would have been familiar. The Lord declared: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever [i.e., Jew or Gentile] believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Nicodemus recalled the incidents recorded in Numbers 21. He remembered how the marching tribes in the wilderness had tired of continually eating manna, had become bored with the monotony of the way, had complained to Moses, and had consequently been punished by Yahweh.

Suddenly a plague of venomous serpents attacked the camp. Many of the people died. Fear swept the nation. The people realised that they were faced with the prospect of death. They recognised their faults, and besought Moses to mediate with God for them. He did so, and was told to make a serpent of brass, and put it prominently upon a pole, so that all could see it. Those who looked upon it, thus availing themselves of this means of salvation, would live.



Moses did so, and those who looked upon the brazen serpent in faith were saved from the death that threatened them.

It was not the serpent of brass that saved them, but their own

faith in what God taught them through its means.

And what had Yahweh revealed?

He had shown that to serve Him acceptably, flesh must be denied, must be crucified. That was the meaning of the serpent of brass upheld on a pole where all could see it; and in quoting this incident to Nicodemus as typical of his own mission, Jesus showed that it pointed forward to what he himself must do. He must die that men might live. His sacrificial death would be a literal manifestation of what they must do figuratively if they desired to serve God acceptably, for as the Lord was crucified, so must his followers "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

To accept this in faith was the way to life eternal, as to look upon the brazen serpent in faith saved the children of Israel in the wilderness from the death that threatened them.

It was in this way that God had "loved the world" (John 3:16), providing a means whereby people might be saved; and that means involved "belief in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (v. 18).

Men Prefer To Remain In Darkness

Unfortunately, as the Lord proceeded to instruct Nicodemus, men prefer darkness to light, and bring upon themselves their own condemnation: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and that men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil things hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered (mg.). But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."

Nicodemus must have felt a little uncomfortable as he listened to these words. He had come to Jesus under cover of night. He had felt a reluctance to openly manifest himself, and had been glad of the darkness. In that, he manifested the attitude of the world about him. But there was a redeeming feature. Nicodemus had, at least, "come to the light," for Jesus was the "light of the world." So the Lord proceeded to encourage him by revealing to him what a true follower of light must do.

Firstly: he must COME "to the light," that is, accept the things of Christ in truth.

Secondly, he DOES truth. He not only loves it, seeks it, desires it, but he follows it and reveals it, so that the power of the Truth is shown in the deeds he does.

Thirdly: his deeds are WROUGHT IN GOD, being the result of the influence of God upon his heart. He allows God's Word to move him, so that God is revealed in him. He builds into his life the divine characteristics he sees manifested in the Son of God.

Chapter 4

CONVERSION OF NICODEMUS

NICODEMUS left Jesus a deeply thoughtful man. There was much to ponder over, and he gave thorough consideration to it. His conversation with the Lord made a lasting impression upon him, so that a few years later, when the Pharisees were wanting to lay a charge against Jesus, he spoke up in his defence (John 7:50).

But perhaps the point that made its greatest impact upon Nicodemus, was the familiar illustration from the Law of Moses of the serpent impaled upon a pole as the means of saving Israel. Jesus had clearly told him that the Messiah must die, and like the serpent on the pole, be publicly exhibited before men, that there might be dramatised before them, the way to salvation.

Nicodemus Returns Home

No doubt, at the time, Nicodemus wondered what all this meant. But he knew later. When Christ finally died upon the stake, the significance became apparent to him. He saw clearly what the Lord meant, and whereas the death of Jesus seemed the end of hope for the disciples, to Nicodemus it was the final proof that convinced him that Jesus was the Messiah. With Joseph of Arimathaea, he took charge of the body of the Lord, placing it in the virgin sepulchre in the garden tomb (John 19:39-42). They did this, even though contact with a dead body was defiling under the Law of Moses, and would prevent them partaking of the Passover that was then impending.

In that tragic moment of Israel's history, when a great darkness came over the land to shut out from the eyes of man the final sufferings of the Lord, a bright light shone for Nicodemus, and he emerged from the shadows of night, to take upon himself the fulness of discipleship with Jesus. May it be our privilege to meet this great man in the kingdom of God when he shall have experienced the glorious birth of the Spirit about which the Lord spoke to him that dark night.

Attracting Disciples In Judea

The conversation with Nicodemus concluded the Lord's work in Jerusalem, and, shortly afterwards, he left the city in company with those disciples who had accompanied him to the Passover, to extend his ministry in the country districts of Judea.

Here he continued for some time (John 3:22), teaching the people. His bold entrance into the temple, the marvel of the miracles he

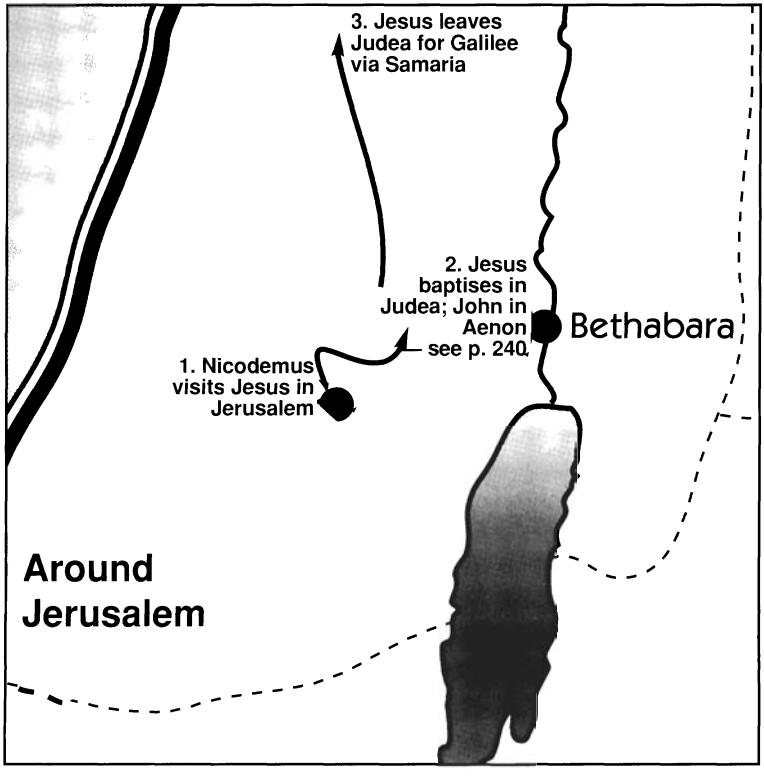
performed in Jerusalem, had been told and retold by those who witnessed them, so that he found a ready audience wherever he went. People flocked to him in increasing numbers to listen to his teaching, and to fall under the spell of his magnetic personality.

Many submitted to baptism, thus publicly declaring that they intended to re-dedicate their lives unto God. Jesus did not forbid them to be baptised, and although, unlike John, he never baptised any himself, he permitted his disciples to do so on his behalf (John 3:22, 26; 4:1-2). He knew that a greater significance would be given to the rite of baptism after his death and resurrection.

Meanwhile, he became a popular preacher throughout Judea. More and more gathered to listen to him. The Lord, however, had no false illusions as to the value of such crowds; he put no confidence in them, because "he knew all men and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John 2:24-25).

Popular preachers need to heed the example of the Lord; it is not great crowds that spell success for a special effort, but its lasting effect upon individuals.

In this instance, the numbers that he attracted were at the expense of another great preacher: John the Baptist.



Chapter 5

JOHN'S UNSELFISH TESTIMONY

FURTHER north, at a place called Aenon, near Salim, John Baptist continued his ministry. He, too, had doubtless been to Jerusalem to keep the Passover, and most likely would have witnessed the incident of the Lord driving out the traders, seen the miracles he performed, and heard the words he spoke.

His realisation that this was the Messiah was strengthened by all that he saw and heard.

But he still had work to do, and had chosen this spot to continue his preaching "because there was much water there," and baptism was an essential feature of John's ministry (John 3:23).

Aenon means *Fountain*, and Salim means *Peace*, so that John baptised his disciples in the *Fountain of Peace*.

However, the outstanding success that had marked his former efforts was not continued on this occasion. There was a sharp falling off of numbers in comparison to those who had previously come to hear his fiery eloquence, and to be baptised of him.

His Disciples Challenged

In addition, he came under attack from a certain Jew who had possibly been instructed by the Pharisees in what he should do. This Jew* had openly attacked the disciples of John, raising some point of dispute concerning purifying, perhaps questioning John's authority to baptise. This opened up a discussion concerning the whole of the future of the movement. Some disciples were dismayed that there was an obvious falling off of audience; others were seized with jealousy as they heard of the increasing crowds that flocked to hear Jesus. A number of disciples came to John to voice their feelings: "Rabbi," they declared, "he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptiseth, and all men come to him."

There was perhaps a hint of reproach in their words, as though John was responsible for the success of Jesus at his own expense, because of his testimony in favor of the Lord.

"He Must Increase, I Must Decrease"

John was a man who laboured only for God, and saw service to Him as his sole desire. He knew that he was but the forerunner of the Lord, and that he must stand aside for the Messiah, as the one greater than he when the Lord would make his appearance in Israel.

* In the Greek, the word is in the singular: "a Jew." See Diaglott.

He had instructed his disciples in that fact from the very beginning.

But it is usually difficult for a man who has tasted the heady wine of success, with crowds thronging around him to applaud him, and when disciples have eagerly sat at his feet, to stand aside even when a greater than he makes his appearance.

John, however, was no normal man.

He rejoiced in the success apparently attending Jesus' preaching. That was what he had longed to see, and he tried, most unselfishly, to instruct his disciples likewise.

He told them plainly, unequivocally, that Jesus had a superior message to his, and that discipleship with Jesus would bring greater rewards than those he could offer. Again he instructed them more plainly than ever: "A man can receive nothing [i.e., of real, lasting value] except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthy, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen* and heard that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Thus did John confess his wonderful faith in the Lord, his grasp of his message and purpose, and, at the same time, rebuked his own disciples for their blindness in not recognising the divine purpose in Christ.

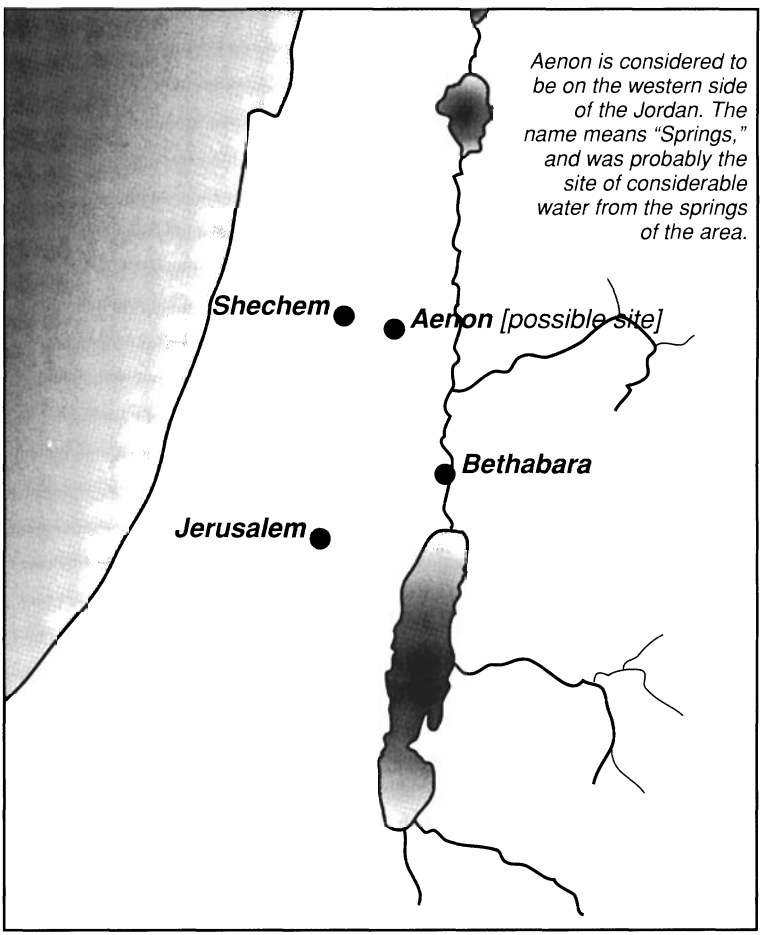
He reminded them that he had plainly declared that he was not the Christ, and that he had witnessed that Jesus was the Messiah. As the friend of the bridegroom, John could only rejoice in the voice of the groom, whilst it was for the bride (Israel) to accept him. Therefore he rejoiced in the success attending the preaching of Jesus. Jesus was from above in the sense that he was the manifestation of the Father, but the disciples of John, in their failure to perceive the truth concerning Jesus, demonstrated that their loyalty for John was on a fleshly basis, and that they were "of the earth." The words that they

* "Hath seen" signifies "hath perceived." When John declared "no man" received his testimony, he meant that man as flesh cannot receive it. Only men moved by the spirit-teaching would be able to do so.

had spoken in jealousy were earthly words, dictated by motives that were not good, and revealing an attitude of mind that should be completely set aside. They should recognise that Jesus is the Son of God, and that to honor the Father they must honor the Son. Only by believing on the Son, and not in discipleship to John to the exclusion of the work of the Master, could they lay hold of eternal life.

So the faithful and single-minded John, with a humility that is rare among men, called upon his disciples to recognise the purpose of God in Christ, and believing on him, attach themselves to the Lord as his disciples.

That was not the attitude of the Pharisees who at this point openly manifested themselves as the enemies of Christ, and used the dissension among John's disciples as a means to oppose and hinder the work of the Lord.



Chapter 6

SAMARIA HEARS THE WORD

THE outspoken testimony of John and Jesus, aroused the bitter hostility of the Pharisees, who now began to keep a closer watch upon their work and influence. They arranged for spies to mingle with the people, to carefully note all that was said and done, that they might report it back to them.

Thus the Pharisees heard that Jesus was now attracting greater numbers than John (John 4:1), and they used this knowledge to arouse discord and jealousy among John's disciples, whilst they also looked around for means to hinder the work of Jesus.

Jesus Leaves Judea The Lord therefore decided that it was time to move on, to leave Judea for Galilee in the north. He had important work to perform there, part of which was to select certain of his disciples, and appoint them as apostles, or ambassadors, to assist in extending the preaching of the gospel.

Between Judea and Galilee, however, there lay the hostile district of Samaria, with its rival worship to that of the temple in Jerusalem, and its hatred of Jews.

That hatred was reciprocated by most Jews, who, in their fanaticism, avoided this part of the country when travelling alone. But the Lord did not share these feelings of hate. He did not endorse, but rather repudiated, the attitude adopted by his self-righteous countrymen; and, therefore, did not hesitate to use this more direct route through Samaria.

It proved a tiring journey, for the Lord traversed it on foot. The countryside in that part of the land is very mountainous, with steep slopes rising high out of deep, rocky valleys, up and down which the road travels as it winds its way northwards. But gradually it descends to a valley, which passing through the twin mounts of Ebal and Gerizim, opens the way to an easier road beyond. It is a green and fertile valley, very attractive to the weary traveller. The rich soil, the plenteous springs of water at the foot of Gerizim, the ample growth of trees and verdure, and, above all, the promise of a smoother, more pleasant path ahead, makes Gerizim a *Mount of Blessing* to the tired and footsore, inviting them to sit down and rest awhile.

That is what the Lord did. Just in front of the Pass, in the very shadow of Gerizim, there was a well that had been dug by Jacob many hundreds of years before, probably with some form of cover over it that afforded shade. And Jesus was extremely weary. The tension of his labors in Judea, the effect of the rising antagonism that

he had felt there just before he left, as well as the tiring journey through the hill country, had worn him out. He decided to rest awhile from the heat of the sun — for it was now noon, and the sun was at its hottest (John 4:6) — whilst his disciples went into an adjoining village to purchase food.



Shechem: lying between the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim.



Sychar today

It is an historic spot, and the Lord would have meditated the history of its past as he sat awaiting the return of the disciples. It was here, at Shechem, that Abram built an altar unto God, and received confirmation of the promise: "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12:7). Here, also, Jacob built his altar, not far from the well that he dug, and called it *The Strength of the Mighty One of Israel* (Gen. 33:18-20), later bequeathing it to Joseph (Gen. 48:22), who has never yet received it, except as a burial ground (Josh. 24:32). Here, too, Joshua gathered the tribes that they might hear the cursings of the Law that were recited from the tribes gathered on Mt. Ebal, and the blessings of the Law heard from those on Mt. Gerizim, in consequence of which the latter is styled the *Mount of Blessing* (Josh. 8:33). Shechem, the town that the Lord could see in the distance, sheltering between the two mounts, was once a city of refuge (ch. 21:21), and became the natural rallying place for Israel in times of national crisis (ch. 24:1). Even its name is significant, for Shechem means *Burden-bearer*, and there, sitting by the well, was the Burden-bearer of all those who will seek Yahweh in the way appointed.

Arriving at Shechem What thoughts must have flowed through the mind of the Lord, as, tired out with the burdens of his ministry, he rested by Jacob's well. He is the seed of Abraham to whom the land is promised; he is the strength of the mighty ones of Israel to whom the power will be given over all mankind; he is the antitypical Joseph (who is yet to be raised from the dead to obtain his inheritance); he is the well of true water; the city of refuge; the burden-bearer. He is the one who was appointed to die that he might bring to light life and immortality; before him was the cross, but beyond is the crown.

Thus the site spoke of promise, strength, worship, refreshment, cursing and blessing, refuge, fellowship, resurrection and inheritance.

And all of this is associated with Christ the burden-bearer, the tired, weary traveller, who, then, dusty from his journey, sharing humanity's problems, sat resting himself by the well.

The Lord meets a Woman at the Well

The disciples had not long left for the little village of Sychar,* when his meditations were interrupted by the approach of a woman coming down to draw water. The Lord silently watched her let down the bucket to fill her pitcher, and she, silently, went about her task; for, under normal conditions, Jews and Samaritans would have no dealings one with the other, and it was obvious to the woman that the Lord was a Jew.

But, suddenly, she was startled by hearing him address her.

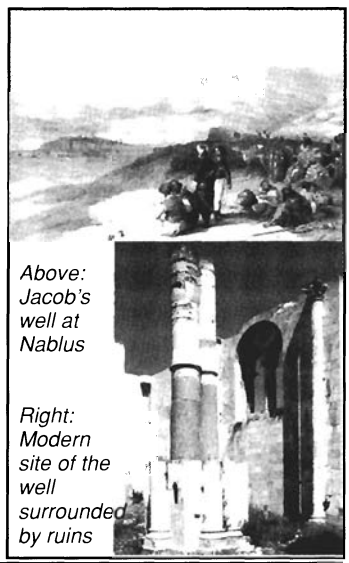
"Give me to drink!" asked the Lord.

The woman looked at him in amazement. Obviously he was a Jew! Why, then, ask a favor of a Samaritan? Surely he shared the mutual hatred that existed between the two peoples!

"How is it that you, a Jew, ask drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" she queried.

Jesus did not deign to enter into the discussion upon the rights or wrongs of that religio-political controversy, in which he was not interested. Instead, he answered: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, give me to drink; you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water."

It was a strange answer, and the woman, naturally, could make nothing of it. What is the "gift of God" anyway? The gift of God is the Lord himself (John 3:16), his life (ch. 10:11), his example (ch. 13:15), the spirit of Truth (ch. 14:16), the word of life (ch. 17:8, 14), eternal



Above: Jacob's well at Nablus

Right: Modern site of the well surrounded by ruins

* Sychar seems to have been a small town about half a mile from Jacob's well, identified with the modern village of Askar. Sychar is derived from either the Hebrew "sheker" meaning *Falsehood*, or "shikkor" meaning *Drunkard*, and it is said to be thus named by the Jews to illustrate the character of the Samaritan inhabitants who were looked upon by them as liars and drunkards. Some identify it with Shechem, but Shechem was about two miles from the well, whilst Askar is only about half a mile, and there were other springs much closer to Shechem than this well. It seems unlikely, therefore, that the woman would walk two miles when she had water much closer to hand, and thus the identification with the neighbouring village of Askar.

life (Rom. 6:23), the glory (John 17:22).

What constitutes the "living water"? It is living, or running, in contrast with the stagnant waters of the well of Jacob! Running water was used for cleansing in the case of leprosy (Lev. 14:5), which, in type, represents sin. This cleansing water represents the impact of Yahweh's Truth upon a person, so that He, Himself, is styled the "Fountain of living waters" (Jer. 2:13; 17:13).

But the woman did not understand that. All that she knew at this stage was that the strange Jewish traveller had first asked her for a drink, and then invited her to request of him certain "living water," that he claimed to be able to give her.

She said unto him: "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then will you obtain that living (i.e., running) water? Are you greater then our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?"

The question showed that the woman was intelligent, and grasped at least one point of the Lord's statement, namely, that he was claiming to be greater than Jacob. The water of Jacob's well was not living water, and could not allay a thirst for spiritual things, though, as yet, the woman did not fully grasp that point. So the Lord impressed it upon her, saying: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

The woman looked at the Lord thoughtfully.* The power of his personality, the majesty of his countenance, made her realise that she was not speaking to an ordinary person. But what did he mean? Did he mean that he could give her water which would, in one draught, by some remarkable and miraculous virtue, cure her permanently of thirst? She took him up on his offer, addressing him with respect.

"Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come here to draw."

The puzzled woman, like Nicodemus (John 3:4) and the Jews (ch. 6:34), could not understand what the Lord meant, for, as Paul later declared, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Natural and spiritual principles are often at cross-purposes with each other!

And so the Lord, in a most skilful manner, proceeded to develop this woman's spiritual understanding. She had taken his statement in its literal meaning, and with child-like simplicity had requested the superior water he had claimed to be able to give her. To have told her

* This is indicated by her respectful reply, shown by the way she addressed him as "Sir."

she did not understand, would have confused, perhaps offended, her; to have explained that he had merely spoken to her in a figure could well have discouraged her interest, or caused her to challenge his authority to do so. Instead he said to her: "Go, call your husband, and come here."

There was a pause, as perhaps the woman wondered how to respond, and then replied: "I have no husband!"

Jesus answered: "You have well spoken, I have no husband; for you have had five husbands: and he whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly!"

If the woman of Samaria had been astonished at the fact of a Jew speaking to her, she was doubly startled at this revelation! How did this Jew, this stranger, know these intimate details of her life? Obviously he had greater power than was normal with man! It was only possible for him to reveal such insight into her life by divine means, by the gift of prophecy. As this dawned upon her, there came the realisation, that one with such powers, could give an authoritative answer to problems of worship that had troubled her for some time. For, as Christ instantly had discerned from the outset, this was no ordinary woman, but one of great mental ability and energy.

"Sir," she humbly replied with even greater respect, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain [i.e., Mt. Gerizim]; and you [Jews] say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Thus she tested him, pressing the claims of the Samaritan worship against those of the Jews. The mounts Ebal and Gerizim were known as the Mounts of Cursing and of Blessing, because of the instructions of Moses that the cursing and blessing of the Law should be there pronounced (Deu. 11:29; 27:4-5), and the Samaritans, who based their religion mostly upon the Law of Moses, worshipped at Mt. Gerizim. This rival worship, had dated from the time when Nehemiah chased the rebellious priest (Manasseh) from the precincts of the temple in Jerusalem, because he was unlawfully allied with the Samaritans by marriage (cp. Neh. 13:28 with 4:1-2). Josephus records that Manasseh fled from Jerusalem to build a rival temple, and set up a rival worship, on Mount Gerizim. Later the Samaritan temple was destroyed when the Jews gained control over the land,



Samaritans worshipped on Mt. Gerizim for centuries before Pontius Pilate broke up their pilgrimage. Foundations of a temple built by the Emperor Hadrian have been uncovered. Beneath are ruins of an earlier building, perhaps the original Samaritan temple, destroyed by Alexander Jannaeus, BC128.

but the rival, schismatic worship remained, together with mutual hatred between Jews and Samaritans.

Now the woman was asking the Lord, as a prophet, to show which worship revealed the Truth? And which would prevail?

The Lord's reply set forth the following facts:

- **The hour was approaching when worship would cease both at Gerizim and at Jerusalem. This came to pass when the Romans invaded the land in AD70, and destroying the temple, took the people captive.**
- **The Samaritan worship was a mixed-up worship ("You worship you know not what") like the mixed-up community itself (cf. 2Kings 17:32).**
- **Salvation is of the Jews, so true worshippers must identify themselves with Israel (Eph. 2:11-14).**
- **All Jews, however, were not "true worshippers."**
- **True worshippers worshipped in spirit (not according to fleshly interests like the rival aspirations of both Jews and Samaritans), and in truth.**
- **The Father will search out such, no matter what nation they belong to (see Acts 15:14), even as the Lord had revealed Truth to this Samaritan woman.**
- **God is Spirit, and His spiritual qualities must be reflected in those who would be His true worshippers.**

The Lord's words were: "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when you shall neither in this mountain *[i.e., Gerizim]*, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship you know not what; we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is spirit *[see Revised Version — not "a spirit" as in the Authorised Version]*: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."*

The woman gave answer to this with words that reveal her belief and hope. As a Samaritan, she heeded the writings of Moses, which taught that when Messiah appeared, he would do so as a prophet to give a complete revelation of truth to the people (Deu. 18:18). She

* It is sometimes imagined that when the Lord used the expression, "God is spirit," as John 4:24 should be rendered, he was teaching that He had not body, parts or substance. But the very relationship of "Father" and "Son" is enough to dispel that idea, for a father can only beget a son in his own image. The Bible clearly reveals that "spirit" can have form and substance, for Paul teaches that there is a spirit-body (1Cor. 15:44), which Peter claims is "divine nature" (2Pet. 1:4). Hebrews 1:7 declares that "God maketh His angels spirits," and yet they have corporeal existence (Matt. 28:2-4). The statement, "God is spirit" thus relates to the incorruptible nature of Yahweh as distinct from "flesh and blood" which is corruptible. Christ now sits at the "right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12; Acts 2:34), proving that Yahweh has body and parts.

now gave expression to her expectations in that regard: "I know that Messiah is coming, and when he is come, he will tell us all things," she told the Lord.



But what more intimate understanding of things, whether of temporal or spiritual matters, could Messiah hope to reveal, than the revelation of her own life that she had received from this unusual Jew?

So the woman was ready to accept the simple, clear and thrilling statement of the Lord: "I that speak unto you am he!"

Spiritual Meat For The Disciples

By now the disciples could be seen returning with provisions they had purchased. They were amazed to see the Lord in close conversation with a Samaritan woman, as the woman herself had been, when the Lord first addressed her. They could tell that the pair had been deeply discussing some point of doctrine, and, at the same time, they were probably aware of Jewish law, taught in the *Talmud*, that prohibited a man to engage in public discussion with a woman.

Yet not one of them dared to challenge the Lord's right to do so, or to question the woman. Jesus was their Lord, and they had received sufficient proof of his divine authority, to dimly realise that he was above the traditions of the Jews.

They waited patiently until the woman left, and even then they did not say anything. Silence prevailed as they set out the food, though every now and then they cast uneasy looks at the Lord who remained impervious to their concern, absorbed in deep, meditative thought, with his mind so concentrated on spiritual matters, as to leave no thought for earthly food.

At last all was ready, and they felt that they must break in upon his thoughts.

"Master, eat!" they bid him.

But he replied: "I have meat to eat that you know not of!"

They cast troubled looks at one another. What did he mean? At one moment, they felt a deep love and affection for him; at the next moment, he irritated them by some strange statement that they could not understand. Had somebody given him something to eat? They whispered this question one to the other, not realising that he knew their thoughts, even if he did not hear their words.

So he proceeded to teach them: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work. Say not ye, there are yet four

months and then cometh harvest? Behold I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and you are entered into their labors."

Thus Jesus applied, with new meaning, proverbs common in his day. There was usually a delay of four months between seeding and harvest during which the farmer could rest; but there was to be no delay in the gospel harvest, and it was up to the disciples to enter immediately into their work, realising that they could earn wages by so doing, and would gather fruit unto life eternal. At that day, both he that soweth and he that reapeth would rejoice together, for the disciples were about to reap the harvest sown by many faithful servants in the past, including Moses, the prophets, John and the Lord (John 4:38).

In that way, the Master taught his disciples not to be over-concerned with the meat that perisheth, but to seek that which will give eternal life in the Age to come by dedicating themselves to reaping the harvest of that upon which they had expended no labor in sowing. In other words, to follow his example, and make the doing of the Father's will the main concern of their lives. Such is the way of life eternal.

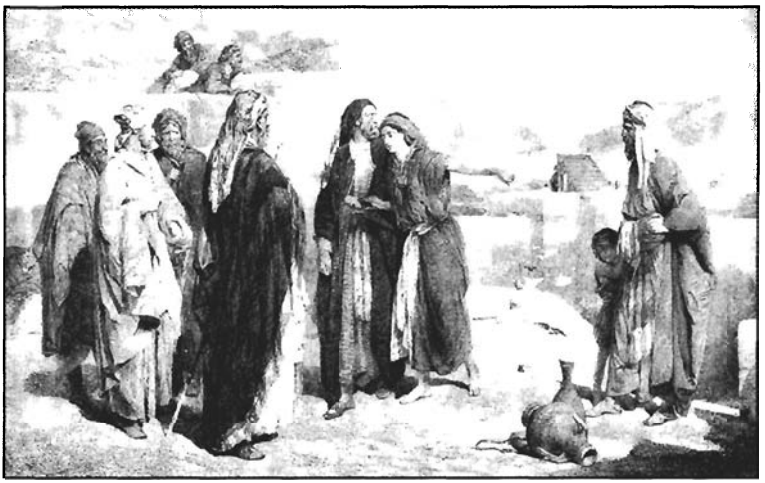
From where he sat, the Lord could see the Samaritan "field" almost ready for "reaping." He was reclining on the well-curb as he spoke with his disciples, looking north across a mile of wheat fields, towards Sychar. There, coming along the road, diagonally through the grain fields, he could see a crowd of Samaritans approaching, led by the woman who had bid them come (John 4:29). The disciples had their backs to them, so that Jesus asked them to turn and see the eager crowd coming to view the Messiah: "Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." The words of John 4:25, 26, 29 reveal how ripe the fields were!

Preaching to the Samaritans

The woman had hurried back to Sychar, full of excitement at what she heard that day, convinced that she had indeed conversed with the Messiah, and anxious to tell her neighbors of her unique experience.

They gathered around her, to hear of the strange Jew by the well, who had spoken such amazing things to her.

"Come," she urged them, "see a man who told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"



And now, at the Well of Jacob, there appeared a scene that was unique in all its long history of significant incidents; it saw Gentiles crowding around the Jewish Messiah to eagerly drink of his words, and this at a time when the leaders of the nation had repelled him. They drank, not of the Well of Jacob, the supplanter, but of the true Well of Israel, the Prince of God (Isa. 12:3; John 7:37-38).

As they listened to the gracious words of the Lord, and looked upon his noble, intelligent countenance, they also were convinced and believed in him. All national barriers were lowered by this contact with him; all hatreds were swept aside by the flood of divine love that was manifested in the teaching of this greatest of all Jews, and they (who normally would not speak to a Jew if they could avoid it) earnestly pleaded with him to stay with them for a short while. The Lord consented, and for two days remained in the small town, teaching the people.

The unnamed woman that he had met by the well took a personal interest in bringing as many as possible to hear him, that he might teach them the wonderful purpose of Yahweh with man and the earth. They, in turn, were convinced. They told the woman: "Now we believe, not because of your sayings: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

Their comment to the woman demonstrated a most important fact, that the real power of God's Word is best felt when personal contact is made with it. That was the case with the Samaritans, when they came into contact with the "Word made flesh" dwelling among them.

In this incident, the ways of Providence are revealed, in that God used apparently adverse circumstances and little incidentals of life, to further His purpose. Though the bitter opposition of the leaders of

Jewry caused the Saviour to leave their territory, a simple woman, whose mind had been exercised on divine Truth, was able to persuade the inhabitants of a despised city to open their hearts to his teaching.

After two days sojourn among the Gentiles of Sychar, the Lord again returned to Jewish territory, this time to Galilee (John 4:43). This brief absence and return was a foreshadowing of his purpose with the Gentiles who have a hearing ear for his message; shortly, however, in the "third day," he will return to Israel to be accepted as king, and to reign from Jerusalem (Zech. 12:10; Mat. 5:35). Then will be fulfilled the prophetic words of Hosea, who declared: "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight" (Hos. 6:2).

"A Prophet Is Not Without Honor Except..."

It seemed strange to the disciples, that the despised Samaritans should so readily listen to Jesus, and yet his own people, and particularly the leaders of Judea, should so oppose him. But the Lord explained to them, "that a prophet hath no honor in his own country" (John 4:44). This is a truth that was to be constantly impressed upon them later, when they were to take up the preaching of the Truth; it is a truth that stands even today. The disciples had a very graphic illustration of it later when the Lord visited his own city of Nazareth, only to be rejected by those who knew him well.

Did Christ's preaching to the Samaritans have any permanent effect upon them? The answer is, Yes. Following the persecution of the ecclesia in Jerusalem after the death of the Lord and the consequent scattering of its members, one of them, Philip by name, took the gospel to Samaria, where the people embraced it enthusiastically. News was sent back to the apostles that "Samaria had received the Word of God." Doubtless the minds of the apostles went back to the occasion when the Lord, despite his weariness, faithfully preached the Word at Sychar, and they were told that they would reap a harvest in a field upon which they had expended no labour.

Meanwhile, the Lord heard sad news concerning his forerunner, his cousin, and his friend, John the Baptist.

Chapter 7

JOHN BAPTIST IS IMPRISONED

JOHN Baptist's light was waning. He knew from the beginning that this must happen. He had told his disciples concerning the Lord Jesus: "He must increase but I must decrease."* John's life was lonely and sad. Though he rejoiced at the voice of the Saviour, and spoke of him as his friend (John 3:29), though they worked at no great distance from each other, and on a similar mission, yet it appears there was little contact between the two men; no occasions when one might console, sustain and encourage the other.

Their continuous work, the crowds making demands upon them, the disciples thronging around them, would have prevented such close and intimate relationship.

And towards the end of his ministry, John experienced other discouraging features. He felt the growing disinterest of listeners whose curiosity had waned; he was faced with the doubts of disciples whom his own testimony had disheartened. Finally there came the last depressing period of his life, when he was flung into prison by Herod, and ate out his heart in solitary confinement.

All this through the hatred of an evil woman, and the wantonness of her depraved daughter.

He Boldly Opposes Herod

We left John baptising at Aenon, and faced with division among his own disciples. Aenon was close to the border of Peraea, over which Herod the Tetrarch** ruled. His dominions embraced in the north: Galilee, west of the Jordan and of the Lake of Galilee, and in the south: Peraea, east of the Jordan.

Herod was a weak man, easily dominated by his own feelings or the stronger will of others, but this very weakness made him cunning and crafty to a degree.

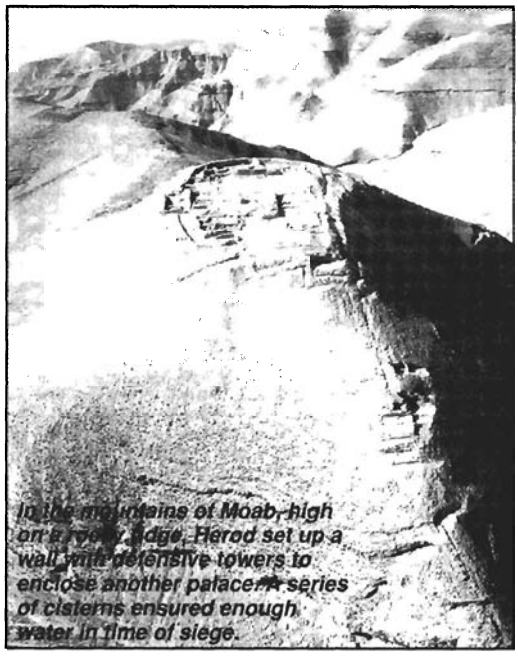
So much so, that the Lord called him "that fox!"

---

* Note the two words used by the Lord to describe John and himself. He declared of John: "He was a burning and a shining light" (John 5:35), and of himself: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). But the words are different in the Greek. In John 5:35, the word is *luchnos*, and signifies a portable hand lamp fed by oil, which burns brightly for a time, and then goes out. The word in John 8:12 is *phos*, and points to the shining forth of continuous, ever burning light. John's "light" was not intended for continuous illumination.

** "Tetrarch" signifies *a fourth*, and was the title given to a subordinate prince. Herod Antipas, who was very ambitious, received only a fourth part of his father's realm.

His father was the bloodthirsty Herod, so-called "the Great," and an Edomite. His mother was Malthace, a Samaritan, so that Herod had very little (if any) Jewish blood in him.


In the mountains of Moab, high on a rocky ridge, Herod set up a wall with defensive towers to enclose another palace. A series of cisterns ensured enough water in time of siege.

By the second last will of his father, the kingdom was bequeathed to Herod, but by his father's final will (and Herod the Great was fond of altering his will!), which was completed just prior to his death, Archelaus, the full brother of Herod, was given the Kingdom, and Herod and Philip (his half-brother) were granted lesser dominions and positions.

This did not please Herod; he appealed to Rome to confirm him in the position originally appointed him, but his efforts were not crowned with success. He received only the Tetrarchy of Galilee and Peraea.

He indulged his passion for building, and had recently completed a splendid palace in Tiberias, his Galilean residence; but most of his time was spent in Peraea, east of the Jordan, where he had two palaces, one at Julias and the other at Machaerus.

Herod was married to the daughter of King Aretas of Nabataea, but on one occasion, when he was being entertained by his half-brother, Philip,* in Rome, he fell passionately in love with Herodias, the wife of Philip, and Herod's own niece. In spite of the incestuous nature of such a relationship, Herod made an offer of marriage to her.

His guilty passion was returned, and Herodias deserted her husband, who was only a private person, that she might share with the Tetrarch the honors of a crown. Herod, on his part, callously divorced his legitimate wife, and married Herodias.

This unlawful action on the part of Herod was boldly opposed by John the Baptist. The Tetrarch had been attracted by his teaching, but now he received an open and public rebuke: "It is not lawful for you

* Not to be confused with Philip the Tetrarch, this Philip received no kingdom.

to have your brother's wife," declared John.

He not only said it once, but continued to do so.*

It angered both Herod and Herodias. This bitter, vengeful woman harbored a personal grudge against the great reformer. Urged on by her, and fearing, too, that John's agitation might result in a public riot, Herod sent forth and took John, and cast him into prison.

That was not sufficient punishment in the opinion of Herodias. She hated John and would have killed him. Constantly she urged Herod to do so. But he refused. For he had a great respect for John, and believed him to be a prophet; and he feared the people who looked upon John in that light, and might have revolted against Herod if he had put John to death (see Mark 6:18-19; Mat. 14:5).

Herod therefore protected John against the vindictive vengeance of Herodias, and also took the opportunity of hearing him expound the principles for which he stood. The contact between Ruler and Reformer had some effect; it caused Herod to look inwardly, and resolve to restrain the worst abuses of which he would otherwise have been guilty (Mark 6:20). He could see, quite clearly, that John was right, and that he was a righteous and holy man.

But fearing his wife more than his God, he kept John locked up in the gloomy prison.

John In Prison John remained imprisoned for several months, and was not badly treated (Mark 6:20), being permitted to speak with those disciples who visited him (Luke 7:18-28). According to Josephus, the prison-fort was close to the palace at Machaerus, near the Nabatean frontier, on the east of the Dead Sea.

The palace-fort, together with its dungeons, was on a rising, overlooking a deep cleft, from which could be seen the shining waters of the Dead Sea like a scrap of sky fallen into the gulf nearly 4,000 feet (1,200 mtrs) below. From a narrow window let into the dungeon, John could look down upon that Sea of Death, knowing that death would soon claim him. But in the north rose the clear outline of Nebo, where Moses looked upon the Promised Land in hope, a hope that could alone sustain John in his imprisonment. From the southern aspect of his prison, John could look out upon the rugged wilderness of Judea, bounded by the hills of Hebron in the distance, with the significant towns of Bethlehem and Jerusalem nearer to hand. Or, he could look down upon the deep Jordan Valley, to see the river itself, like a winding thread of silver, wending its tortuous way amid the

* Mark 6:18 reads: "For John had said ..." but the Greek is in the imperfect tense, which signifies something that is not complete, something that continues. Thus it should read: "John kept on saying ..." He raised his voice constantly against the shocking example of infidelity manifested by both Herod and Herodias.

harsh, barren hills that hemmed it in, until it was lost in the northern distance. Thus before John was the vista of his own life: his childhood days in the hill country of Judea; the period of preparation in the wilderness; the scenes of his early ministry, and the baptisms he performed in the Jordan; that wonderful day when it was revealed to him that his righteous cousin was the Messiah, the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

But, as the Baptist thought of these things, his meditations would possibly be disturbed by the drunken revelry in the palace of the king; the wild debauchery for which it was noted. Then he would pace the prison cell wondering how long he must endure the cruelty of such confinement, for to the fiercely independent, restless spirit of the vigorous, forthright John the Baptist, no greater punishment could be conceived than caging him up like some wild bird, to piteously look out of the bars of his prison, and to rot away his life in loneliness.

News of the imprisonment of John came to the notice of Jesus as he left Samaria for Galilee (Mat. 4:12).

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE SAMARITANS:
A Despised People Who Listened

They sprang originally from an intermixture of Gentile nations, imported into the northern kingdom when the ten tribes were taken into captivity by the Assyrians. Colonies from Babylonia, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharviam were brought into the land to intermingle with the remnants of the Israelites that remained (2Kings 17:24).

They encountered difficulties there, and claimed that this was because they were not worshipping the local god aright. In consequence of this, the Assyrian king brought back one of the schismatic priests of the worship established by Jeroboam, and he imperfectly taught the people principles of divine worship as he understood them (2Kings 17:27-28). The record states: "They made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared Yahweh, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations" (2Kings 17:32-33).

The Samaritans, therefore, were a mixed-up community, with a mixed-up religion, and true Israelites would have nothing to do with them.

On the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, when they began to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, the Samaritans requested to be acknowledged as Jewish citizens, and to be permitted to assist in the work; but their application was rejected out of hand (Ezra 4:1-4). As a result of this refusal, a state of bitter enmity arose between the two peoples, and the Samaritans did all in their power to defeat the project of the Jews. They accused and condemned them before the Persian kings, bribing the officials to hinder the work then undertaken (Ezra 4:5). Nehemiah found them to be his most bitter opponents, using every means to destroy his influence and his work (Neh. 4:1-8). He recognised that complete separation from the Samaritans was necessary for the success of the restoration.

On his return to Persia, Nehemiah's prohibitions were relaxed, and Jews began to intermingle with Samaritans. Even the priests were guilty of this; and when the governor again returned to Judea, he found the need, all over again, to insist upon complete separateness from this people living in error. He dealt vigorously with the problem, recording in Neh. 13:28: "One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib, the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite [a prominent Samaritan]: therefore I chased him from me."

This son of Joiada, a man called Manasseh (according to Josephus), fled to Sanballat, who built for him a temple on Mt. Gerizim, and constituted him high priest. Thus a rival worship was set up, which became a refuge for every apostate Jew. According to Josephus, if a Jew at Jerusalem was called to account for breaking the law, he fled to Shechem, declaring himself to be unjustly accused.

From all these, and other circumstances, the national hatred between the Samaritans and Jews increased to such a height, that the Jews

denounced them with the most bitter curses, and for a considerable time refused to associate with them in any way. Hence the woman of Samaria was astonished that Jesus, a Jew, should ask a favour of her. Hence also the Jews, when they would express the utmost aversion to Christ, said to him, "You are a Samaritan" (John 8:48). Hence also the reason why the Lord selected the Samaritan in his parable to illustrate the true lesson of neighborliness.

In belief, the Samaritans further augmented Jewish hatred towards them, by rejecting all the sacred books except the five books of Moses. It was from these books that they derived the sacredness of Mt. Gerizim, for Moses had commanded the Israelites that they should read the Law at that place, and should sacrifice there (Deu. 27:4-13). In common with the Jews, and the teaching of Moses, they believed in the day of judgment and recompense, and in the coming of the Messiah, or Christ.

The Lord plainly endorsed the attitude of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah towards the Samaritans, clearly showing the woman at the well that she did not worship in truth ("Ye worship ye know not what") and that salvation was of the Jews. In his instructions to his apostles, the Master commanded them to preach to Jews only, and warned them against entering "into any city of the Samaritans" (Mat. 10:5). However, on his resurrection, when the Jewish repudiation of him was complete, he instructed the apostles that the gospel was now to be preached to the Samaritans, thus breaking down the wall of division that previously existed between them (Acts 1:8). The gospel was subsequently preached "in many villages of the Samaritans" (Acts 8:25).

The temple built by Sanballat on Mount Gerizim, was destroyed by the Jewish ruler, Hyrcanus, BC129, but the Samaritans, in the time of Jesus, esteemed that mountain sacred, and the proper place of national worship (John 4:20).

The Lord's words to the woman at the well ("neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall men worship") were prophetic of the destruction that came upon the two places of worship when the Romans invaded the land. Severe bloodshed was experienced on Mt. Gerizim when a group of die-hards endeavored to resist the Romans, so that Samaria experienced the destruction that came upon Jewry throughout the Land.

The Samaritan sect still continues to the present time despite frequent persecutions throughout the centuries. Today, a small community of three hundred or more Samaritans exist in Nablus, the modern Shechem, awaiting the Messiah.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN JESUS AND JOHN BAPTIST

Two Men Whose Work Was Inseparably Linked

1. Both were heralded by an angel (Luke 1:11, 28).
2. Both were styled "great" as indicative of their work (Luke 1:15, 32).
3. Both were begotten by the operation of the Spirit of God (Luke 1:13, 35).
4. Both were born to faithful women.
5. Both were born to women who, in the natural course of events, were not in a position to be with child. Elisabeth was barren and in old age (Luke 1:7). Mary was a virgin (v. 27). Thus God worked contrary to nature to produce "the seed of the woman" (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14).
6. Both John and Jesus were filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15; 4:1).
7. Both forsook home and families for the Truth's sake (Luke 1:80; Mat. 19:29; Mark 3:31).
8. Both were priests — John of an inferior order (Luke 1:5); Jesus of the order of Melchisedec (Psalm 110:4; Zech. 6:13; Heb. 5:5-6; 7:17).
9. Both ministered for the forgiveness of sins. In the case of John (Mat. 3:6; Luke 1:77); in the case of Jesus (Luke 5:20; Heb. 5:1-3).
10. Both were messengers of God (Mal. 3:1), and both were sent from God (John 1:6; 3:17; 5:37).
11. Both were preachers of the Truth (Mat. 3:1; Luke 4:18-19). Both proclaimed the same message: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:2; 4:17).
12. Both acknowledged baptism as a means of recognition that man is in need of redemption (John 1:26; 4:1).
13. Both were prophets. In the case of John (Luke 1:76; 7:28); in the case of Jesus (Deu. 18:15-18; Acts 3:22).
14. Both were "lights." John was styled a *luchnos*; a lamp. The word signifies a hand-lamp fed with oil, which would diminish and go out. It was a temporary light ministered by hands (John 5:35). The word used to describe Jesus as a light is *phos*, and indicates underived and undiminished light (John 1:8-9; 8:12; 9:5).
15. Both died violent deaths. John was beheaded (Mat. 14:12); Jesus was crucified.
16. Both were "witnesses" (martyrs) for the Truth (John 1:7; 18:37).

The Contrast as Expressed by John

"He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the

bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. H***e must increase, but I must decrease...***" (John 3:29-30).

John had the great privilege of acting as forerunner to the Messiah, and in that regard was greater than any of the prophets that preceded him.

Features of John's Work in relation to Jesus

1. JOHN WAS THE FORERUNNER heralding the Majesty (Mat. 3:2; Isa. 40:3-8; John 1:23), and preparing a people for the Lord. Similarly, the Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24).
2. JOHN WAS THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM (John 3:29), who brings the Bride and Groom together. His joy is complete and he then leaves the scene. Similarly, the Law was given until the seed (faith) should come (Gal. 3:19, 25).
3. JOHN'S FUNDAMENTAL TEACHING was the "unprofitableness of flesh," for he declared: "all flesh is as grass." The Law was given to demonstrate the sinfulness of sin (Rom. 7:13).
4. JOHN WAS IN THE WILDERNESS (Luke 1:80), a term used as the Hebrew title of the Book of Numbers. Here he was fed by the Providence of God. Compare the locusts of his wilderness experience as the devouring judgments of God (Joel 1:4; Deu. 28:38; Mal. 3:11), and honey as the symbol of His righteousness and true judgments (Psa. 19:9-10). He baptised at Bethabara, the place of crossing or passage, near Gilgal where Israel crossed the Jordan, and were nationally circumcised (Josh. 5:1-9).
5. JOHN RECOGNISED THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS, even though John would have had more personal esteem in the eyes of the people than Jesus (John 1:15, 30). He (Jesus) was "preferred before me" (or superior in dignity. Compare the expression used by Jacob in his blessing of the firstborn: Gen. 49:3 — the "Excellency of Dignity" was the blessing for the priestly aspect of the firstborn)... for he was before me" (i.e., foremost in position and authority: John 3:30), for he "must increase and I must decrease."
6. JOHN'S WORK WAS TO REFLECT THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE LAW in the life of an Israelite (cp. Luke 7:26, 29, where the result of his work turned many to the Lord, thereby justifying God). The Law and the Prophets were until John (Luke 16:1).
7. JOHN'S NAME MEANS "YAHWEH IS GRACIOUS." God's grace to Israel was reflected through the Law, but "abounding grace" came by Jesus Christ (John 1:14-17).

Preaching in Galatia

Chapter 1

IMPORTANT WORK IN GALILEE

LEAVING Samaria, the Lord travelled north to the region of Galilee (John 4:43-45), a heavily populated part of Palestine in those days. Josephus records that it contained 204 towns and villages, with an average population of 15,000 inhabitants, so that this district contained more than three million people.

From them Jesus received an enthusiastic response. Those who had witnessed the miracles he performed in Jerusalem, had returned home with his fame on their lips, to tell others of what they had seen and heard. People from all walks of life desired to see and hear the new prophet, so that crowds gathered wherever he went, to gaze with awe upon the performer of such marvels, and to listen spellbound to the gracious words he spoke, as he expounded to them the things of the kingdom of God.

There was a marked contrast, however, between those who now came to hear him, and those who had so enthusiastically received him in the Samaritan village of Sychar. The Jews accepted him because they had *seen* the things he did; the Samaritans believed on him through the *words* he spoke (see the contrast stressed in John 4:42, 45). There is greater virtue in the latter than in the former, as Jesus later reminded Thomas. Thomas had declared he would not believe unless he *saw*; and when the Lord completely swept away his doubts by providing Thomas with indisputable visual evidence, he declared: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

We have the opportunity today to reap the blessedness of which the Lord spoke, by manifesting our belief in these matters, though we have not personally witnessed them.

Chapter 2

THE SECOND SIGN; HEALING THE NOBLEMAN'S SON

IN the course of his preaching tour, the Lord returned to the town of Cana in Galilee. It was here that he had performed his first miracle to gladden the hearts of his friends (turning water into wine at the marriage feast), a miracle that John refers to as the first of eight outstanding signs expressive of the purpose of God in Christ (see pages 204-212).

A Plea For Help He had not long arrived, when his work was interrupted by a nobleman* of Capernaum who showed every appearance of distress. Back home, in Capernaum, this nobleman's son lay desperately ill, at the point of death. Every attempt to cure him had failed, and at last physicians had given up all hope.

But the nobleman had not! He had seen, or had heard of, the wonderful miracles of the Lord, and hastened to meet him to plead his help. He impatiently pushed his way through the crowd surrounding Jesus, and instantly addressed him.

"Come down and heal my son," he pleaded, "for he is at the point of death!"

The nobleman was urgent in his request; impatient that Jesus should leave Cana immediately for Capernaum, lest it be too late.

But there was one vital matter that he did not understand.

His son was lying on a bed of sickness, at the very point of death, and he could recognise the need of the Lord's healing touch; but he did not realise that another "son" was just as desperately ill.

That "son" was God's firstborn — even Israel!

The nobleman wanted Christ to personally "come down" to Capernaum to perform a miracle; he wanted the reassuring presence of Jesus himself to place his hands upon his son, confident that this would cure him.

In that, he was like Jewry, which would only believe what it saw, and not what it could hear in God's Word.

The Lord tried to bring this home to the nobleman. He had no desire to be looked upon as a mere wonder-worker, a man who could perform miracles without pointing a lesson; he had not come into the world merely to tend humanity's physical ailments, but to cure its spiritual sickness. And this was the most difficult work he had to do. On all sides he was faced by complete lack of faith. True, the people

* The word "nobleman" in Greek is *basilikos* and signifies "a royal officer." This man, therefore, was evidently an officer of the court of Herod Antipas.

were following him, but that was because they had seen the miracles he had performed, and not because they were moved by the Word of God. And now, as they listened with curiosity to the importunate plea of the nobleman, they eagerly awaited a further miracle they hoped would follow, possibly urging the Lord to again demonstrate that he was the Messiah by yet another manifestation of supernatural power.

But he turned and rebuked them. "Except ye* see signs and wonders ye will not believe..." he declared.

The Samaritans had believed after hearing him expound the Word of God, but his own countrymen refused to believe unless they had a visible sign!

The worried nobleman, however, fearful that his son might die, took little heed to this rebuke. One thing dominated his attention at that moment: a cure for his desperately sick child. Pathetically he cried: "Sir, come down, ere my child die!"

In other words, he would have Christ leave his work of preaching to save his dying child!

It was a natural request. But the work of the Lord was greater than the life of a boy, and he was not prepared to neglect it for that reason. With the power that his heavenly Father had given him, however, he was able to do both! Quietly, earnestly, impressively, in such a way as to remove all anxiety and fear from the nobleman's mind and replace it with confidence, he replied: "Go thy way; thy son liveth!"

And the anxious, worried nobleman, looking into the serene countenance of the Lord, felt all his doubts swept away.

"Thy Son Liveth" And now, he, himself, manifested great faith. Instead of immediately returning home** to test the truth of what the Lord said, or to rejoice with his family, he remained with the Lord, doubtless to hearken to his teaching of the Word and to be instructed in the things of God. It had been the seventh hour, about 1 pm, when he had accosted Jesus to make his request, but it was not until the morrow that he arrived back in Capernaum, about 14 miles (22 kms) from Cana.

Meanwhile, in the nobleman's house, despair and grief had given place to relief and rejoicing. A dramatic change had taken place in the desperately sick son. At one moment he was reported gravely ill with

---

* The word "ye" is plural in the Greek, making it obvious that the Lord was not exclusively addressing the nobleman, but the Jews who were listening in to the conversation.

** This is obvious from the circumstances. The Lord gave his assurance that the boy had been cured at 1 pm, but it was not until the next day that the nobleman returned home. Capernaum was only about 14 miles (22 kms) from Cana, and could easily have been reached that same day; but evidently the nobleman showed faith, and remained for further conversation with the Lord.

a burning fever; then, suddenly, there was a remarkable change for the better: the fever left him and he was well on the road to complete recovery.

The attendants around the bed noted the time that this had happened; it was the seventh hour — but the cause was quite unaccountable.

One thing was certain, however, there was now no need for the nobleman who had left the house to seek a further miracle from the strange prophet who was touring the towns and villages of Galilee. Servants were therefore dispatched to inform their master that the danger had passed, and there was no need to trouble Jesus.

They met him returning home without the prophet.

"Thy son liveth!" they joyfully and excitedly proclaimed.

"At what time did he begin to mend?" enquired the nobleman.

"Yesterday, at the seventh hour," was the reply.

The seventh hour! That was the very time that the nobleman had heard from those gracious lips the grand message, "Thy son liveth." Here was complete confirmation of the miracle! There was not the shadow of doubt in the mind of the nobleman now: Jesus was a prophet, the Messiah of Israel! He believed, and as he told and retold his experience to his family and servants, they also believed.

Thus sorrow and sadness were turned into joy and happiness in that home in Capernaum (*Town of Consolation*), because its members believed in the word of the Lord.

His Word can still have the same effect, even though the time of open miracles is past.

What The Miracle Taught

Concerning this miracle, John declared, "This is the second miracle that Jesus did..." (John 4:54). On page 207 of *The Story of the Bible* we have shown that the word rendered "miracle" in John's Gospel is the Greek word *semeion*, and signifies "sign," being so rendered in the Revised Version.

We also drew attention to the fact that there are eight such signs recorded in John's Gospel, and that they tell in sequence the purpose of God in Christ. Perhaps it would be a good idea to read again what we have there stated, and see how beautifully this "second sign" links up with the first one in significance.

The first "sign" *(turning water into wine)*, revealed that Christ's followers will experience joy and happiness in performing his service. The second "sign" *(healing the nobleman's son)* demonstrated that his Word is adequate to cure the desperately sick nation of Israel, or, applying the sign personally, to heal those who are spiritually sick.

It was his Word that healed the son; it is the Word of Truth that can spiritually revive those who apply themselves to it.

That was the lesson impressed upon the people of Israel, and the nobleman in particular, over 2,000 years ago, when Christ performed this notable miracle.

That was why he rebuked them, saying: "Unless ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." He was trying to impress them with the need of relying upon God's Word for all their spiritual needs.

What To Look For In The Second Sign

In interpreting this miracle as a "sign," take note of the four characters associated with it. They are: [1] the nobleman; [2] his sick son; [3] his household; [4] Christ.

The nobleman, or royal officer as the term signifies, represented those leaders in Jewry like Nicodemus, who recognised that the nation was in need of spiritual revival, and that Jesus was a man sent from God for that purpose (John 3:1).

But they did not fully understand the mission of the Lord nor the purpose of God. In fact they were so far astray, that on one occasion, those who believed in him tried to take him by force and make him king (John 6:15). They were stirred with a patriotic zeal, but were prepared to acknowledge his royal prerogatives only on their own terms. They wanted to revive the nation out of its state of "sickness" by destroying the Romans, and therefore desired Jesus to "come down" to their selfish level of thought and action to accomplish this. They were like the nobleman who wanted him to "come down" (the phrase is expressive!) the descending road to Capernaum and cure his son in the only way he thought possible.

The attitude of those who tried to make him king by force, was similar to the temptation the Lord resisted when the kingdoms of the world we described in thought and he was told, "all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Mat. 4:9).

The Lord, however, refused to "come down" to Capernaum and he also refused to "come down" to the standard adopted by such as Nicodemus, in order to save the nation.

There is only one genuine means to spiritual revival, only one way to save Israel or individuals, and that is by the influence and power of God's Word. The Lord demonstrated that when he healed the sick son of the nobleman by a word uttered whilst he was yet "a long way off." Israel's leaders then did not appreciate the lesson, but they will ultimately. It is a lesson we must learn today if we would be saved.

Meanwhile, notice that Christ *first* rebuked the Jews (John 4:48), and then, at "the seventh hour," he cured the son.

Does not that remind us of the two advents of the Lord? At his first advent he rebuked the Jews; at his second advent he will save them, as Paul declares in Romans 11:26. He will do this because they will then believe (v. 23).

As the nobleman represented the leaders of the nation, the son represented the nation itself which was placed in their care. The nation was desperately sick when Christ appeared in its midst over 2,000 years ago, but it will be restored at the "seventh hour," at his return, when the seventh millennium of peace will be ushered in.

The Family Rejoice The raising of the son from the bed of sickness was the occasion of much rejoicing, inasmuch as the whole household of the nobleman believed, including his slaves. This, likewise, has an application to the time when Israel shall be nationally raised from the spiritual sickness that has brought it to the point of death. Joy shall be widespread, and God's servants will rejoice with His sons.

Jeremiah records: "I *[Yahweh]* will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against Me. And it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise and an honor before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them *[Israel];* and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it *[the nation]"* (Jer. 33:8-9).

Meanwhile the fever of uncertainty and sickness rests heavily upon the Jewish people.

What Yahweh, through His Son, will do for His people in the future, He will do for us now. Spiritually, men and women today are desperately sick "in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1-2), and only the Word of God can cure them and "raise them up" (Col. 3:1). That principle was indicated when the Lord refused to go personally to Capernaum, but instead demonstrated that his word alone is sufficient to heal.

The Spirit-Word can cure us of spiritual sickness and give us spiritual health. It will create belief in us, grant us joy and happiness, influence others about us to seek the same means of help, and commence a process that will end in abounding divine health of immortality at "the seventh hour" — Christ's millennial reign on earth.

So in Cana (the name comes from a root meaning to *cause to stand up; to be erect*), this second wonderful sign was given for those who had ears to hear and eyes to see the spiritual significance of all the Lord said and did.

The Effect Of The Miracle The amazing power that Christ demonstrated, in that he was able to cure a man by the utterance of a word, even though far removed from him, added to the prevailing excitement concerning

him throughout Galilee (Luke 4:15). The nobleman was well-known, and the miracle was told and retold. People were eager to see it repeated, so that with their own eyes they might view what "they had heard done in Capernaum" (Luke 4:23).

With such reports sweeping Galilee, with people flocking to hear his message, and manifesting the greatest warmth and enthusiasm, the Lord decided to return to his hometown of Nazareth, to preach the message of salvation to those among whom he had been brought up.

Cana, and the modern city (below).





MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE NAMELESS NOBLEMAN — His Faith Wrought Works

(Christ healed his son — John 4:46-54).

There is many a nameless hero in the Bible, who, like a bright meteor, momentarily flash into view for a brief moment, only to be swallowed up in obscurity. But though we do not know them by name, Yahweh does, and their deeds are recorded in His Book of Life.

The nobleman of Capernaum, whose brief appearance is recorded in a few verses in John 4, is one such. He is seen for a brief moment, and then is heard of no more.

Or is he?

His title shows that he was in the service of Herod, for the word "nobleman" is *basilikos* in the Greek, and signifies a "royal officer," that is, one in the service of Herod who held sway over that part of the land.

There are two men mentioned in the New Testament who could claim that title: Chuza and Manaen.

Chuza is described in Luke 8:3 as "Herod's steward," whose wife Joanna ministered unto the Lord of "their substance." Perhaps this liberality was born of gratitude to the Lord, not only for the truths he spoke, but because of his gracious act of compassion in raising their son from the bed of sickness — if indeed, Chuza was the nobleman in question.

Acts of the Apostles makes reference to another man who could have been the nobleman (the king's officer) in question, for it records that among the members of the ecclesia at Antioch was one Manaen (Acts 13:1) who was the companion, or foster-brother, of Herod the tetrarch (see margin). Nothing more is known of Manaen than this statement. He is supposed by some to have been a relative of Menahem the Essene who, according to Josephus, predicted that Herod would ultimately obtain the kingdom, and was befriended by him in consequence.

But that is only conjecture.

Of these two "officers of the king," Chuza is the one most likely to be identified with the nobleman.

Christ drew to his side men and women of all classes of society. The highest and the lowest, the rich and the poor, all had a place in his purpose, and he made use of them all. Their resources were laid at his feet, and in the case of the wealthy, assisted him in a practical way to perform the work he was called upon to do (Luke 8:3).

The nobleman manifested attributes that are worthy of emulation. He was a person of faith and humility. He believed in Jesus, and went, himself, to beseech his aid. The urgency of his need gave speed to his feet and determination to his resolve, but, even so, he was not easily deterred. Even in the face of the discouraging public rebuke that the Lord administered to those who wanted signs before belief, he continued to plead his cause before the crowd with earnestness and humility.

It is not this that illustrates his great faith, however, but rather his subsequent action after he had received the assurance from Christ that his son would live. A merely selfish man would immediately hurry back to see the promise confirmed, and to rejoice with his family, but the nobleman evidently remembered the rebuke of the Lord ("ye will not believe unless ye see...") and remained some hours with Jesus, doubtless to hear his exposition of the Word. He accepted and believed the word of Christ both in relation to the healing of his son and his own personal need. His delay in returning demonstrated his faith, for it was not until the morrow that he arrived back in Capernaum, only 14 miles (23 kms) distant from Cana (John 4:52).

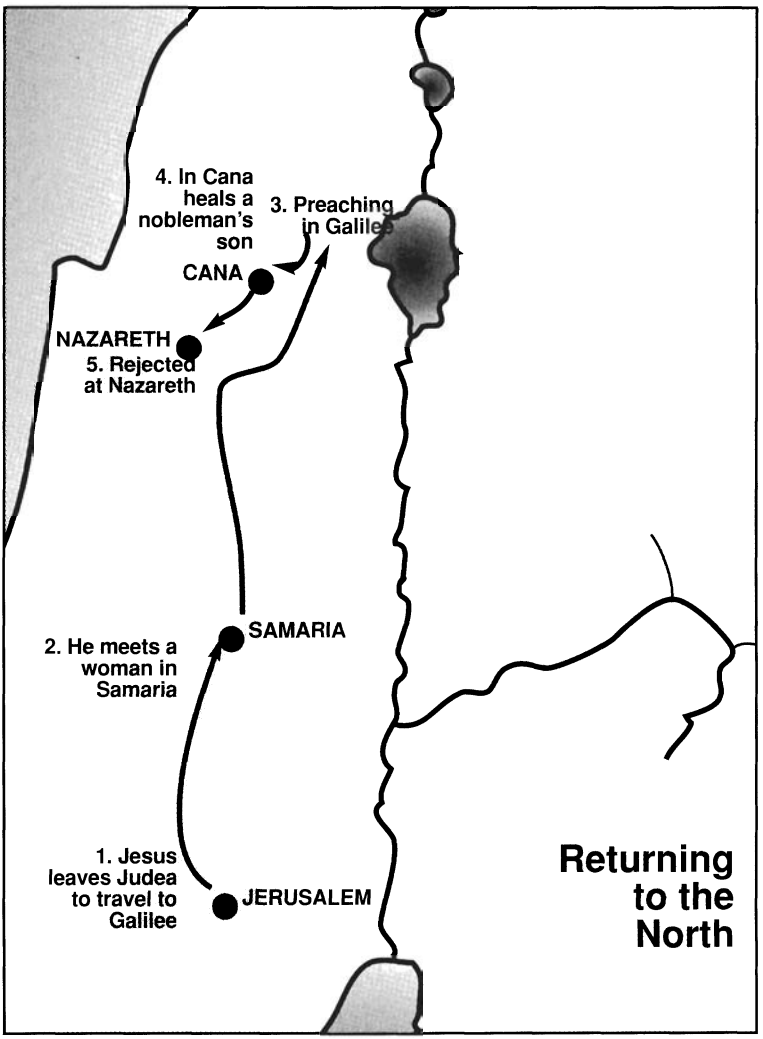
The nobleman was observant, taking heed to detail. He knew the exact point of time when the Lord had given his assurance that his son would live, and carefully compared it with the moment that the turn for the better was reported.

He was reverential and grateful. He did not grasp with greedy hands the gift that God can give with no thought of any return, but gave to Christ that which the Lord would most appreciate — an ear for his Word and a trust in its truth. He remained to listen and to believe, and returned home

to teach and convert.

After Nazareth had rejected the Lord, Jesus made Capernaum his headquarters. One can well imagine that the nobleman would be ever ready to receive him, and would afford him both shelter and protection. Perhaps that was one reason why he made this town the centre of his activities in Galilee.

One likes to think of him as Chuza, whose wife rendered back to Christ of their substance for the priceless benefits he conferred, but all doubts of his identity will be removed in the Age to come, when he shall receive the reward of faith, of which the miracle was a sign so long ago.



Chapter 3

NAZARETH REJECTS JESUS

NAZARETH is situated on the summit of a steep hill that rises some 1,150 feet (350 mtrs) above sea level, and commands a panoramic view of the Valley of Esdraelon. Hermon, Tabor, and Carmel, are some of the mountain peaks that can be seen from this hill — historic places reminding true Israelites of the wonderful heritage they possessed in the things that Yahweh had granted them; or of notable acts that men and women of faith had performed through their trust in God. Surely the contemplation of such a view, with all that it recalled of episodes of glory in Israel's history, would engender a responsive chord of warmth and faith in those who looked at it with understanding.

But not in Nazareth! Despite the significance of the view that ever lay before them, the people were untouched by the message that it should have conveyed, and had become fossilised in their concept of religion. Nazareth was a city of the dead as far as spirituality was concerned; the people were as living corpses — cold and defiling — in their attitude to God's Truth. It was a town that was generally despised throughout Palestine (John 1:46), and when the Lord visited Nazareth, it certainly lived up to its unenviable reputation. It was not a wealthy place, neither in a material nor a spiritual sense. It manifested a griping poverty in every way, its citizens being miserable, blind and naked, stultified because they had not the spiritual vision to lift their eyes above their abject poverty and revel in the richness of divine Truth.

Nazareth has many daughters among the cities of the world today!

The Lord climbed the steep hill to the village he knew so well, and once again walked the familiar streets where he had been brought up. No doubt, curious eyes were turned in his direction. He was well-known in the small town, and the reputation he had built up since his dramatic entry into the temple at Jerusalem must have preceded his return home.

But the people who looked at him saw not the Christ, but the carpenter. They saw the young man who, as a boy, they had employed and ordered around. He had obeyed their requests and had been paid (probably with a mere pittance!) for performing their bidding. He, a prophet, some said? It seemed unlikely. Oh, yes, they knew that he was sincere and studious; they knew he frequented the synagogue and delighted in the law of Yahweh. But, he, the Messiah? It seemed preposterous that the man they had employed to do trivial maintenance and repairs — a mere carpenter — could be the Son of

God, earth's future monarch!

But what of the miracles of which they had heard? What of the crowds following him in Judea and Galilee, and the wonders, it was reported, that he had wrought?

Well, let him do a few in Nazareth, and we will believe on him! It is true that there was a rumor of some stupendous miracle of healing performed in Capernaum, but who knows whether it was genuine? Let him do the same in Nazareth, and we will believe!

Such was the attitude of the townspeople of Nazareth, as they saw the meek and lowly Lord walking in their streets. But though he spoke to the people, he did no miracle there, and they were offended because of this. Why give preference to Capernaum? Let him demonstrate his power here!

The Riot in the Synagogue

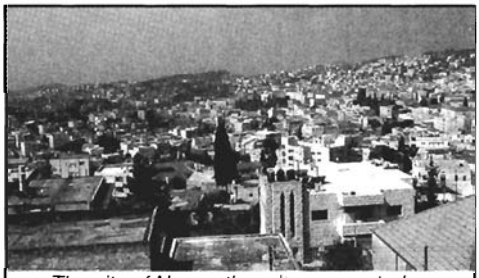
The presence of the Lord in Nazareth built up a spirit of suppressed excitement and tension. And the sabbath day brought it to a peak. The people knew that he would attend the synagogue, for it was his regular custom to do so (Luke 4:16); and we can be assured that the building was packed to capacity on that sabbath of his return to the village.

The congregation was not disappointed.

At the appointed time, the Lord entered and took his place, to become immediately the centre of attention.

The synagogue service was very simple, and was designed to impress upon the people the worship that took place in the temple. A synagogue building itself was very humble, usually a plain hall, rectangular in shape, facing Jerusalem. The normal service provided for two opening benedictions, an extract from the Law read in Hebrew followed by a translation into the local tongue (Aramaic), a prayer, a reading from the prophets, an address based upon the reading, and the final benediction as contained in Numbers 6:24-26.

Scrolls of the law were kept in a chest not far from the speakers' "chief seats" of the synagogue which were the delight of the Scribes and Pharisees to occupy (Mat. 23:6). The women were separated from the men, and because of the construction of the building, the faces of the congregation all turned towards Jerusalem.



The city of Nazareth as it appears today.

It was the custom for the elders to ask any visiting notable or

teacher to address the assembly if he so desired (cf. Acts 13:14-15), and, on this occasion, Jesus was invited so to do. With dignity he took his place at the rostrum. The presiding elder, known sometimes as the Keeper of the Sacred Books, handed to him, from out of the chest, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

There was an impressive silence as the Lord found the desired place (Isa. 61:1-2), and began to read the following words with such emphasis as only he could give:

"The Spirit of Yahweh is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of Yahweh..."

At this point the Lord stopped, rolled up the scroll, and handed it to the official (Gr. *huperetes,* an underworker). The silence was intense as the scroll was returned to the chest, and the Lord took his seat facing the congregation. His friends, neighbors, and relations looked at their carpenter, with "eyes fastened upon him" (Luke 4:20). There was a hushed, deep sense of expectancy in that synagogue.

And then he spoke.

What he said is not recorded, but it made a tremendous impression. All bore witness to the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. Doubtless he explained that the *"poor"* (mentioned in Luke 4:18) were not necessarily those who lack material wealth, but who are humble in their attitude, whatever their status in life might be; the *"brokenhearted"* are those who "sigh and cry" for the iniquities seen on all hands and who are oppressed with such problems of life as only Yahweh can heal (Psa.147:3); the *"blind"* are those who have their normal faculties, but have closed their minds to spiritual truths; the action of *"liberating"* the captives, is expressive of a true sabbath observance as Isaiah had observed (Isa. 58:6), in place of the formalised one that they were that day celebrating; whilst the term, *"the acceptable year"* (Lk. 4:19) pointed to the Year of Jubilee in the Jewish calendar, the year of release as it was called (Lev. 25:8-13).



Scroll of Isaiah found near the Dead Sea

The prophecy of Isa. 61, and the Law of Jubilee represented the release of the people from the oppression of sin and burdens. But ultimately deliverance from sin, and release from out of death, are things that Christ alone can grant.

To this point the people heard him quietly; these were "gracious

words." But then he made a claim that caused them to rise from their seats in excess of fury, and scream for his death.

He declared:

"THIS DAY IS THIS SCRIPTURE FULFILLED IN YOUR EARS!"

The spell of hushed silence was broken by this statement.

The Carpenter was claiming that he was the promised Christ!

Indignant murmurs broke out throughout the synagogue.

The townspeople of Nazareth looked upon Jesus as the son of Joseph, not the Son of God. How could the son of Joseph, a carpenter whom they had employed, a man to whom they had paid a few miserable shekels to do their bidding, be the Messiah promised in the prophets, the Mighty One who would deliver Israel, destroy its enemies, and elevate Jerusalem?

The claim was ridiculous!

The Lord, seated in the teacher's seat, could sense the rising indignation. He knew that familiarity breeds contempt. He had already instructed his disciples that "a prophet hath no honor in his own country" (John 4:44), and now he was personally experiencing the truth of his own words. But he made one last attempt to save these people who were his "familiar friends" (Psa. 41:9) from the results of their own folly, striving to awaken in them a realisation of what they were about to do by an appeal to their own history. The murmuring of the people stilled as they listened to him trying to break through the iron barrier of their faithlessness.

"You will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself [i.e., demonstrate your power and justify your claim]; whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in your country..."

And then he paused. Before miracles could be performed faith had to be manifested. But there was no faith in him in Nazareth. They were repeating the history of the past, and this he tried to gently impress upon them.

"Verily, I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. For I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them were cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian."

The Lord looked at the congregation as he spoke these words and could feel its resentment rising against him like an overwhelming flood. The synagogue seethed with anger. Looks of the most bitter hatred were cast in his direction. There was no mistaking the implication of Christ's words. Elijah and Elisha helped Gentiles and not their own countrymen, because the Gentiles had manifested a

faith that had been lacking in Israel!

What right had the carpenter to insinuate such things against them? Elijah and Elisha were prophets of Yahweh, appointed to their position and acknowledged as such, but this man who now claimed that he was the Messiah, was the one-time tradesman they employed to do repairs around their homes. They were used to seeing him in his rough, worn clothes performing menial tasks. It was ridiculous that he should claim to be the Messiah!

Such conceit, as they viewed it, was not to be tolerated for a moment. He had angered them beyond measure as they felt the sharp prick of his criticism. A feeling of mad, unreasoning hatred swept the audience as they saw only the common carpenter and ridiculed his claim to be the Messiah. They forgot themselves, they forgot the purpose of the gathering, they forgot the solemnity of the sabbath day. Rising from their seats, shouting out words of ridicule and angry threats, completely beside themselves with a mad blind passion of hatred, they laid rough hands on him and dragged him from the synagogue. Fiercely, noisily, and with murder in their hearts, they dragged him to the brink of a precipitous cliff not far from the town, intending to fling him down to his death. But the noise of the riot attracted others. Questions were asked as to its cause, answers were given, and in the prevailing excitement and confusion, in the heat of the moment as people pressed to the front to witness the horrible scene, the Lord escaped.



Old street in Nazareth

Passing through the crowd, the sorrowing Saviour of humanity sadly left the town where he had been brought up, "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).

Christ's Message For Us

The angry Jews had easily detected the main point of the Lord's discourse, but there are features of it that are not so clearly obvious, but which seem to have an application to these Gentile times.

He made reference to the periods of time in which the famine continued in the land in the days of Elijah, information not recorded in the Old Testament. The terrible famine lasted, he declared, three and a half years, or, according to Jewish reckoning, 1,260 days.

That was the period of Christ's own ministry on earth when a spiritual dearth was apparent among the people, as was shown by the way they rejected God's message and finally crucified His Son (see Amos 8:11-13).

It also seems to form the foundation (on a prophetic basis of a day for a year) for that long epoch of 1,260 day-years of spiritual famine throughout the earth during Gentile times, which is referred to in Daniel 7:25 and elsewhere (Rev. 11).

And who will be saved out of such times of famine?

Gentiles, like the widow woman of Sarepta who was saved because she hearkened and believed the words of the prophet!

Gentiles, like Naaman who was cleansed of leprosy (typical of sin) because he submitted to baptism in the Jordan at the bidding of Elisha.

The discourse in the synagogue in Nazareth thus had something for the Jews of Christ's day, as well as a message for everybody who has read it since. It warned the Jews that if they rejected the message of their Messiah, he would turn to the Gentiles. And it teaches Gentiles that if they would be saved, they must hearken to the voice of God and follow His teaching in believing and being baptised.

The Jews having rejected the message, it was ultimately delivered to the Gentiles.

What The Message Did Not Reveal

The passage in Isaiah which the Lord read is Chapter 61:1-2. Turn to this quotation, and note the dramatic pause that the Lord made, and the place where he finished.

For he stopped in the middle of a sentence!

The statement reads: *"...Yahweh hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek... To proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh, and the day of vengeance of our God..."*

But the Lord only read up to the statement, *"the acceptable year of Yahweh,"* and then, in the middle of a sentence, he dramatically stopped. Then he abruptly declared: ***"This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears..."***

If he had completed the sentence, he could not have made that comment, for *"the day of vengeance of our God"* is yet to come.

It will be revealed at the second advent of the Lord.

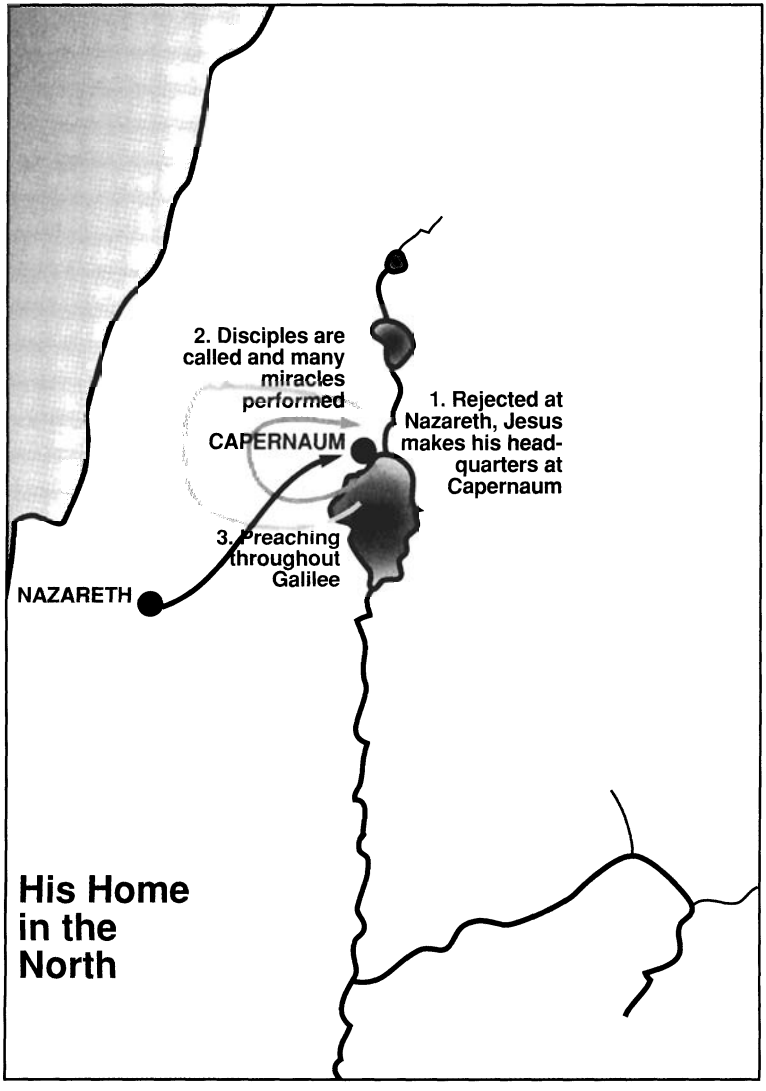
Isaiah 61:1-2, therefore, predicts the work of both advents of Christ. His first advent was to preach *"the acceptable year of Yahweh,"* to call upon men to repent and seek the salvation of God; his second advent will be as judge, to manifest the *"vengeance of Yahweh"* in the purifying judgments that shall come upon humanity. Paul taught that Christ comes to "take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2Thes. 1:8). The cause of all the world's misery, is the refusal of men to acknowledge God in truth; and though God patiently endures the blasphemy that constantly ascends into heaven, that the righteous among men might be called to salvation, the time is coming when His

patience will be exhausted, and His judgments will thunder forth against a disobedient world.

Meanwhile, "the acceptable year of Yahweh" continues.

Thus, in his address in the synagogue at Nazareth, the Lord Jesus carefully and "rightly divided the Word of truth" (2Tim. 2:15), revealing himself to be a "workman that needeth not to be ashamed."

How foolish the people were not to heed such a skilful teacher!



Chapter 4

JESUS REMOVES TO CAPERNAUM

HIS own town rejected him. The people among whom he had lived, worked, studied, and worshipped, had thrust him out of their midst with dark murder in their hearts! And all because he, a carpenter, had revealed to them the Truth!

Petty, boorish, backward little Nazareth, isolated from the busy Galilean life and the normal caravan routes, but perched upon its hill, open to view, had demonstrated before all mankind that "the flesh profits nothing," driving from its self-satisfied synagogue the Saviour of mankind, earth's future king!

Courageously and resolutely the Lord shook its dust from off his feet, and turned his face to more profitable centres from which to preach to the people.

Did any leave with him on that occasion? We are not told. If the few disciples who were then attached to his cause had followed him there, they would have left in his company. Probably his mother and his brethren did so, for later we find them away from Nazareth. Certainly the atmosphere of that small town would not have been very comfortable for them after the uproar in the synagogue, and perhaps the happenings on that tragic day began the rift between the Lord and his half-brothers that developed into complete unbelief later.

The Thriving 'Town of Consolation'

Be that as it may, he sought refuge in Capernaum, for not only was shelter available to him there, but the time had come when some of his foremost disciples had to be called to their labors.

Sadly the Saviour of mankind turned his back upon the town where he had been brought up, and wended his way along the dusty road to Capernaum about 20 miles (32 kms) northeast of Nazareth, on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee, there to "dwell" for some considerable time (Mat. 4:13). During the course of time, he became so identified with this *"Town of Consolation"* (as the name signifies) that it is sometimes referred to as "his own city" (Mat. 9:1). There he performed a number of his most notable miracles.

In the days of Jesus, Capernaum was a bustling fishing port situated a few miles from where the Jordan enters the Sea of Galilee. Besides the fishing industry for which it was noted, it was the headquarters of a Roman military post (Mat. 8:5-13), and was also used as a toll-collecting station, to gather revenue from caravans passing along the great trade route from Damascus to the Mediter-

ranean coast and Egypt. It was in the Capernaum toll-house that Jesus called Matthew to discipleship (Mat. 9:9), for he was a Jew in the employ of the Roman revenue bureau.

It was therefore a city of some importance, with a teeming population, and constant contact with the outside world.

Yet so completely was it ultimately destroyed that some doubt still lingers as to its proper site. Two spots contend for the distinction: *Tell Hum*, about 2½ miles (4 kms) from where the Jordan empties into the Sea of Galilee, and *Khan Ninia*, about two miles (3 kms), further



Tax-collecting was a part of government everywhere. On this carving from a third-century tomb in Germany, the collector sits with his ledger and piles and bags of coins.

south. Most archaeologists identify Capernaum with the former place.

In any case, the few ruins that remain stand as a memorial to the death of the ancient city fulfilling the prophetic words of the Lord: "Thou, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven shalt be brought down to hell [the grave]" (Mat. 11:23).

A great honour was conferred upon that city when Jesus made it his headquarters. It was situated in the territory of ancient Naphtali which bordered on Zebulun, and Matthew saw in this fact, a partial fulfilment of the Immanuel prophecy, and quoted the words of Isaiah 9 as expressive of this: "The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (Mat. 4:15-16).

Zebulun and Naphtali! The words signify *Dwelling* and *Wrestling*, and as such appropriately described the ministry of the Lord.

Calling Disciples Capernaum was on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee, and thus overlooked the lovely stretch of blue, fresh-water lake that extends for some 13 miles (21 kms) north and south, and about 8 miles (12.8 kms) east and west at its widest point. It lies in a depressed cup almost 700 feet (213 mtrs) below the Mediterranean Sea and enjoys a semi-tropical climate. Enclosed by high hills, it forms an integral part of the Jordan River which feeds it with water from perpetual snow-capped Mount Hermon which is not far distant.

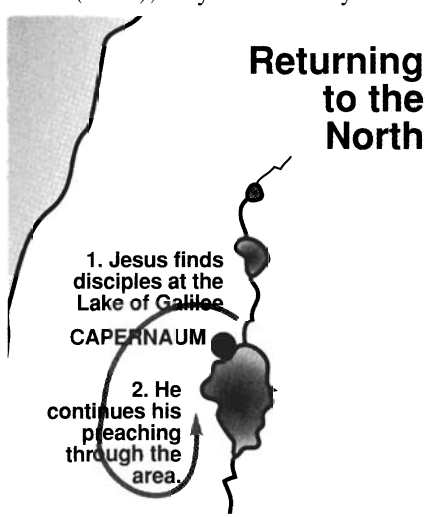
The sun, the shore, and the sea provide ideal means for relaxation and communion, and this lake became a favourite haunt of the Lord. He sought its quiet for meditation, he used the isolation that a boat on its broad waters provided, in order to commune with his Father.

The first picture we have presented to us of the Lord in Capernaum, is that of him treading its shores, as doubtless he meditated the work before him.

It was evening time, for the fishermen were either letting down their nets or preparing them for fishing. And as the Lord strolled along the shore, he saw Simon with Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea within easy calling distance from the shore, for they were fishermen.

He stopped and called them: "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men!"

The two young men looked up startled. It was the call they had awaited since the time they had returned to Galilee in company with Jesus, after hearkening to John Baptist (see page 197). They fully believed in him, and with a zeal that was characteristic of them, and particularly the impetuous Simon (Peter), they immediately drew in their nets, rowed back to shore, and followed the Lord.



A little further on he saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee, preparing their nets for fishing. They were business partners with Simon (Luke 5:10), and had doubtless discussed with him the momentous fact that he and John (there is no record of James having seen Jesus previously) had met the Christ and had conversed with him. Perhaps they had

mutually agreed that when the time was ripe, they would give up fishing and follow the Lord.

Zebedee, the father of James and John, was a prosperous fisherman who employed hired servants in his business (Mark 1:20). Perhaps he had agreed that his sons and partners should follow the Messiah when the time for them came to do so, whilst he maintained the fishing business.

That is what did happen. For when the Lord came upon them he sent forth the same call. And as James and John lifted their heads in answer to it, and saw their partners standing with the Lord, they, too, immediately left their nets with the hired servants and followed Jesus.

They went with him into the town of Capernaum.

EVENTS IN THE GOSPELS
JESUS' EARLY MINISTRY

Continued from page 224

	Mat	Mk	Lk	Jn
John Baptist sends messengers to Jesus	11:2-6		7:18-32	
Jesus discourses upon John	11:7-19		7:24-35	
General appeal to 'Come unto Him'	11:20-30			
Anointed in house of Simon the Pharisee			7:36-50	
Circuit of Galilee — Women assist			8:1-3	
Jesus' relations accuse him of madness		3:20-21		
Heals a demoniac	12:22-23			
His miracles descried as from Beelzebub	12:24	3:22		
The Lord warns of the Unforgivable Sin	12:25-37	3:23-30		
The only sign — that of Prophet Jonah	12:38-45			
His relations seek to restrain him	12:46-50	3:31-35		
The parable of the Sower	13:1-9	4:1-9	8:4-8	
The parables explained	13:10-23	4:10-25	8:9-18	
Parable of the Tares	13:24-30			
Parable of the Good Seed		4:26-29		
Parable of the Mustard Seed	13:31-32	4:30-32		
Parable of the Leaven	13:33			
Why the Lord taught in Parables	13:34-35	4:33-34		
Parable of the Tares —judgment explained	13:36-43			
Parables of Treasure in Field	13:44			
Parable of Merchant Man	13:45-46			
Parable of Gospel Net	13:47-50			
On instruction	13:51-52			
Christ's relations again try to restrain him			8:19-21	

Continued in Volume Six

Chapter 5

A DRAMATIC DAY OF MIRACLES

ON the very next sabbath, the first after leaving Nazareth, the Lord entered a synagogue in Capernaum, in company with his disciples, in order to preach to the people. It was an important moment for the Lord as he set out on his ministrations.

In the ruins of this city, unearthed by archaeologists, there have been found the remains of such a synagogue. Its inside measurements are about 70 x 50 feet (21 x 15 mtrs), and it possessed a balcony where women could gather to watch the proceedings and hear the message, for the women were always separated from the men in the services. Like all synagogues, this was built so that it faced Jerusalem, and the worshippers gathered together, would think of the temple in the holy city, as they proceeded with their religious exercises. Some have claimed that it was the very synagogue in which Jesus preached, but others date it after AD70 when the Romans destroyed Jewish places of worship throughout the land.

All eyes would have been centred on Jesus as he entered that synagogue in Capernaum. His miracles (particularly the healing of the nobleman's son — who was probably present) as well as the power of his preaching, had brought him prominently before the notice of the people.

He took his place as teacher, and a deep hush fell upon the audience as all listened to his discourse. The people were astonished at the manner of his teaching. There was none of the empty, artificial appearance of learning such as the scribes revealed when they gave their lifeless, stultifying expositions; no droning over texts without enthusiasm for their meaning whilst the thoughts of the congregation drifted on to other matters; no quoting from the childish opinions of rabbis gathered together in dusty tomes and dished up secondhand because the



Partially restored ruins of the synagogue at Capernaum

speaker lacked the time or energy to absorb the matter himself; no sickly sentimentalising that emasculated the Word, and left those who hungered for righteousness as starving as they were before the "teaching" commenced.

No, the Lord spoke as one who "had authority," not dependent upon schools of thought, or opinions of rabbis, but going straight to the Word of God and revealing its meaning for all to hear and understand. There was virility, power, and enthusiasm in all that he spoke.

Christ's Word Cures Insanity

A deep hush had fallen on the congregation as the people listened intently to the sober words of Truth spoken by the Lord. But the quiet discourse and solemn occasion was suddenly interrupted by the insane shriek of a madman who was present. Evidently this poor fellow had some lucid moments, and was permitted into the synagogue; but the excitement of listening to such a teacher as Jesus, the effect of rumors concerning him that were current, and the tension that had built up in the congregation as it was moved by the power of Christ's words, proved too much for him. His excited mind became completely unhinged, and to the consternation of all present, he started up out of his seat and addressed the Lord with an insane shout: "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God!"

It was an embarrassing situation. The poor fellow was evidently expressing some current idea concerning the Messiah that had hazily possessed his confused mind. It is said, that among the Jews, there was a tradition that the Messiah, when he appeared, would devastate Galilee. Evidently the deranged mind of this man, recognising Jesus as the Christ, gave expression to the popular idea.

The congregation was thrown into complete confusion. What should be done? Should they violently reject him?

But in the speaker's seat the Lord remained calm, for he had the answer. To the poor man whose insanity made him utter words of blasphemy, of anger and of hatred, he commanded: "Hold thy peace, and come out of him!"

A terrible convulsion seized the man. He was thrown on the floor in the midst of the people (Luke 4:35) by what looked like an extreme epileptic fit. He lay there for a moment twisting and turning in an agony of movement.

Then, suddenly, he was still and quiet. He picked himself up from the floor of the synagogue, all semblance of his previous malady gone.

He was cured.

And cured by a mere word!

If the congregation had been astonished at the power and authority of Jesus' word before this, it was now staggered beyond all measure. A buzz of excited talk followed.

"What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? for with authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him!"

It was a greatly excited congregation that left the synagogue that day to repeat over and over again the remarkable incidents that had taken place.

Peter's Wife's Mother Is Healed

In company with his disciples, the Lord immediately left the synagogue after the service, to enter the home of Simon and Andrew.* Most likely he wanted some refuge from the gaping curiosity of people who were interested in a miracle without perceiving the purpose behind it. The house provided the refuge he sought.

But it was a house of gloom, for Peter's wife's mother** lay sick of a consuming fever. Nevertheless the disciples were loathe to tell the Lord of this, not presuming to break in upon the rest that he doubtless needed, and also hesitating, possibly, to suggest that he should cure her on the sabbath.

But after a while ("anon" — Mark 1:30) they told him of her.

Immediately the Lord went into the sick chamber, and took her by the hand. In a moment the fever had gone — she was cured! She arose, and in her gratitude, began to minister unto them.

It taught a powerful lesson, as all the miracles of the Lord were intended to do. Service to God brings its reward, not only to



Ruins underneath the restored section show those of an earlier building of the first century, believed to be the one Jesus visited.

* John 1:44 says that they were "of Bethsaida," not of Capernaum. Two explanations could account for this: [1] They had shifted from Bethsaida to Capernaum; [2] Bethsaida was so close to Capernaum as to be accounted part of that city. The word means: *The house of fishing,* and could relate to the centre of the fishing industry of that place.

** Peter did not follow the celibacy of the Romish priesthood, and Christ gave no indication that he should do so. Rather he honored the relationship by going publicly into the house, and healing his wife's mother. See also 1Cor. 9:5.

those who are directly engaged therein, but to their dependants as well. Although salvation is an individual matter, and all must make personal contact with Christ through the waters of baptism if they would inherit eternal life, great benefits accrue both to ourselves and our homes, if we serve God aright. He has invited us to test and see if this is not true. Proverbs 3:9 declares: "Honor Yahweh with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

Andrew and Peter thus learned that the best way they could serve their families was to serve their God. Peter could see, in the cure effected in his wife's mother, the vast change wrought by contact with Christ. From an invalid requiring to be waited on, she became the hale and hearty housekeeper, waiting on all.

The house of Andrew and Peter was changed from a dwelling of gloom to one of gladness by the presence of the Lord.

Miracles of Healing

Meanwhile, the fame of Jesus swept Capernaum. The amazing cure of the madman in the synagogue recalled the equally powerful miracle of the healing of the nobleman's son. The presence of such an amazing personality in their midst provided a grand opportunity for other desperately sick people to be healed. Words of hope were whispered over many a sick bed, as people made arrangements to convey their ailing relations into the presence of Jesus at the conclusion of the sabbath.

A Jewish sabbath commences from sundown on one day and continues until sundown on the next day. Thus at evening, at the conclusion of the sabbath, a procession of people converged on the house of Peter where the Lord was resting. They brought with them those who were physically and mentally sick, that he might heal them.

It was a moving, pathetic sight, and the Lord, as he viewed it, was moved by a deep compassion for suffering humanity. Some poor people, like the man in the synagogue, raved in their emotionally unstable state, shouting out, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of God." It was no real praise. It was like the emotionalism of religion without the Word of God, and he laid his hands upon these over-excited people, quietening them



by his presence, bringing to them the calmness of sobriety, as his Word, properly understood, will ever do. Others looked at him with pleading eyes, their faces showing the ravages of pain and disease, and upon these, too, he laid his hands, bringing them instant relief.

And all that evening the work of healing continued, leaving the Lord completely exhausted. For the performance of miracles was not done without conscious effort on his part: it drained him of energy, leaving him physically weak and tired. Indeed, in his account of this incident, Matthew applies the words of Isaiah 53:4 to it: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." He really felt for the people, and made their problems his own.

Figuratively, those sicknesses are a symbol of sin (see Isa. 33:24), and in that way the Lord took upon himself the problem and effort of curing the people of sin. As the onlookers saw the lame throw away their crutches, the desperately ill suddenly revive in health, the insane cease their incoherent shrieks and shouts to stand calm and collected before them, they witnessed an enacted parable of what the Lord is able to do for the most potent sickness of all: the disease of sin and death.

But few in Capernaum grasped the significance of that message!

What Were The Unclean Spirits?

To whom did Jesus speak when he said, "Hold thy peace, and come out of him?" (Mark 1:25), and to what did the people refer when they said, "the unclean spirits obey him"?

Jesus was speaking to the insane man in the synagogue. It was this man who was shouting out, and who had to be quietened; it was therefore he whom Jesus addressed when he said "Hold thy peace."

But why did he use such a strange, indirect way of expressing it? And why did the people speak as though the man was inhabited by something called "unclean spirits"?

It was the way in which people spoke in those days when they described certain illnesses, particularly those relating to the mind. This form of speech was derived from the Grecian theory of medicine which claimed that demons (they looked upon them as lesser gods, or as the spirits of departed human beings who had the power to possess a person and so afflict him) were the cause of madness, epileptic disorders, obstructions of the senses, and so forth.

A case in point is given in Acts 16:16 where a girl, obviously insane, is said to have "a spirit of divination" or of *"python"* (see margin). Python was the name of a mythical serpent supposed to have dwelt in Pytho, at the foot of Mt. Parnassus, to guard the oracle of Delphi, and to have been slain by Apollo. From this myth, the name was transferred to Apollo himself, and according to the popular manner of speech of the day, a diviner or soothsayer was popularly regarded as inspired by Appollo, or possessed by Python!

We use similar language when we talk of a person being "bewitched" (affected by a witch!), or being a lunatic (affected by the moon!), or suffering St. Vitus Dance, or when we use such a word as "pandemoniac" (affected by the demon called Pan!). We do not really mean what these words actually state, but we use them according to the common, popular usage of today.

Christ did likewise. To speak of "casting out devils" was merely to use the language of the day to say that a person was cured.

Hippocrates, the great Grecian doctor, who (it is claimed) first brought science to medicine, in an essay on mental diseases, stated that the Greeks referred such to the belief that they had been "possessed" by gods and the spirits of heroes who had died. He wrote this essay on epilepsy, which was called the sacred disease, because the people believed what the priests taught, that epileptics were possessed, and the priests, the magicians and the impostors derived a considerable revenue from attempting to cure this disease by expiations and charms. He wrote to expose this delusion, and to prove that this disease was neither more divine nor sacred than any other.

In his words, Jesus used the ordinary language of the people, as is obvious from his comments on Beelzebub in Mat. 12:27. The Bible not only speaks of casting out devils, but also of sorrows and sins (see Job 39:3; Mic. 7:19). It not only says that the "demons departed" but speaks of diseases doing the same (Mark 1:42; Acts 19:12).

The "unclean spirits" therefore relate only to the description of the disease, not to the possession of something supernatural such as the Greeks imagined. Jesus knew the cause of disease and was able to cure it by the Father's power which he possessed, and in the language of the day that was said to be "casting out demons." The same expression is still used today of cures effected by the physicians in these countries and among those people (like Australian aborigines) where such a superstition prevails.

Chapter 6

RENEWING STRENGTH FOR THE WORK AHEAD

AND so the tiring day came to an end: the discourse in the synagogue, the curing of the insane man, the healing of Peter's wife's mother, the tending of the numerous sick that were brought to the door of the house — were long, exacting demands that exhausted the Lord. That is what suffering humanity drained from Jesus to whom it gave so little in return. A word of thanks, giving praise to God, expressing heartfelt gratitude for the great benefit received! The evening air no doubt resounded with all this — but how long did it all last? How pathetic must have sounded later the utterance of the Lord: "If the mighty works, which have been done in thee [Capernaum], had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day..."

How ungrateful is flesh! At the conclusion of this day, his first sabbath in Capernaum, many went home rejoicing; but the Lord ultimately retired to rest, absolutely worn out by his continuous labors. He gave himself without stint to those who had a need of him, and thus set before Peter, Andrew, and all his disciples — both then and now — an example in which they can follow.

But he had to recoup strength for these labors, and he knew that this could only come from spiritual communion with his Father.

Such was impossible, however, whilst the crowds thronged him, and was even difficult inside the house because of the demands that his disciples and their relations made upon him.

He felt the need of the quietude of complete isolation, and the uplifting mental stimulation that comes from close communion with Yahweh.

The lonely wilderness provided a means to that end, if he could escape the crowds that would normally follow him there.

To that end he rose up early, long before daylight, and quietly letting himself out of the house whilst the rest of the inmates were still sleeping, he made his way into a solitary place, there to give himself to prayer (Mark 1:35).

And from this exercise, he derived strength. As he poured out his heart unto Yahweh, voicing the problems facing him, and his need for constant communion with his Father, he felt spiritually renewed and revitalised, and more capable of coping with the difficult and exacting work that lay ahead of him.

In the months ahead, Jesus often sought the isolation of the wilderness that he might draw closer to his God, and undisturbed pour out his heart in prayer (Mark 1:12-13; Luke 5:16; 6:12; John 6:15;

Mat. 26:36-45). He realised, inasmuch as he was human, that he needed a greater strength than flesh can provide if he was to succeed in the work before him, whether it be in the direction of triumphing over sin and death, or in satisfying the demands to be made on him by others; and God alone could provide him with the means to that end. But quietude and solitude are needed to derive the greatest benefit from prayer, and Christ found this when he left the crowds that thronged him so continuously, and sought the isolation of the wilderness.

He also knew the value of the early morning hours. He rose when the world was still, and the day was fresh. He saw as the light of a new day spread abroad from the east, driving away the dark shadows of the night. He breathed in the pure, sweet, morning air, and saw in the early beginnings of a new day, fresh tokens of Yahweh's goodness. At the break of day all creation seems to respond in praising its Creator, as it feels the cheerful, health-giving, golden rays of the sun play upon it, and, on this occasion, among those tokens that witnessed to divine goodness, there was the Son of God, praying and praising Yahweh also, that for him the day might commence with his mind filled with thoughts of God.

And he never permitted those thoughts to leave him as the day wore on and the business of life reached a crescendo of bustling activity, until, gradually, the shadows of night again stole across the earth.

So, for a moment, we see the Son of God, a lone figure in solitary communion with His Father, and the first golden rays of the sun playing warmly upon him.

The Crowds Seek Jesus

But Jesus was not left on his own for long. As the morning advanced, crowds again converged around the house in Capernaum, demanding the Lord. But he could not be found! The disciples sought everywhere for him, excited at the number of people that had gathered to hear and see him, but without a thought that the Lord might desire to be on his own for a while. They measured the success of his preaching by the size of the crowds that assembled to see him, and felt a little impatient when he was not on the spot to minister to them.

So, on this occasion, when he could not be found in the house, they officiously set off to find him, and as they went the crowd followed at some distance behind.

They found him in prayer, and interrupted his meditations and communings with the Father to tell him that the people wanted him. They possibly looked upon his action in seeking the quietness of the wilderness, as so much waste of time. The Lord knew better. He

realised that without the blessing of Yahweh no real and lasting good could be accomplished (Psa 127); it was important to preach to the people, but it was more important that God should bless that preaching.

Meanwhile, the disciples thoughtlessly hurried up to him, showing the greatest impatience.

"All men seek for you," they exclaimed.

There was a note of reproach in their voices, and even as the Lord looked up, he could see the crowd of people, coming towards him from out of Capernaum. They came "seeking for Jesus" (Luke 4:43), desiring that he might remain with them, for they had felt the value of his presence, and had experienced the physical benefit of his healing touch.

But Christ had other plans. He knew that they only wanted him because of the immediate benefits he had to offer, and he had no desire to be looked upon merely as a wonder-worker, for his main purpose was to preach the gospel.

So, as the crowd gathered around him in that lonely place, he told them that he must be about his Father's business: "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:42).

Then turning to his disciples, he said: "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (Mark 1:38).

Thus commenced a preaching tour in which the Lord, in company with his disciples, visited the cities and towns of Galilee, teaching the things of the kingdom of God.

Wildly Excited Crowds Follow the Lord

Wherever they went on this tour, there followed a repetition of that which had happened in Capernaum. News of his presence, and of the wonderful miracles he had performed was swiftly passed from mouth to mouth, kindling a glimmer of hope in desperately sick folk. They were brought to him, that he might place his hands on them and heal them. The sick, the mentally depressed, the palsied, the mentally deranged, as well as people with all kinds of incurable and horrible diseases, were presented to him; and as he looked upon their tortured bodies and pain-racked faces, a divine compassion welled up inside him, and he healed them of their complaints.

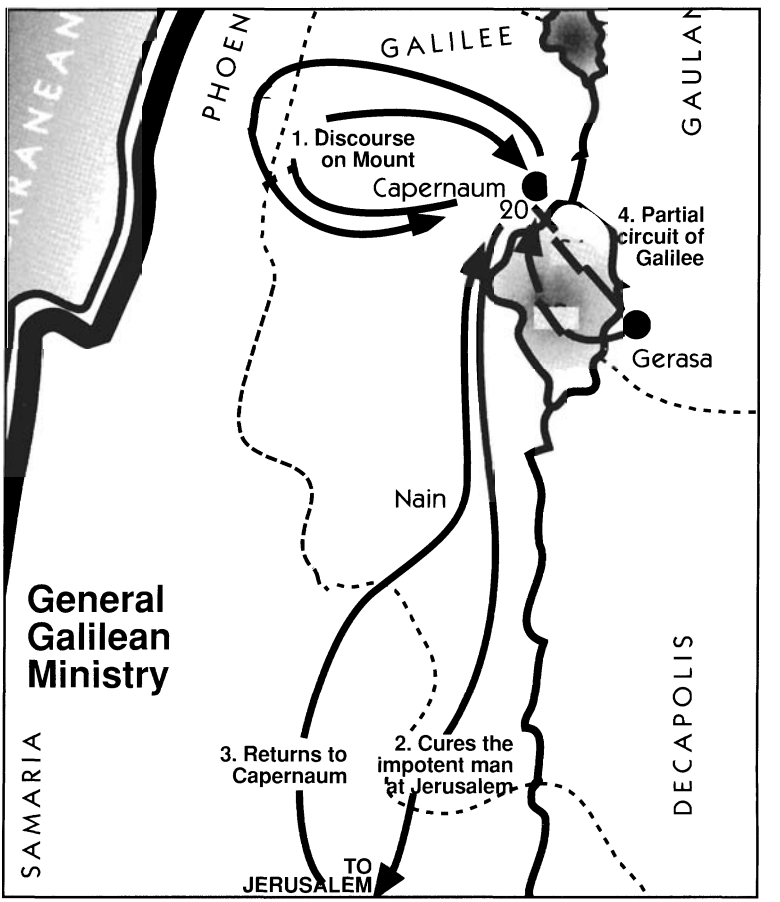
It was a physical demonstration of the spiritual benefits that can come from Christ's presence; for he can be with us, and we can walk beside him, if we seek him through God's Word. As he cured the lame, so he can guide those who stumble in the way of righteousness; as he gave health to the sick, so he can build up to spiritual health those who are weak in faith if they will turn to him; as he helped the

mentally depressed, so he can uplift his followers with a glorious vision of the "joy set before them;" as he cured the mentally deranged, so he can bring the influence of sobering Truth to those who are emotionally swayed by the superstitious religions that abound throughout the world.

The Lord thus travelled from town to town, and his fame was heard on everybody's lips. People were attracted to him from all over the country; from Jerusalem in the far south, Decapolis in the northeast, beyond Jordan, and from populous Galilee.

The greatest excitement prevailed, as crowds gathered at the cities he visited that they might witness the miracles, to gape with curiosity on the young prophet himself.

But something more than idle curiosity was required of them if they were truly to be his disciples, and what that was, the Lord now revealed unto the people.



Chapter 7

THE DISCOURSE ON THE MOUNT

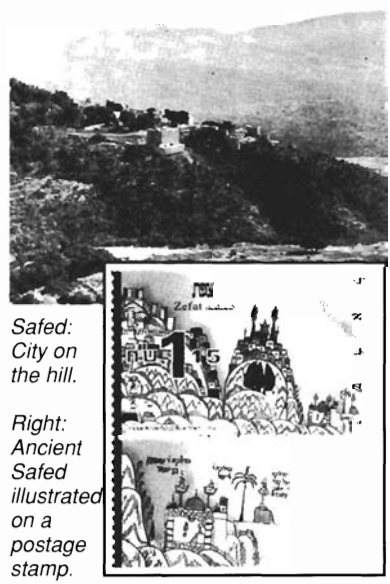
AMONG the hills of Galilee, not far from the lake, there is a high, steep mountain on which is situated the town of Safed. Safed is thus "a city set upon a hill" (Mat. 5:14), and from it a glorious view is obtained which stretches out over smaller hills to the blue waters of the Sea of Galilee beyond, which, in comparison to the brown hills surrounding it, sparkles refreshingly cool in the clear, bright sunlight. The conspicuous mountain on which Safed stands, is itself whitish in appearance, and gleams as it reflects the bright light of the Mid-Eastern sun.

It is thought, by many, that upon this mountain Jesus delivered what is called the *Discourse on the Mount*. There is no certainty about this, however, because the record contains no hint concerning the location of the mount referred to. All it states is that Jesus, "seeing the multitudes, went up into a mountain" (Mat. 5:1).

Ascending the Mount

To climb this steep height imposed a challenge on the multitudes following him: the challenge of discipleship. To that moment, as they followed him from city to city, witnessing the miracles performed and perhaps themselves benefiting from them, nothing had been demanded of them but to see, and hear, and receive; but now, if they wanted to take the matter further, they had to climb a mountain, lifting themselves above the normal lot of mankind. And that imposed on them an effort — the tiring labor of climbing the mountain.

Many doubtless turned away as they saw the steep height before them, but those who followed him (and they were not merely the twelve who were later appointed as "apostles") constituted "his disciples." Seating himself upon a convenient place where he was lifted above them, and could teach them, he indicated that



Safed: City on the hill.

Right: Ancient Safed illustrated on a postage stamp.

they should seat themselves before him, whilst he outlined for them principles of true discipleship. Many of the people were waiting for the restoration of the kingdom of God, and Jesus, who had been preaching "the gospel of the kingdom" in their cities (Mat. 4:23), now taught them what citizenship of that kingdom involved. And so he commenced with the statement: ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"*** (Mat. 5:3). It was the beginning of a dramatic policy speech: the Lord's first public address, which would lay the basis for his ministry.

The circumstances must have been very colorful: the sun-drenched mountain side, the white hills in the background, the blue Sea of Galilee in the distance, the colorful garments of the people gathered before the Lord, whilst further up, perched conspicuously on its very peak, was the town of Safed.

The Demands of Discipleship

What Jesus taught on this occasion constituted his policy speech, setting out the basis of discipleship through means of which the kingdom alone can be obtained. His teaching took a practical form. He selected topics which were those most abused by the religionists of his day.

The people heard strange things.

They heard that the "poor in spirit," the "mourners," the "meek," those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness," the "merciful," the "pure in heart," the "peacemakers," the "persecuted," the "reviled for Christ's sake" are really "blessed," or "happy" as the word signifies.

They heard of eight* forms of happiness, and were told why those who suffer should consider themselves blessed. They are blessed if they endure those things in the cause of God's Truth, and if they can clearly see the *purpose* and *end* of such mourning, persecution, reviling, and so forth. And what is the purpose and end? That their characters might be perfected thereby, and they might find an abiding place in the Kingdom of God.

Such people are happy even now in spite of sufferings, for their knowledge and service to God lifts them above the problems of life, and enables them to view them from a divine perspective. They leave it to Him to vindicate them, and know that if they render faithful service in spite of all difficulties, they will be rewarded in the Age to come.

Thus the *poor in spirit* will receive the kingdom, the *mourners* will be comforted, the *meek* will inherit the earth, those who *hunger and thirst after righteousness* will be filled, the *merciful* will receive

* Eight is the number of perfection, and is associated with circumcision, the token of the covenant that a person makes with God to deny the flesh and live unto Him.

mercy, the *pure in heart* will see God, the *peacemakers* will be called the sons of God, the *persecuted* will receive the kingdom of heaven, and the *reviled of men* for Christ's sake will find a great store of wealth laid up for them by God.

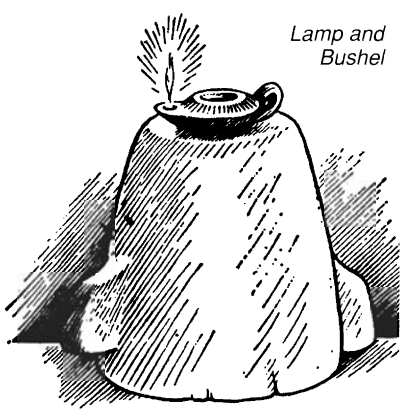
All that is necessary to really find that happiness, is faith that God will accomplish His purpose and promise.

And who will doubt that?

What Christ set before his disciples as their rule of life, as he taught them on the mount, was exactly the reverse of what the scribes and Pharisees, the leaders of the Jewish nation were wont to do! This he showed on a later occasion when he publicly indicted them and warned them of eight great woes that would come upon them in consequence. Thus, in the course of his teaching, he set before the men the eight Beatitudes both positively and negatively.

The Truth In Action Following the beatitudes (the "blessings"), the Lord made reference to the exalted position his disciples held in the sight of God, though surrounded by a world of darkness. They constitute the salt of the earth, the light of the world. From them must come the savour of Truth, and a teaching that will illuminate the darkness of a world which is without the wisdom of God.

He spoke of their attitude to the Law and the Prophets (Mat. 5:17-26), how that their righteousness must exceed the cold formalism of the legalists, like the scribes and Pharisees, who openly paraded their ritual adherence to the Law that men might see their "righteousness;" but in heart, where the eye of God alone could penetrate, they manifested a cold indifference to the real requirements of its teaching. They lived for external display, but Christ's disciples must live only for God.



Lamp and Bushel

The Lord made reference to the spirit of the Law, and taught that true discipleship must seek to observe that, rather than the letter. For example, the Law said, "Thou shalt not kill," and whilst the cold formalists of the Law recognised that murder was thus condemned by God, they allowed a murderous hatred to govern their attitudes to their brethren, and did everything possible within the compass of the Law to do Jesus an injury, destroying his reputation if they could, "killing" him in the sight of his fellowmen. In contradistinction to that attitude, the Lord warned

that mere "anger with one's brother without a cause" broke the divine law of love, and therefore must be avoided.

So also with the marriage state. This was a matter of great dispute at the time, for two Jewish schools of thought disputed over what Moses taught in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. One school of thought — that of Rabbi Hillel — claimed that Moses required divorce for unchastity only; the other school — that of Rabbi Shammai — declared that divorce was legitimate for any cause whatever, even for the most trifling thing — such as putting too much salt in the soup! In consequence, divorce was common, faithfulness to one's partner was considered quite unnecessary, and the greatest immorality prevailed. The Lord's teaching swept both schools of thought aside. He warned that not only the action, but the very intent of adultery was breaking the Law of God, and reminded the other that the lightness with which they viewed matrimony caused adultery to become legalised and widespread.

He called upon his disciples to give practical expression to his teaching: oaths are to be avoided, evil is not to be resisted, love must be cultivated and manifested. He called upon his followers to look to the Father in heaven for their example, for He pours out His gracious gifts on good and evil alike, that He might draw all by His love. Such unadulterated love should be revealed by them if they would claim to be His children (Mat. 5:33-48).

The Lord's teaching provided guidance for his followers in their everyday conduct. They were to strictly avoid hypocrisy (Mat. 6:1-4), were to be instant in prayer (vv. 5-15), were to avoid fleshly over-indulgence (vv. 16-18), were not to selfishly seek material wealth at the expense of God's way (vv. 19-23), were to give singleminded service, and trust in God, recognising that He can provide for life's needs, were to seek first "the kingdom of God and His righteousness" in confidence that necessary things will be granted them (vv. 24-34), were to avoid wrong judgment (ch. 7:1-5), were to exercise discrimination in preaching (v. 6), seek divine help and direction (vv. 7-12), walk carefully the narrow way (vv. 13-14), beware of false prophets (vv. 15-20), remember that only doers of God's will shall gain that kingdom (vv. 21-23), and were to build wisely upon the rock foundation by not merely hearing his teaching but applying it in their lives (vv. 24-27).

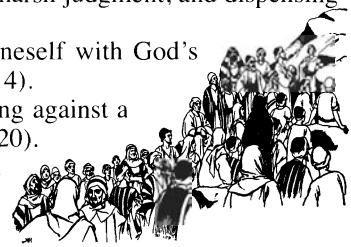
The Lord concluded his discourse with a parable of a wise man and a fool. Both heard the same teaching, both rejoiced in it, and both subscribed to it. But only one applied it. He was the wise man who built on rock. The other was a fool, building on shifting sand, for though he heard and rejoiced in the Word he did not apply it. Thus both built, but the building of the fool was a monument to his self conceit; but that of the wise man a token of his humble submission. A

storm of trouble and a flood of evil swept the building that was on sand into destruction, whilst the same storm was impervious against the building of the wise man: it remained secure upon the rock which provided its foundation.

The Lord thus divided his disciples into two classes: the wise and the fools!

The Lord's Discourse Summarised The *Discourse on the Mount* can be divided into ten sections expressive of ten principles which Christ's disciples should try and build into their lives. They are as follows:

1. *Righteousness* before God as summarised in the Beatitudes (Mat. 5:3-12).
2. *Godliness* manifested by shining as lights (vv. 13-16).
3. *Faith* exhibited in wholehearted reception of the divine revelation (vv. 17-20).
4. *Love* shown in self-denial, and the Golden Rule (vv. 21-48).
5. *Patience* revealed in prayerful submission to the will of the Father (ch. 6:1-18).
6. *Meekness* developed by a quiet spirit in the face of distracting worldly trouble (vv. 19-34).
7. *Service* manifested in avoiding harsh judgment, and dispensing truth (ch. 7:1-6).
8. *Ability* created by equipping oneself with God's help to serve effectively (vv. 7-14).
9. *Vigilance* maintained by guarding against a merely theoretical faith (vv. 15-20).
10. *Perfection* attained by not merely hearing but doing the will of God (vv. 21-22).



The Ten Commandments and the Discourse on the Mount Moses brought from Yahweh ten commandments which formed the basis of the the covenant that God entered into with Israel. In similar manner, the Lord Jesus, as a "prophet like unto Moses," brought to the people a revelation from God, and his words, when carefully considered, manifested the Mosaic ten commandments in action.

There is a great difference, however, between the covenant made through Moses, and that made through the Lord, for the former was negative in its expressions: "Thou shalt not," but the latter is positive in its teaching: "Thou shalt..." Furthermore, the Mosaic covenant created fear in failure, whereas that confirmed by Jesus draws by love. This is shown by comparison of the effect of Moses and Christ upon the people. When Yahweh revealed Himself to the people at Mt. Sinai, it caused them to fear exceedingly, so that they drew afar off

(Exo. 20:18), but when Jesus expressed the will of the Father, he drew the people near to him in love (Mat. 5:1-2).

But the basis was very similar, and the *Discourse on the Mount* can be divided into ten sections answering to the Ten Commandments of the Law, as shown in the following epitome:

1. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" (Exo. 20:2-3) — seen in action in the principles of the beatitudes (Mat. 5:3-12).
2. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Exo. 20:4-6) — revealed affirmatively by manifesting light (Mat. 5:13-16).
3. "Thou shalt not take the name of Yahweh thy God in vain" (Exo. 20:7) — manifested by respecting His will and word (Mat. 5: 17-20).
4. "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exo. 20:8-11) — the true sabbath rest is revealed in self-denial (Mat. 5:21-48. See Heb. 4:9-10).
5. "Honor thy father and thy mother" (Exo. 20:12) — expressed in filial love and submission to the Father (Mat. 6:1-18).
6. "Thou shalt not kill" (Exo. 20:13) — shown in quietness of spirit and trust in God (Mat. 6:19-34).
7. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exo. 20:14) — by avoiding the infidelity of hypocrisy (Mat. 7:1-6).
8. "Thou shalt not steal" (Exo. 20:15) — but make your requests known to God (Mat. 7:7-14).
9. "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Exo. 20:16) — but avoid false prophets (Mat. 7:15-20).
10. "Thou shalt not covet" (Exo. 20:17) — but build upon the rock by doing God's will (Mat. 7:21-27).

Interpreting Christ's Words

There are many beautiful expressions in the Lord's teaching which space does not permit us to expound here. We will provide one or two examples, however, and if information is desired upon any other part of the Lord's teaching, we shall be happy to attempt to give it.

Thus, on the mountain side, the people heard Jesus say: *"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward"* (Mat. 6:1-2).

What did the Lord mean? Interpreting it in today's language we might imagine that the "hypocrites" had somebody sounding a trumpet before them as they went to offer their gifts of charity; but that is not the case. The "trumpet" referred to was part of a collection





Syrian collection box of the second century

box where people threw coins for charity. These were placed outside the synagogues and on the street corners, and the mouth of the chest or box into which these contributions were dropped was called the "trumpet," because it was formed like a trumpet with a large opening that narrowed into a throat, and so formed that money could be thrown into it in such a way that the coins could reverberate against the side of the opening, thus making a loud sound, in order to draw the attention of those within the vicinity, to the great liberality of the one making the contribution.

Thus the lordly Pharisee would ostentatiously draw near to the trumpet of the collection box, and making sure that all might see him, cast in his money in such a way that it sounded loudly, indicating the great amount of his offering.

He was "a hypocrite," declared the plain-speaking Jesus!

Again they heard him say: *"The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single* [or "sound" — RV] *thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil* [if the sight be distorted or impaired], *thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

Here were words to meditate upon indeed! The Lord was clearly telling his disciples that it is not sufficient to have light, we must also have an organ adapted to receiving light, and further, that organ must be correctly focused, otherwise the vision will be distorted, and we will not see clearly the aim of life and the purpose of God (see Heb. 12:2). As the natural eye, when healthy, brings all things into correct perspective and regulates the motions of the body accordingly (otherwise we stagger, or trip over!) so does the mental eye direct the spiritual vision, and leads to singleminded service to God.

They were also taught not to put undue confidence in material

riches: *"No man can serve* [i.e., become a slave to] *two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon"* (Mat. 6:24).

What did he mean? Do not we have to work to live, as well as give time in service to God? Of course we do, but we can do the former in such a way as fulfils the latter (see Eph. 6:5-8). The key to the words of Jesus is found in the word "serve," which means to serve as a bond-slave, completely identifying one's will with that of our Master.

One cannot become a slave to both God and Mammon, but one can serve God by a right use and application of Mammon (1Tim. 6:17-19). Mammon is the Syriac name for worldly riches. In his teaching Christ personified worldly riches as a god which men worshipped and for which they sacrificed their lives. It is suggested that the word is derived from the Hebrew *aman*, meaning to trust, or confide in something of value — in this case: in worldly wealth rather than the true riches that come from the Word.

And in relation to Christ's observation, it has been truly said of Mammon that when a man is driven by selfish desire to worship it at the expense of God, the trouble of getting riches, the care of keeping them, and the fear of losing them, takes away all the pleasure of using them!

He also gave his disciples some instruction in the art of prayer: *"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."*

It is a simple prayer, direct and to the point. Note that Jesus did not tell his disciples to use or repeat this prayer (and we never read in Scripture of anybody using it) but rather to pray "after the manner." In other words, when you pray, pray simply, reverently, directly, as in the example of the Lord. Bear in mind the essentials of prayer: Acknowledge Yahweh's position, render to Him thanksgiving for benefits received, ask Him for strength to sustain the battle of life, and seek from Him a vision of the Kingdom that its reality might give us the incentive to grasp it firmly.

If this prayer is carefully pondered, it will be seen that *love* governs every part of it. It is made up of six petitions.

- The first three *(Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven)* are expressions of our love of God manifested in the desire that His honor should be widespread.
- The next three *(for daily bread, forgiveness of sins, and*

guidance for the future) express our confidence in God's love for us.

• It is concluded by three statements of fact *(Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory)* that are expressive of His ability to grant the requests of those who offer acceptable prayer.

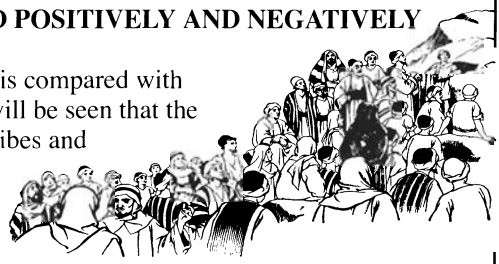
This wonderful discourse which the Lord delivered on the mount, should be carefully studied by all who wish to be his disciples — and not only studied, but applied as a way of life.

Teaching With Authority

A stir of wonderment passed through the crowd when the Lord concluded his address. Here, indeed, was a prophet like unto Moses (Deu. 18:15). He was so unlike the teachers they heard in the synagogues or at the temple. Their scribes relied upon the opinions of others, and quoted various schools of thought and opinions of rabbis, to those who sat before them. Not this man! He taught with authority and conviction. He brought them to the bar of Scripture and expounded it in such a fashion that left nothing to dispute. He relied only upon the Word of God, and by his exposition demonstrated that he clearly understood what he was talking about.

The discourse over, the Lord descended the mount, the multitudes following him. They had heard wonderful things that day, but it needed time and much thought for it to sink in. As with Ezekiel before him, who, indeed, typified him and used his title, the "Son of Man," so of the Lord it could be said: "They come unto thee as the people cometh [as disciples flock to their teachers], and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear Thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (Eze. 33:31-32).

THE BEATITUDES
— EXPRESSED POSITIVELY AND NEGATIVELY



If Matthew 5:1-12 is compared with Matthew 23:13-33 it will be seen that the Lord set before the scribes and Pharisees *eight woes* in exactly the same order as he set before his disciples *eight blessings*.

THE BLESSINGS (Mat. 5).

1. The poor in spirit will receive the kingdom of heaven (v. 3).
2. Mourners will be comforted (v. 4).
3. The meek will inherit the earth (v. 5).
4. Those who hunger after righteousness will be filled (v. 6).
5. The merciful will obtain mercy (v. 7).
6. The pure in heart will see God (v. 8).
7. Peacemakers will be called the Sons of God (v. 9).
8. The persecuted and reviled will be vindicated (vv. 10-12).

THE WOES (Mat. 23).

1. The Pharisees shut up the kingdom of heaven against men (v. 13).
2. The mourners are distressed (v. 14).
3. The Pharisees' proselytes inherit "hell" (v. 15).
4. The Pharisees destroyed the righteous by religious formalism (vv. 16-22).
5. The Pharisees overlooked mercy (vv. 23-24).
6. The Pharisees manifested an external purity but were unclean within and were blind to God (vv. 25-26).
7. The Pharisees claimed to be children of God but were spiritually dead (vv. 27-28).
8. The Pharisees were persecutors and revilers and were to receive that which was meet (vv. 29-35).

Notice that each of the beatitudes is prefaced with the word "Blessed" and that each of the woes is prefaced by the words: "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites..."

Chapter 8

TEACHING PETER TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

AFTER his discourse on the Mount, the Lord returned to the city of Capernaum, with the people still thronging him to hear him preach, and hoping to see a miracle. The seaside provided an excellent means for teaching, and shortly after his return, he was down there preaching to a great concourse of people.

Not far from where the Lord stood, Peter was stooping down, washing his nets after a disappointing night's fishing. With his partners, he had toiled all night, but had caught nothing.

And he was, perhaps, a little disgruntled in consequence. Certainly he took very little interest in the growing crowd of people that hearkened to the Lord. Perhaps he had become used to crowds and took them for granted; perhaps he had become a little sulky and irritable at his lack of success in fishing. In any case, there he remained washing his empty net, whilst the Lord continued to preach.

Back In Capernaum

Meanwhile, the ever increasing crowd, pressing closer and closer upon the Lord, made his position very uncomfortable, and as Peter's boat was drawn up to the shore of the lake, he stepped into it, and requested Peter to thrust out a little from the land.

And, sitting down in the boat, the Lord taught the people.

At last the discourse came to an end, and the Lord now turned to Peter. "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught," he declared.

Peter Is Given a Lesson in Fishing

Peter the fisherman, thought it a foolish request. He had been fishing all night without result, and it was not likely that the day would produce anything! As a fisherman he knew that the night was the best time for fishing, and doubtless saw in the Lord's request only the ignorance of a landsman. Nevertheless, he decided to humor him.



"We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing," he declared, "Nevertheless, at thy word, I will let down the net."

What a surprise awaited Peter! He was to learn to give

first to God and all necessary things would be provided.

He put down the net into the sea, and felt an immediate response. To his amazement a large number of fish were enclosed, so large a haul, that as he began to pull in the net it began to come apart. Beckoning to his partners, James and John, who were in another ship, they all began to draw the fish into the boats together, but the haul was so great that now the ships were in danger of sinking.

What a lesson for Peter! A little earlier, he had been more concerned with washing his nets than hearing the preaching of the Lord, because he lacked the faith to realise that God would provide for all their needs. Now he felt ashamed of his previous conduct. He could sense the rebuke that was implied in the incident. In a sense he felt that he had betrayed Jesus, and the huge catch of fish pressed home the lesson. What did material things matter when God called? Could not He provide all things necessary?

The more he thought upon the matter, the more Peter felt completely unworthy of discipleship, and utterly ashamed of himself. Falling down at the knees of the Lord, he declared: "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

The wonder of the miracle, his keen dissatisfaction at his own lack of faith when he had continued to wash his nets heedless of the help he could have ministered to the Lord in the face of the large "catch" for which Christ was "fishing" as he taught by the seaside, was also shared by James and John, his partners.

But the Lord had the right answer for them: "Fear not," he declared, "from henceforth thou shalt catch men!"

It was the final call to discipleship, a call this time to dedicate their lives to his service. Instead of the Lord departing from them as Peter had suggested, he called upon them to depart from their fishing, and give their time completely to assisting him in his work.

He had taught them what true discipleship demanded, and now they willingly followed the lead he gave them. He thus revealed to them the qualities expressed in the name of God he manifested: *Yahweh Ra'a* — Yahweh the Shepherd.

Chapter 9

A LEPER AND A PALSIED MAN HEALED

ON the outskirts of one of the cities situated close to the Sea of Galilee, the Lord and his disciples came upon a most pathetic sight; they met a man who is described as being "full of leprosy." It was an appalling sight, for leprosy (the scaly disease) is a terrible malady, and those afflicted with it experience an excruciating existence with little hope of remedy.

The Disease of Egypt: A Living Death There are various forms of this disease, the worst being what is called the Greek Elephant Leprosy. It is a tubercular disease, revealed by circular spots or blotches of irregular forms, and varying extent appearing on the forehead, limbs and body. After a time, the central portion of the spots becomes white, and parts affected contract a certain numbness. Gradually the whole body is afflicted, and the appearance of the sufferer changes. The hair falls from the head and eyebrows, the nails loosen, decay and drop off; joint after joint of the fingers and toes shrink up and slowly fall away; the gums are absorbed and the teeth disappear; the nose, eyes, tongue and palate are slowly consumed.

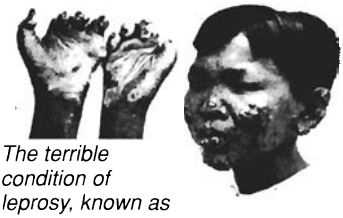
Leprosy is a living death!

It was considered a disease of Egypt, the Israelites having brought it out with them from that land of sin, slavery and suffering (Exo. 4:6; 15:26), and therefore, special legislation was directed against it by the Law of Moses. Leprosy having been proved against a man, he was put out of the camp, and lived a life apart from the normal run of people, associating only with others suffering from the same disease. When Israel was settled in the Land, the leper was forced to dwell outside the cities and was found there in his colony, with rent clothes as a garb of mourning, with bared head, and a covering upon his upper lip. On the approach of anybody, the Law demanded that he cry out, "Unclean! unclean!" that they might keep out of the way, lest they also be defiled (Lev. 13:45; Num. 5:1-4; 12:14-16).

The Leper Seeks Jesus' Help It was outside the city, therefore, that Jesus came upon a certain leper. As the disease was deep-seated in him, he was a hideous and revolting sight, made all the more pathetic by the mournful cry of, "Unclean, unclean." Cut off from normal companionship, excluded from the synagogue or temple, death was a merciful escape for such as he.

But he had heard of Jesus, and was sure that he could cure him if he were willing to do so.

Falling down upon the ground in his misery and need, he besought the Lord in heart-rending tones to help him. "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!" he declared.



The terrible condition of leprosy, known as "lepromatus leprosy", mutilation of hands.

He had faith in Jesus' power to perform the miracle, but doubted his willingness and compassion in the circumstances.

But in that he misunderstood the one who stood before him. The Lord, like his heavenly Father, has a deep sympathy for suffering humanity, and was greatly moved by the abject condition of the man. The poor leper, grovelling in the dust, with clothes rent, with the hideous deformity of the disease apparent for all to see, aroused in the Lord that keen sense of pity which was part of his character.

The Master stepped forward and did something that must have caused the disciples to look askance, for, putting forth his hand, he touched the leper. Under the Law of Moses, this would have made him also "unclean," and excluded him from the congregation for a period of time (Lev. 13:46). But, as the manifestation of his Father, Christ was greater than Moses or the Law. Where the Law cursed, he was able to cure; where it defiled, he was able to deliver.

And as he had previously revealed the shepherd-characteristics of the Father to the disciples, he was now about to manifest Him to them as *The Healer* (Exo. 15:26).

It was revolting to the disciples to see their Lord touch that leper, but he was teaching them that to cure men of sin, one must make contact with them without being influenced by the evil actions they reveal (see John 17:15; Heb. 4:15). Thus, as his hand made contact with the leper, he answered him, saying: ***"I will, be thou clean!"***

The astonished disciples saw an immediate change in the leper. The ugliness of the disease was instantly wiped away; the large, scaly blotches of the skin were gone; the rotting joints were healed; the vile influence that the disease had wrought in the man as it had eaten deeply into his flesh was arrested and restored.

The leper was cured!

How delighted the poor man was. How great was his joy, how boundless his thanks! He was prepared to do anything for his benefactor; anything, that is, apart from that which Christ commanded him to do, namely, to remain quiet about the miraculous cure! To the man he said: "See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them."

It was only right that the man should respect God's law and testify

his thanks to the Father in the way laid down therein; and in so doing he would offer testimony to Christ's power, demonstrating that he had the ability to cure spiritual leprosy, or sin. As the healing hands of the Lord were adequate to cure physical disease, so his truths are able to heal the ravages of sin which hideously deform the characters of men as completely as leprosy does their bodies.

The man hastened away to interview the priest and report he was cured, as required by the Law. But as to remaining silent about the matter, it was quite beyond him. He doubtless wanted to obey the Lord, but did not have sufficient will-power to keep his tongue from babbling. And once he commenced to talk, he could not stop, and told of his experience to all people. No doubt he was moved with a desire to do Christ a service, but his action did Jesus a disservice. Hearing that the Lord was outside the city, people hastened to meet him, so that he could not openly enter therein, nor properly teach the people. The unauthorised action of the man thus interfered with the Lord's plans. It taught the disciples the lesson that their preaching of the Word would be more profitable if it was conducted strictly in accordance with what Jesus required of them, and not what they might think was best. If the latter was followed to the exclusion of the former, more harm than good could follow.

The swarming crowd now prevented the Lord from obtaining the much needed communion with the Father that he sought. He tried to escape the people by going further into the desert that he might pray and gain strength for the work before him, but due to the well-meaning, but disobedient action of the leper, the people came to him from every side interrupting him as he gave himself to prayer. Thus, through the good-intentioned, but ill-conditioned action of the leper, the work of the Lord was greatly hindered.

Back in Capernaum The remarkable cure of the leper outside the walls of the city, and his action in publicly proclaiming the miracle to all and sundry, aroused tremendous interest in the Lord Jesus among multitudes throughout the land. They came seeking him from all parts of Galilee and Judea, and even disturbed him when he sought the seclusion of the desert that he might pray unto his heavenly Father, in order to obtain added strength for the work before him.

Thus though he needed that help, and tried to escape into the wilderness to seek it, he could not avoid the crowds that followed him. Try as he might, travel from place to place as he did (Mk. 1:45), they were there making their demands upon him, wearing him out by their insistence that he tend their needs.

In due course, he found himself on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and he decided to return to Capernaum (which he had made

his headquarters, and was now known as "his own city" — Mat. 9:1) by boat, and thus escape the pressing crowds.

And in the boat, as it went dancing over the waves, the Lord was able to relax quietly, and allow his mind to commune with his Father.

But soon Capernaum was reached, and immediately he, with his disciples, made for what he now looked upon as his home (cp. Mark 2:1; 3:19, margin).

It was most likely the house of Simon Peter, and perhaps the Lord thought that in it he might find some respite from the thronging crowds.

But no! His return had been noticed, and soon it was being excitedly reported throughout Capernaum that the miracle-working prophet of Nazareth was back home.

Crowds Throng the House

Soon people were streaming towards Peter's house that they might view the prophet and hearken to his words. Among them was a company of scribes, Doctors of the Law, and Pharisees in their distinctive dress, who had gathered to Capernaum from various parts of Galilee and Judea, and even from Jerusalem, to see and hear Jesus, and possibly to test whether his claims were genuine or not.

These lordly teachers, who looked upon themselves as the very cream of Jewry, as the custodians of Yahweh's Truth, did not realise how desperately sick they were spiritually. But it was so, and the Lord looked with compassion on their spiritual blindness and paralysis, and desired to help them. Luke records that "the power of the Lord was present to heal them."

But faith was required to perform that miracle!

And, therefore, he commenced to teach in the house, and as he did so, a great number of people crowded inside that they might hear him, until all available space was filled to capacity.

What was the house like? In order to obtain a mental picture of the remarkable miracle that followed, and the action of the four men who "uncovered the roof" and let their friend down on his couch before Jesus, we must try and describe an Eastern house.

They were commonly square or rectangular in form, and of a single storey. On approaching them from the street, a single door would be seen in the centre, and directly above it a single latticed window. This door would open out upon the street, for there would be no front garden such as an Australian home would generally have, and it would provide access to a small porch surrounded with benches where visitors would be received. Another inner door would provide access to a large square room, called the court. This would be paved, and around it would be found seats. It would be open to the sky, but surrounded by a covered walk (like an inside verandah) with doors

Healing the Man Sick of the Palsy

Every detail of this dramatic incident is worthy of careful thought, for it was used by the Lord to teach a powerful spiritual lesson. Palsy (Gr: *paralysis*, from *paraluo,* to unloose, enfeeble) results from a disease of the brain affecting the spinal cord and particular nerves, and causing what is commonly referred to as a stroke. It is often brought on by extreme intemperance, and that this was the case with the man healed by the Lord is implied in the words of Jesus: "Thy sins are forgiven thee." The palsied man was cured by the word of the Lord, demonstrating that this word is charged with power. In that case, it cured a physical ailment; in our case it is a certain antidote for spiritual ills.

The miracle seems to provide a parable of the work of Christ in regard to the nation of Israel. In that light, the helpless, palsied man borne by four friends, seems to point to the nation (the 12 tribes of Israel were divided into four groups – Num. 2), for the condition of Jewry, or its leaders, at the time of the Lord was as helpless through sin and intemperance as was the paralysed man upon his bed; and the Word of Yahweh only could restore it to spiritual health.

Luke, indeed, suggests such a spiritual lesson as this, for describing the self-righteous Scribes, Pharisees and Doctors of the Law who were present at the time, he declares: "the power of the Lord was present to heal ***them***" (Luke 5:17). Why them? His words indicate that they were spiritually as paralysed as the sick man was physically, and that, therefore, in the miracle that followed, they had a graphic illustration of their own condition and need.

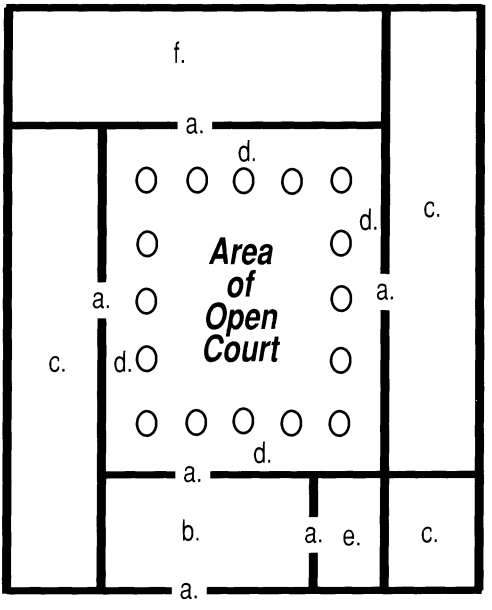
The Bible often aligns physical ills with spiritual sickness. Referring to such a case, the Psalmist declared: "Yahweh will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; Thou wilt ease his bed in sickness. I said, Yahweh, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee" (Psa. 41:3-4). Again: "He forgiveth all thine iniquities; He healeth all thy diseases" (Psa. 103:3). The healing of the palsied man is thus a graphic parable of the work of Christ who will ultimately cure the spiritual sickness of palsied Israel, as he will that of the whole world.*

---

* This incident is recorded in Mat. 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26; Mark 2:1-12. It is obvious from this, that Matthew does not set out the incidents of Christ's life that he records, in sequential order, whereas Luke does so. Luke claims to place "in order" the incidents he reports (Luke 1:3); his account helps to establish the proper sequence of the other three accounts, and includes valuable information of events upon which they are entirely silent.

PLAN OF A TYPICAL EASTERN HOUSE

a. Doors.
b. Porch.
c. Family rooms.
d. Galleries — walks between courts and rooms.
e. Stairs to second storey, or roof.
f. Women's rooms.



How The Palsied Man Was Let Down Through The Roof

Suppose the Lord was seated in the open court, say at [d]. The room was packed. There was but one way of access: through **[a]**. It would be easy for the friends to ascend the stairs at **[e]**, and go around the gallery **[d]**, till they came over Jesus, and removing portion of the temporary awning over the Open Court, let him down directly before the Lord.

which would open to other rooms that provided the sleeping or living quarters of the house. In wet weather, or in times of extreme heat, this centre court, which was normally open, would be covered by an awning or awnings, so constructed that they could be easily rolled up or removed. This was the roof of the court that was uncovered by the four men.

The roof of the buildings that comprised the main living quarters of the family, and which surrounded the open centre court, would be solid, however, and were commonly used for many purposes. On hot nights, a cool breeze might be obtained on the flat roof, and the inmates of the house would resort to it for that purpose. It provided a place of privacy for prayer, so that Acts 10:9 speaks of Peter going up to the house-top to pray (see also Josh. 2:6; 1Sam. 9:25-26). Sometimes an "upper room" was built on this flat rooftop, and used as a guest chamber. The Law of Moses required that these roofs be surrounded with a protective "battlement," balustrade or railing (Deu. 22:8), so as to prevent any accidents when they were so used. Access to them was obtained by flights of stairs either from the porch or from outside.

The large open space in the centre of the house was used to entertain company, or for festive occasions, and it was doubtless here that Jesus addressed the people on this occasion. He probably sat upon one of the benches at the far end of the court, and faced the crowd of curious people that soon filled the court and porch to

capacity. In front, directly before Jesus, were the Pharisees and Doctors of the Law, who had visited the city to see him; and so he began to teach them the things of God, hoping to instil in them a desire to serve Him in truth.

A Disturbance on the Roof

But after a while, the teaching of Jesus was interrupted by a noise from above. It attracted the attention of the people. They saw the awning that covered over the court gradually removed,* and soon five men were revealed, four active in doing this work, and the fifth recumbent upon a soft mattress or couch.

The man upon the couch was completely helpless, hopelessly paralysed. His friends, however, certain that Jesus could help him, had carried him to the house, only to find it so crowded with people that they could not force themselves into his presence.

No amount of pleading could open a passage for them, for everybody was intent upon the words uttered by the Lord, and nobody was prepared to make way for the sick man upon the couch.

What could his friends do to help him?

The circumstances were frustrating, but his need was desperate, their faith was sure, and their determination inflexible.

They decided to climb the stairs leading to the flat rooftop, and removing the awning that covered the otherwise open courtroom, lowered their sick friend before the Lord.

It was their noise in uncovering the roof that had disturbed the Lord in his discourse, and caused the eyes of all the people to turn upon them. Jesus, however, could only view such faith and determination with pleasure.

The Man Is Healed

Meanwhile the paralysed man had been lowered down on to the floor of the courtyard, and was now lying helpless before Jesus. Jesus instantly diagnosed the cause of his illness, and recognising his greatest need, addressed him with words that offended the Pharisees and the Doctors

* Mark says, "They uncovered the roof" (ch. 2:4). Luke says, "They went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling" (ch. 5:19). But J. Strong, in his Lexicon, states that the word for "tiling" in the Greek, can, by analogy, signify a thin roof or awning. This certainly makes clearer what was done. The four friends would hardly have commenced breaking up a person's house, but it was not difficult for them to go upon the rooftop and remove the awning that temporarily covered the centre court. It was probably of a rigid kind that could easily be removed when required, and thus correctly described by the Greek word *keramos*, rendered "tiling." But what are we to make of Mark's additional statement: "When they had broken it up"? Here, again, J. Strong suggests that the word in the original can signify "removed it," so what they did was to remove the detachable awning, or portion thereof, and thus obtained access to the Lord who was teaching beneath.

of the Law who were the interested spectators of all that was going on. "Son,"* he said compassionately to the sick man, "thy sins are forgiven thee!"



It was not the treatment for which the palsied man and his friends were hoping, for as yet no miracle of cure followed these words; but it was a statement to which the Pharisees took instant exception.

They were doubtful of the claims of Jesus. They could not dispute the wonder of his miracles, or the wisdom of his words, but they were not prepared, at that moment, to subscribe to his claims. They had come to Capernaum from many places (Luke 5:17), to meet and listen to Jesus, and to carefully weigh up all that he might do and say.

This statement convinced them that he was a charlatan, a fake.

They did not openly say this, but inwardly they did so.

"Who is this which speaketh blasphemies?" they reasoned within themselves contemptuously. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

What a shock they now received! They had uttered no words, but had only reasoned like that in their hearts. But to their amazement they heard Christ telling them what they were thinking, for turning to the Pharisees and Doctors of the Law, he said: "Why do you think evil in your hearts? And why do you reason like you do within your minds? For what is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven you; or to say, Rise up and walk?"

What answer could the Pharisees give? They must have been staggered to hear this open declaration of their innermost thoughts! A dramatic silence followed. The four friends, kneeling on the rooftop and looking down on what was going on below, perhaps prayed in their hearts for the miracle at which the Lord now hinted. The people in the courtroom of the house could feel the tension building up, and wondered at the significance of the dispute between the Lord and the Pharisees.

But the Pharisees and Doctors knew what he meant! Only God could forgive sins; only God's power could heal the paralysed man before them. If the miracle was performed, then obviously Jesus

* Whilst the word used is "son" in Mark 2:5, it is "man" in Luke 5:20. Doubtless both expressions were used, even as in Acts 1:16 the joint expressions of "men and brethren" are used. Such a form of address was evidently a Hebraism, though the term "son" was one that expressed compassion.

possessed the authority of God to forgive sins, and his claim to be the Messiah was justified. It was certainly no harder to heal such a man as was on the bed before them, hopelessly crippled up, than to say, "Thy sins are forgiven you!"

And now they heard the Lord continuing: "But that you may know that the Son of man has power upon earth to forgive sins..."

Then turning to the paralysed man lying on the couch at his feet, he said: "I say unto you, Arise, and take up your couch, and go into your house!"

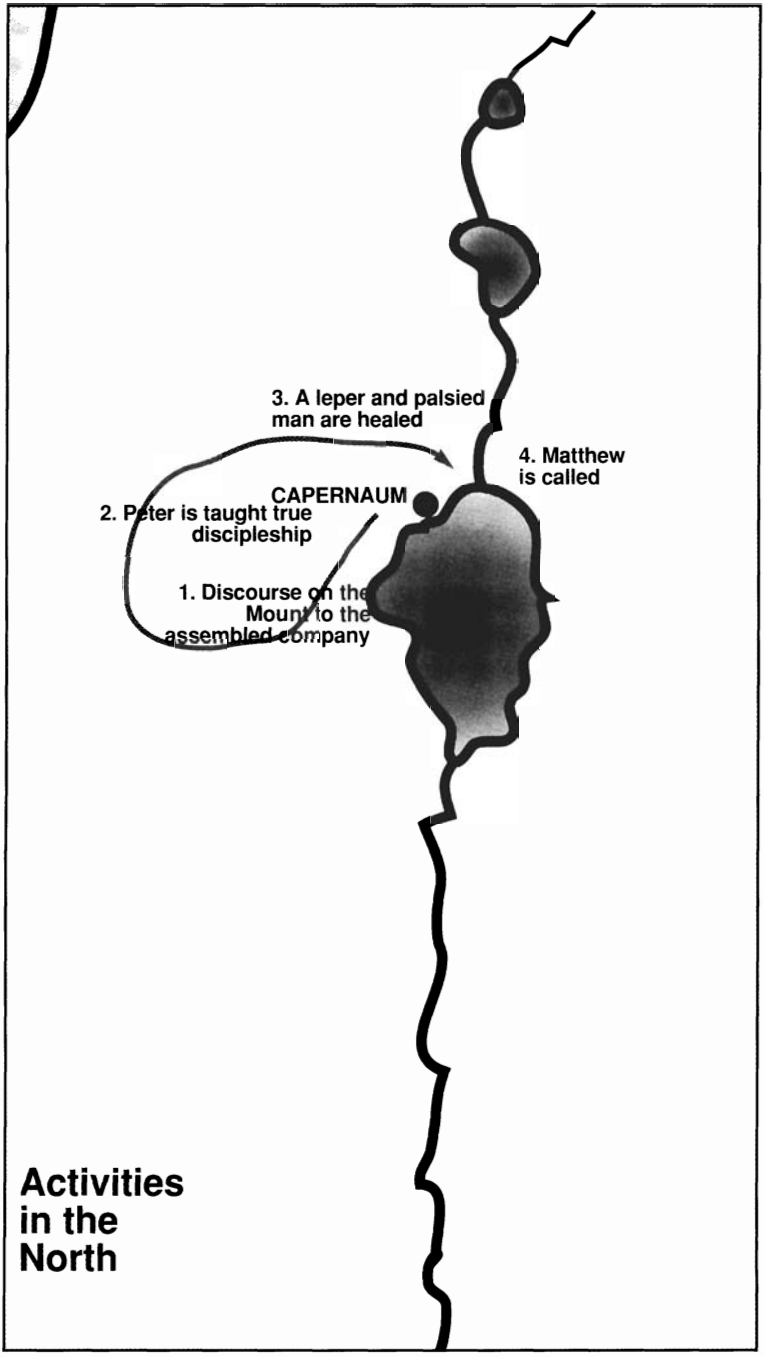
Before the eyes of the doubting Pharisees, in the sight of all the wondering people in the courtyard, to the joy of the four friends on the rooftop above, the miracle occurred. The muscles of the paralysed man relaxed; his body strengthened; in answer to the commandment of Christ, he rose up from off the mattress that formed his couch, and with words of thanks and joy to the Lord, he stood upright before the people.

A gasp of amazement followed the miracle. The people saw the previously paralysed man carrying his bed to his house as they stood back to let him through, and heard him glorifying God in the thanks that poured from his lips.

They, too, glorified God who had given such power to men. They were filled with a reverential fear, and as they left the house they continued to talk over their experiences, saying, "We have seen strange things today."



A 3rd century drawing of the palsied man.


3. A leper and palsied man are healed
4. Matthew is called
CAPERNAUM
2. Peter is taught true discipleship
1. Discourse on the Mount to the assembled company
Activities in the North

Chapter 10

THE CALL OF MATTHEW THE BUSINESS MAN

CAPERNAUM occupied an important position on the caravan route from Damascus to the Mediterranean coast and Egypt (see page 276), and on the outskirts of the city, adjacent to the shores of the lake, probably in order to intercept goods arriving by water, there was a small building used for the purpose of collecting taxes or customs on goods arriving.

A familiar figure in the toll-house of Capernaum was Levi the Jew.

He was what was called a publican, or tax-gatherer, an official hated by his fellow-Jews. Not only did they dislike having to pay taxes on the goods they brought into the country, but it was a constant reminder that they were not a free people, and that God had seemingly forsaken His land. It was constantly recalled to their minds that they were under subjugation to the hated foreigner, and as though that was not bad enough, publicans often exacted from the people more than was their due.

Jesus Visits the Toll-house

The Master was in the vicinity and grasped the opportunity to call this tax-gatherer to his side (see Luke 5:27-32; Mark 2:13-17; Mat. 9:9-13). Jesus could read the hearts of those before him, and realised that in Levi there was a man of greatest integrity. He had no doubt observed him in the audiences of the people listening to his discourses, observing the miracles he did, carefully weighing up the claims of the Lord in the light of all he saw and heard. Levi was the type of man that Jesus required, for he wanted followers whom he might send out to "seek and to save those who were lost," and who would be better for this purpose than those who had themselves been saved out of degrading circumstances. Jesus could have made choice of dignified scribes (Mat. 8:19), or



Tax official and client with cash box.

wealthy Pharisees, but he chose to select men whose experience of life would give them a practical knowledge of the needs of humanity.

He wanted Levi as an apostle, and as he had been teaching the multitude down by the seaside (Mark 2:13), and the tollhouse was nearby, he visited it for that purpose.

Levi Follows Jesus Up to that moment, though many followed Jesus and looked upon themselves as his disciples, he had only specifically chosen six by name: Philip, Nathanael, Andrew, Peter, James and John.

Levi, or Matthew as we better know him, and as he liked to be known, was to make the seventh.

He had doubtless heard some of the discourses of the Lord, and had seen some of the miracles he had performed; there was no doubt in his mind as to the credentials of Jesus, but in his humility he did not aspire to be a close associate of the wonderful young prophet from Nazareth.

But two words from the Lord changed the whole course of his life, and caused him to forsake everything and follow Jesus. And those two words were spoken when the Lord reached the tollhouse and saw Levi in his accustomed place. Fixing his eyes upon the tax-gatherer, he declared: ***"Follow me!"***

And, immediately, Levi left all, rose up, and followed the Lord.

The conversion of the wealthy, well-known tax-gatherer, must have caused a sensation in Capernaum. It was, in its way, almost as great a miracle as curing the man sick of the palsy. Levi gave up a lucrative position to follow Jesus, and hard-headed business men, such as he, do not do that unless they are convinced that what they are doing is right. Such men are practical and are used to coldly and calmly assessing a situation; they are not easily swayed by emotion or swept off their feet by mob-hysteria, so that the conversion of Levi, and the sacrifice he made in money matters to that end, was an outstanding testimony to the Truth and power of the gospel.

Levi Entertains His Friends But not satisfied with passively following the Lord, Levi desired also to give public testimony to the power of the gospel in his life. He had turned his back completely on his previous manner of living. He even changed his name, and preferred to be known as Matthew, so that in the gospel record that he later wrote, he always refers to himself by that name, though others called him Levi (cp. Mat. 9:9; Luke 5:27).

Matthew means *A Gift*, and perhaps he selected that name because he had received the Truth as a free gift in contrast to the demands he previously had made on his fellow-men, and the way of life to which

he had been then so closely joined (Levi means *Joined*).

He felt a desire and a responsibility to plainly tell his previous friends and acquaintances what he was doing and why he was doing it, and to that end, he called together a large company of them to meet at his house where he had arranged a feast for them. The Lord and those disciples whom he had already called were present, and there they met the tax-gatherers and "sinners"* who were the previous associates of Matthew. Matthew doubtless hoped that his business friends would be impressed with the teaching of Jesus, and thus be induced to seek "treasure in heaven" rather than that which is found on earth and which perishes with the using.

And he was partially successful in this, for some of them continued to follow Jesus (Mark 2:15).

Contention With The Pharisees

But the Pharisees viewed the attitude of the Lord in attending Matthew's feast, and encouraging the tax-gatherers to follow him, with disfavour. They were doubtless smarting under the rebuke that the Lord had publicly administered through his power, by healing the palsied man. Now, however, they really thought they had grounds of complaint against him that could not be answered. But they did not have the courage to go to Jesus direct. Possibly feeling they could do nothing with him, they attempted to undermine his standing with his disciples, and approaching them, accused them of wrong conduct. "Why do you eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" they demanded.

Jesus overheard their words (Mat. 9:12), and immediately came to the defence of his followers: "They that are whole need not a physician," he replied, "but they that are sick. But go and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."**

It was a well-merited rebuke for the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees! They claimed to be the only true followers of Yahweh, the outstanding exponents of the Law and Prophets in the nation, and here was this common carpenter of Nazareth, this associate of hated publicans and sinners, telling them publicly that they did not

*Gentiles, or Jews who acted like Gentiles were called "sinners" (Gal. 2:15), so that the term signifies those who did not embrace the hope of Israel, or those who did not carry out its requirements. It does not necessarily imply that people so described were immoral.

** The latter portion of Christ's statement seems to be an adaptation of Isaiah 49:5-6 where the work of Messiah is described as "bringing Jacob again" to Yahweh. In their self-righteousness, the Pharisees imagined that they were ready for Messiah when he came, but Jesus pointed out that the Scriptures predicted that the people would not be ready to receive Messiah, and part of his work would be to bring them to repentance.

understand the Scriptures, and to go ye and learn what Hosea 6:6 meant! If they did turn up Hosea 6, they must have ground their teeth in anger at what they read there, not only because of the words quoted by the Lord, but also because of the context in which they are found; for the passage reads: *"O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth; and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they, like men have transgressed the covenant; they have dealt treacherously against Me"* (Hos. 6:4-7).

The Pharisees did not want to dwell on that Scripture! And so, hastily passing over it, they returned to the attack. In an attempt to gain support from the people against the Lord, they identified their practice with that of the followers of John Baptist who was held in high esteem by most people, and contrasted it with that adopted by the followers of the Lord. They asked him: "Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?" *

The Lord had the complete answer to that question. He replied: "Can you make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days."

The Lord's answer showed that the attitude of the disciples of John as well as that of the Pharisees was wrong, because they did not discern in him the Bridegroom predicted in the Scriptures. John Baptist himself had publicly announced that Jesus was the divine Bridegroom, and had identified himself as the "friend of the Bridegroom," whose greatest joy would be found in the Bride accepting her Groom (John 3:29). The attitude of the disciples of John in standing aloof from Jesus was therefore in complete disregard of their leader's teaching. They should have rejoiced that Messiah had come; and so also should have the Pharisees if they really had understood the Scriptures. The fact that they did not rejoice in the presence of the Bridegroom showed that they did not appreciate the

* The question on fasting occurs in Mat. 9:14-18; Mark 2:18-21; and Luke 5:33-39, but a careful consideration of the background reveals that they are three separate incidents, and the question was posed by three different classes of people at different times. In Luke it is the Pharisees first; in Mark it is the people later, who had heard the Pharisees' misrepresenting Jesus, and his disciples, as gluttons, drunkards; in Matthew it is the disciples of John much later, after the Second Passover, as in Lk. 8:40-42; Mat. 9:18. There are also slight but important differences in the answers given by the Lord as appropriate to those who posed the question. Thus he answered the Pharisees differently from the way he did the disciples of John. All this will develop as our story advances. These details are significant and important to understand as they appear.

teaching of John, or that of the Scriptures!

So, using the very expression coined by John whom they had advanced against him, the Lord easily turned the question back upon themselves.

But he also added a word of warning for the ears of his disciples. The time would come when he would be taken away from them, and they would have cause to mourn. They would mourn then because the Bridegroom was still absent, and because of the persecutions and tribulation they would experience at that time (Zech. 13:7; Luke 22:35-37).

To illustrate words which may have been confusing to some who listened to them, the Lord added two parables: the parables of the ruined garments and of the new wine.

The Parable of the Ruined Garments (Luke 5:36).

"No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old," declared the Lord, "if otherwise, then he will tear the new and the new will not match the old" (RSV).

What did the Lord mean? The word for "new" (Gr. *kainos*), signifies that which is completely different. Who would think of tearing out a piece of a completely different garment and patching an old garment with it? The thought is ridiculous, for both would be ruined. The new, or different garment would not only be ruined when the piece was torn out of it, but, being an entirely different piece of material, it would not match the old. Thus, the new would be torn and the old not be matched!

By this parable Christ showed that his teaching was completely different from that of the Pharisees. He had not come to patch up the deficiencies of the Pharisaic way of life, with its cold, formal religion, and its dependence upon such ordinances as washing of hands, the offering of sacrifices without real meaning, and sabbath observance without its true spirit. They set before men the idea that they could be justified by works, by imitating their ways. But men constantly broke God's commandments and needed forgiveness of sins, so that the Pharisaic principle of justification by works had to give way to justification by faith and mercy. Christ had come to provide that need, so that it was no use comparing his way with that of the Pharisees or even the disciples of John, for his was a completely new — in the sense



of being different — garment or covering. Therefore, for his disciples to mourn whilst he was with them, would be as incongruous as patching up an old garment with a different kind of material — they would not match. And for him to embrace the Pharisaic way of life would be like ruining the new (different) garment to patch up the old, worn-out one. Both would be ruined. Better to toss the old garment away and use the new; better to turn from the Pharisaic way of life and follow the Messiah!

The Lord continued his illustrative parables:

The Parable of the New Wine (Luke 5:37-39)

"No man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, the old is better."

In those days, the skins of animals were used for "bottles." New wine had to be put into new bottles made of skins, because such bottles stretched as the wine matured in them, and if old bottles were used, the maturing wine would split them.

Christ's parable thus taught that as special vessels must be prepared for the wine they are intended to carry, and as the wine placed in them must be left to mature, so his disciples must be specially prepared for the work of teaching he would give them.

They were the "new vessels" into which the new wine was being poured — and that wine is the teaching of Yahweh (Isa. 55:1). When the wine in them matured they would be sent forth on their mission to offer it to men. Meanwhile, as the skin-bottles stretched with the maturing wine, so the disciples must grow in spiritual stature and develop to spiritual maturity.

The Pharisees had criticised the disciples because they did not act as their disciples acted, but Christ's answer was that "new vessels" were required, and if his "wine" was poured into their "vessels" they could not carry it! In other words, a person desiring to become his disciple must leave all and follow him, and not imitate the ways of the Pharisees.

He concluded the parable by saying, "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better."

His teaching has a double meaning.

Firstly: It expresses the general reluctance that was widespread at the time to accept Christ's teaching. It was like "new wine" to them, and they preferred the old wine.

Secondly: It taught the need for his disciples to carefully mature the "wine" (his teaching) before offering it to others, otherwise it will be found distasteful.

The lesson of this parable is as necessary today as it was in the days of Christ. As "new bottles" we must fill ourselves with the "wine" that is freely offered in the Word of God (Isa. 55:1). But we must also learn to grow with that wine, as the skin-bottles did when they stretched with the wine that was poured into them. And we must also allow that wine to mature within us before offering it to others. There is a natural tendency in most of us to try and become teachers when we first come to an understanding of the Truth or a portion of the Bible, instead of waiting to allow that teaching to mature in ourselves. Such an attitude is not wise, for, as Christ taught, men easily detect new wine, and reject it saying, "The old is better." Let the wine of God's Truth thoroughly mature within us, and we will be fit to cheer others with its invigorating message. Study, meditation, experience, time, are all necessary for that, but sometimes young people become impatient in learning that fundamental lesson of life, and effective teaching.

Discipleship Contrasted (Mark 2:18-20)

The Pharisees had no reply to the words of the Lord, but neither were they converted. They continued to point the finger of scorn and scandal at Jesus and his disciples on the ground that they associated with publicans and sinners, and did not publicly fast as did their disciples and those of John. And as the people hated the publicans anyhow, and highly respected John, so this underhanded opposition bore some fruit. The people saw the disciples of John and the Pharisees fasting regularly,* and they observed that those of Jesus did not regularly do so, and they wondered at the reason.

On one such occasion (and therefore after the previous encounter recorded above) the people (see Mark 2:18, RV, NIV) approached the Lord with a question similar to that of the Pharisees: "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?"

The Lord answered them in words similar to those he addressed to the Pharisees and illustrated his reply by another parable that is also very similar to the one he used on that occasion. A little thought, however, will reveal a very striking difference, a difference that underlines another important lesson.

The Parables of the New with the Old (Mark 2:21-22)

The Lord declared: ***"No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.***

* Every week, on Monday and on Thursday, the Pharisees observed fasts, and the disciples of John had their days also. The fasting, especially by the Pharisees, was done quite openly, for they delighted in parading their so-called "righteousness" before the people.

And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles."

This parable sounds very similar to the previous one considered above, but there are striking differences, and it was given at a different time. That one (see Luke 5) was given to the Pharisees, who had put the question consequent upon the circumstances associated with Matthew's feast; this one was given a little later to the people who asked the question consequent upon the Pharisees and the disciples of John fasting (see Mark 2:20).

The former parable spoke of two garments both of which were



Goat-skin bottles

ruined: one because it was torn to patch the other; and the other because the patch in it did not match.

In this parable to the people, as distinct from the one to the Pharisees, the word "new" (*agnaphos*) is an entirely different word in the original to that previous used, and signifies raw, or unwrought. It relates to cloth that has not been properly prepared, and thus is bound to shrink. If such cloth is sewn into an old garment it will tear the stitches out as it shrinks, and "the rent will be made worse." The textures being dissimilar (the raw cloth being rigid, and the old cloth supple) they will never wear well together, for the rigid will tear away the supple, and so make the rent worse.

This parable illustrated Christ's answer to the people when they asked him why his disciples did not fast like those of the Pharisees and John's disciples. He illustrated the inexpediency of imposing too grievous burdens and restrictions on new converts during their development as such; for men cannot suddenly be initiated into strict austerities without proper preparation, any more than unwrought, stiff cloth can be used to patch an old, worn garment. The Pharisees were trying to superimpose rigid formalities on the people who were not ready to accept them, and the only result was to rend the nation apart by their schismatic demands. The wise course is to act as one would when storing new wine into the skins (bottles) then used. A new skin was provided for the new wine, and both matured together. So it was with the Lord's disciples, for as their knowledge of God's requirements grew, so they superimposed upon themselves restrictions that they would not have borne previously, and the time came when they, too, both mourned and fasted.

The parable has an application today. A new convert does not appreciate the need for the restriction of liberty to the same extent as one fully educated in the Word of God should do. Later, as the "wine" matures, he comes to understand and respect that teaching of the apostle: "All things are lawful unto me but all things are not expedient." Paul did not necessarily impose on others the restrictions he placed upon himself, for to do so would be like sewing stiff, unwrought cloth into a well-worn, supple garment. The unwrought cloth must undergo a period of preparation.

John's Gospel records eight outstanding miracles which, though each is complete in itself, together provide in sequence a remarkable parable of the ministry of the Lord. Instead of the usual word for "miracle" used by the other Greek writers, John describes them by the Greek word "semeion" which means "signs," showing that he has recorded them as eight great signs to Israel (both natural and spiritual) of the purpose of God in Christ. On pages 204-209, we have set these signs out in order from John's Gospel, and have there described the first of them: the miracle of turning water into wine. On pages 261-266, is outlined the second sign: The healing of the nobleman's son. The first sign showed that there is joy in Christ's service; the second sign that new life can be derived from him; the third sign, now to be considered,` reveals the source from whence can be obtained the strength to overcome weakness. Thus Paul taught: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

Christ's life on earth can be divided into five main periods, as set out in the following diagram:

Birth THIRTY YEARS	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	THIRD YEAR Death	Resurrection Forty Days
Quiet period of Preparation	Period of Introductory Preaching	Period of Popularity	Period of Opposition	Period of Triumph

These periods are roughly divided by the various passovers which the Lord attended. As a faithful Jew, he kept these festivals as required by the Law, and the Gospels mention these occasions. The first passover in his public ministry is recorded in John 2:13, and was the occasion when he dramatically entered the temple to drive from its precincts those who were desecrating that holy place. The second one (though we are not specifically told it was a passover) is referred to in John 5:1, as the time when the Lord cured the impotent man who was despondently laying helpless and hopeless by the Pool of Bethesda. The third passover was preceded by the miracle of the feeding of five thousand hungry people as outlined in John 6:4. The fourth passover, of course, saw the Lord peacefully sleeping in the tomb, awaiting the joy of resurrection morn.

Each of these passovers witnessed a significant development in the ministry of Jesus. The first one was followed by a preaching tour which resulted in enthusiastic crowds following him throughout Galilee. The people, already prepared by the fiery eloquence of John Baptist, listened with delight to the powerful preaching of the prophet from Nazareth, and beheld with wonder and admiration the miracles he did. They found his teaching a great contrast to that of the scribes and Pharisees, for he spoke with the greatest and most convincing authority, and not as they did: destroying the power of Scripture by the traditions of men. The leaders of the nation, however, moved by jealousy, looked upon him with suspicion. When they found that they could not use him to further their plans, they vigorously opposed him. With Nicodemus, they knew that he was a man "sent from God," but they could not tolerate the unceremonious way he swept their teaching and authority aside, and therefore viewed him with increasing hostility.

The second passover saw the remarkable miracle by the Pool of Bethesda which aroused the admiration of the people, but hardened the attitude of the leaders against him. They realised that Jesus could not be ignored; that both in power and teaching he had the means to overthrow their influence; that he was a man to be watched and feared. The ensuing year saw a succession of similar incidents, with the result that the Lord reached the apex of popularity as far as the people were concerned. They saw in him such a leader as they desired, and towards the end of that period, they wanted to "take him by force, to make him a king" (Jn. 6:15).

But then his popularity sharply waned. In an uncompromising manner, he bluntly set the truths of God before the multitude in a way that aroused the resentment of the people. Even "many disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (Jn. 6:66). But the Lord was unmoved by this reversal of attitude. He warned his followers that they must free themselves from slavery to sin by which they were bound, if they really wanted salvation; and they, who thought they were already free men, were incensed with the implication that they were no better than the Gentiles in concept and attitude (see Jn. 8:41). Angry words followed, and the incident closed with some of his own followers taking up stones to stone him! It commenced the period of bitter opposition, an opposition that climaxed in the tragedy of the cross.

It was followed by the epoch of triumph. Even the twelve disciples thought the death of the Lord meant the end of all their hopes, for they did not then fully understand the purpose of God, and the triumph of the resurrection. "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel," was their despondent comment upon the drama of his death (Lk. 24:21). But the black mood of depression that had then settled on them was dispelled by the triumph of his resurrection, and when, for forty wonderful days he continued with them, teaching the things prophetically set forth in the Old Testament

concerning himself, showing how it was necessary for the "Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory" (Lk. 24:26), they were moved by an inexpressible joy that completely changed their outlook and lives.

They became different men. Not only did they understand the purpose of God better, not only did they perceive wonderful truths and meanings in the sayings and doings of their Lord that were previously hidden from them, but their earlier timidity was replaced by a confidence, a boldness, and a wisdom that demonstrated to others the transforming influence of Christ upon them. The record states, that "when the people saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled! and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Considered in broad outline, the life of the Lord reveals three great principles: [1] that long years of preparation went into a short ministry of three and a half years; [2] that fleshly popularity ended in bitter opposition and hatred; [3] that out of the disgrace of a criminal's death, God raised Jesus to a glorious triumph.

There are lessons in these principles that we need to apply in our lives. [1] Proper preparation is necessary for success in the things of God. Sunday School work, the daily reading of the Bible, painstaking care with the study of the Word of God are aids to that end. They will help us serve God better, and enable us to testify to others by our conduct, that "we have been with Jesus and have learned of him." [2] Fleshly popularity avails little. Consider the experiences of the Lord. The people swarmed around him, praised him for his words, benefited by his ministry and miracles, but then permitted him to be ignominiously executed as a criminal, perhaps joined in the maniacal shout, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" There is nothing of lasting value that this life can offer. To youth, the world may seem so full of hope — a wonderful adventure — but soon the glory fades, the adventure loses its excitement, pleasure gives way to disappointment and disillusionment, then age begins to take over and the darkness and inevitability of the grave begins to cast its grim shadow.

What then?

The third principle set forth above provides a means of hope. In Christ, "out of weakness we can be made strong" (Heb. 11:34). Paul taught: "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death (through baptism and obedience — Gal. 5:24), we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:5). In other words, if we apply the lessons derived from Christ's life, out of all the frustrations, the trials, the defeats of the present, there can come a glorious triumph (Phil. 4:13).

These three foundation lessons illustrate the value of the study we are undertaking in *The Story of the Bible*.

But perhaps the most powerful lesson of all is the personal impact of Christ upon one's life. I wonder if your experience, as you read

this volume, was anything like mine as I wrote it? In preparation for writing, I had first to study up the sections of the Bible dealing with the life of the Lord, and as I did so, I took the trouble of marking the margin of my wide-margin Bible with explanatory notes, and then carefully thinking over the things I had discovered through my study.

It impressed me with an important fact: how far removed is my character from that of the Lord Jesus!

I read about a man who was always kind and patient, who showed anger, it is true, but only because of a righteous cause. How different to the example I sometimes set! That is the kind of lesson brought home to me! Imagine the Lord, constantly wearing himself out in service to the people; bearing with the sniping criticism of some of the leaders; observing that his own disciples were failing to grasp the principles he was setting forth, and yet, in spite of all this, rendering perfect obedience to Yahweh! Where did he derive the power to do so? The answer to that question is the greatest lesson of his life. He derived it from God. He was the Son of God by birth, and doubtless inherited an aptitude towards spiritual matters that was quite unusual — but he also had to co-operate with God. He had to draw into his life the power of God by the study of His Word and by prayer. He could not have succeeded without God, for flesh is weak, and he came in human flesh. Jesus succeeded because God was with him, and God was with him, because His Son willingly submitted to what the Father required of him.

Let us try to do likewise.

We can succeed if we use the means that God has made available to us. Paul wrote: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Through Christ, by baptism, we have access to God, and to a power that will enable us to rise above ourselves; and the example that Jesus set is that we should constantly turn to the Father for that help.

How often he sought the wilderness that he might commune with God! How frequently he gave himself to prayer! How intense must have been his study of God's Word that he might know exactly what was required of him!

These are some of the thoughts that flowed through my mind as I studied this section of the Bible and wrote the last volume of the *Story of the Bible*. Each day saw failure as far as I was concerned when I measured my life against his, but each day I was able to thank God that He has provided a means of forgiveness of my shortcomings in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and so, with the example of the Lord himself before me, to try and do a little better.

Let us study his wonderful life from that aspect, and by applying the lessons personally, so build up some resemblance to the Lord, that at his coming he will acknowledge in us a relationship that will ensure for us a place in the kingdom he will then set up on earth.

— *H. P. Mansfield.*

Chapter 1

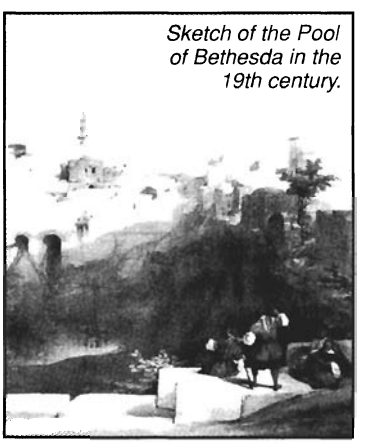
AN IMPOTENT MAN IS GIVEN STRENGTH

SHORTLY after the events narrated in the previous section occurred, a feast of the Jews (probably the Passover, John 5) took place in Jerusalem, and as was required by the Law, Jesus went up to that city to celebrate it. During the course of his stay in the city, he visited the Pool of Bethesda, situated on the northern part of Jerusalem close to the Sheep Gate, through which animals were led for the purpose of sacrifice in the temple. Thus the principle of sacrifice, or mercy, was constantly brought to mind.

At the Pool of Bethesda

Bethesda means *The House of Mercy*, and as though to emphasise this principle, it was overshadowed by five great porches, for, to the Hebrew, five is the number of grace or mercy (Gen. 43:34; Num.18:16; Lev. 26:8).

In the shadow of these porches lay a great number of sick folk waiting for what they thought was a sign from heaven. For it had been observed that every now and then, the water of the pool became mysteriously disturbed: it bubbled (possibly through some underground action), and the popular belief was that an angel from heaven stirred up the water, and whoever got into the water first after such had taken place would be cured of whatever disease he had.*



Sketch of the Pool of Bethesda in the 19th century.

And perhaps some had been cured, because the mind is a strange thing, that can exert a tremendous influence over the body for good or ill. For example, an Australian aborigine will die if an enemy has gone through the native ceremony of "pointing the bone" at him, and the only thing that will cure him will be the "magic" of a witch-doctor; for all the skill of modern science or medical treatment will prove vain (as evidenced in certain

* Notice that beginning from the statement, "waiting for the moving of the water" in John 5:3, to the end of v.4 is excluded from the Revised Version of the Bible as an interpolation. It is explanatory of the attitude of the mind of those waiting at the pool, and was probably included in the margin of an early manuscript of John's Gospel, and later incorporated in the received text. If retained, the words in parenthesis ("it was said") should be included after the word "for" in v. 4.

documented cases), so strong is his belief in the superstition. On the other hand, a man of dynamic personality is able to induce a strong emotional reaction in an individual or a crowd, and influence them to act as they would not normally do. In some instances, this can have such a powerful effect upon sick persons as to result in a temporary cure, and this is often attributed to the possession of the Holy Spirit.

It is, of course, nothing of the kind; it is merely the result of the excitation of the flesh induced by some powerful hypnotic or dynamic personality or belief exerting some overwhelming emotional influence over the person anxious to be cured.

It was this that may have caused apparent cures at the Pool of Bethesda, for the legend that attributed it to angelic influence was false.

Jesus Provides the True Cure

It was with the greatest compassion that the Lord looked at the pathetic scene before him. There, in the five great porches, was a multitude of people representing suffering humanity. Some were paralysed and could not walk without the help of others; some had horrible eastern diseases that disfigured their faces; some had hopelessly twisted limbs that retarded their actions; some looked up out of sightless eyes, blind to the beauty of earth and sky.

Jesus had the power of the Holy Spirit and could have cured all these people if it was the purpose of God to do so, but (contrary to the attitude of modern "faith healers" who would and should cure everybody according to their claim) would have defeated the very purpose for which that power had been given him. He was sent, not to cure men's bodies, but to heal their lives and to restore their minds to the soundness of God's Truth — not to give some temporary relief from sickness, but to cure them permanently from the disease of mortality. To that end, it was more important to impress upon each one their need of God and His plan of redemption, than to cure them of their ailments. The miracles the Lord performed were all parables speaking of God's purpose, and not mere examples of his wonder-working skill.

Among the crowd of sick people, he saw one man who stood out among all others as desperately in need of help. He was completely paralysed, helplessly impotent in his limbs and body, so that he could barely move. In addition, he was destitute, without a friend to help him.

He was a man with an urgent need.

And he had been in that state for a long time, for some 38 years.

All these details are recorded by John because they help to illustrate the "sign." "Thirty-eight years" is a significant period, for it is the same length of time that Israel struggled in the wilderness

(Num. 14:33-34), and thus stands for the period of probation. Jewry was like that man in a spiritual sense, though it did not know it.

"Do you wish to be cured?"

The Lord Jesus singled this man out from all the others, and as the impotent man looked at him out of hopeless eyes, he heard words that quickened his excitement, and caused the eyes of all the others to turn with curiosity to the Lord.

"Do you wish to be made whole?" Jesus asked the man.

Did he wish to be healed? Of course he did! For that reason he had lain there 38 years, so long, indeed, that he had almost lost hope. And so the impotent man replied: "Yes, sir, but I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

These words summed up all the frustration and the bitterness of a lifetime of defeat. Time after time, during those 38 years he had tried to shuffle his poor, paralysed body close to the pool when he thought the water was about to be troubled, only to find that somebody else had got in before him! Perhaps at one time he had friends to help him, but after 38 years, they had all deserted him. Now he doubtless thought that Jesus, in his compassion, was offering to assist him in that manner.

But the Lord, looking at him earnestly, addressed him with a single statement: ***"Rise, take up thy bed, and walk!"***

The impotent man looked at him in bewilderment. Was this some cruel joke made at the expense of his affliction! But, no! With wonderment, he felt his limbs being strengthened; in staggering joy, he recognised that he was no longer paralysed, but healed! Perhaps he tentatively felt the strength of his limbs, looking up in amazement at the serene, noble countenance of the one, standing before him, and then with the realisation that the 38 years of misery were over, he stood up and walked, taking up his mattress with him — a visible evidence of the miracle.

The Healed Man Reproved By The Jews

And now, what excitement in the shadow of the five porches by the pool of the House of Mercy! The impotent man was cured! A babble of tongues announced the fact, as heads turned to watch him walking. And not by the troubling of the water, but by the words of a strange, noble-looking man! Was he an angel? Perhaps he could perform another miracle! Who was he that had performed it?

But in the excitement the Lord had quietly withdrawn himself, and was not to be found.

There were some of the leaders of the Jews present, who had seen the miracle, and had probably recognised Jesus, but now they set out

to restrain any demonstration in his favor. They now had something that gave them the opportunity of so doing, and of clearly showing (in their own minds at least) that this miracle-working prophet was not to be heeded when it came to the important teaching of God.

For it was the sabbath day on which the miracle had been performed.

In carrying his bed on such a day, they claimed that the man had broken the Law.

With stern faces they approached him and laid this accusation against him. "It is the sabbath day," they declared, "It is not lawful for you to carry your bed!"

The poor man could not understand it. Surely one who obviously possessed the power of God to perform such a miracle would not have ordered him to commit a sin. Trembling, he replied: "He that cured me, said to me, Take up your bed and walk."

Conveniently ignoring the fact of the miracle in their insistence upon sabbath observance, the Jewish rulers asked the name of the person who had authorised him to do such a thing.

But the man did not know. In his joy at being cured, in his excitement at being able to walk again, he had not noticed Jesus slip away, and when he came to look for him, he was not to be found. With a word of warning, the Jewish leaders left him.

"Go, Sin No More" The one-time paralysed man realised that whoever it was that had performed the miracle, such power came from one source only: God. He therefore made good use of the strength given him, for he used his newly-strengthened limbs to carry him to the temple, that he might offer worship and thanks unto Yahweh. He had not been able to walk there for 38 years, and like Israel when they left the wilderness to enter the Land of Promise, he desired to make a new start. He was intent upon his worship, when he was startled to hear a voice speaking to him: "Behold, you are cured," said the voice, "sin no more lest a worse thing come on you!"

Turning around he saw the man who had performed the miracle, and from his lips he learned that to be crippled up is not the worst thing that can happen to a person, for moral regeneration is as great a need as physical health.

And as they spoke together he learned that his benefactor's name was Jesus — *Yah's Salvation!* He could also tell from his conversation with him that Jesus was not a breaker of the Law as the Jewish leaders imagined, but a man from God, a true prophet in every way.

Joyfully he returned to the Jews, anxious to testify on the behalf of the Lord. Surely this token of power, as well as the gracious words he spoke, would demonstrate to them that Jesus should be heeded, would

cause them to seek him and to learn that no harm had been done by him carrying his bed on the sabbath day!

But his witness for Jesus did nothing of the kind. His words of explanation were received with sour-faced criticism. The Pharisees set out to persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him because he had healed on the sabbath day, for they realised that by demonstrations of such power he would soon have all the people following him.

This brought them in personal argumentative conflict with the Lord during which he patiently strove to bring home to them that they were as spiritually impotent as the man was physically so, and that they were helpless to lift themselves up out of their bed of spiritual sickness, unless they turned to him for the help he could give them. In the course of his discussion with them, Jesus revealed that he could provide the sacrifice that normally came through the sheep gate; he was the House of Mercy; he was the repository of grace like the five porches in which the crowd of suffering humanity lay. He revealed all this to them by drawing attention to the five great titles that the Old Testament showed were his, and by five indisputable witnesses to the veracity of his claim that they should have heeded. He warned them that unless they took heed they would be like the sick people in the shadow of the porches vainly waiting for a miracle. He declared: "You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me. And you will not come to me, that you might have life!" (John 5:39-40).



Ruins of the Pool of Bethesda as they appear today.

But before we consider the interesting discussion that took place between the Lord and the Jews, let us summarise the *Sign of the Impotent Man*.

His dire state dramatised Jewry's condition and its need, as it does ours today, thus:

1. *The man recognised his need — the Jews did not! Do we?*
2. *The man had a desire to be cured — the Jews did not recognise that they were spiritually sick! Do we?*
3. *The man acknowledged his poverty, he had none to help him — the Jews thought they were rich! Do we?*
4. *The man was strengthened by the Word of God — the Jews rejected it! Do we?*
5. *The man once healed sought to proclaim Jesus' power — the Jews rejected it! Do we?*

The miracle was a sign teaching that the Lord can strengthen us to rise above our weaknesses. Paul recognised this need, and testified to it in the following words: "When I would do good, evil is present with me... O wretched man that I am!... who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:21-25). "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

Let us learn the sign of the paralysed man who was made strong, and find in Christ a strength in weakness that will enable us to conquer the flesh.

Jesus Denies Being a Sabbath- Breaker

Seething with unrighteous indignation against Jesus, and fearful that the miracles he performed might sway the people in his favor, the leaders of the Jews, with murder in their hearts, sought him out, intent upon persecuting, and even slaying him.

They needed a charge that they might press against him, and thought they found it in the sabbath law.

To their mind, Jesus had broken the sabbath when he healed the man on the sabbath day. They therefore sought him out that they might publicly challenge him with this crime.

But, in answer to their charge, the Lord replied: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

It was only a simple statement, but it roused the anger of the Jews to boiling point, mainly because they understood what he meant and had no effective reply. Not only did it completely destroy their hope of successfully charging the Lord with breaking the sabbath, but now, as they were quick to recognise, he was claiming to be the Son of Yahweh.

This, to their mind, was blasphemy; and hating him already, their obsession against him was roused to the point that it could only be satisfied by his death. But, at the same, and most frustrating of all to them, they could not help recognising the power of his answer, and therefore hastily avoided pressing the accusation that the Lord had broken the sabbath (see John 5:16-19).

In what way did the Lord's statement so completely refute their charge?

He claimed that God worked ceaselessly without resting on the sabbath day. The sun shone on that day as much as it did on other days; the work of redemption was just as effective then as on the six profane days of the week, for although God had rested on the original seventh day, that rest had been broken by sin. Thus the sabbath law, which had been made for man not God (Mark 2:27), did not bind the Father to its limitations. Jesus could therefore truly say, "My Father worketh hitherto [i.e., without ceasing]..."

But then he also added the words, "*...and I work.*" In doing so he claimed that the miracle he had performed was done by God working through him, so that if they wished to prefer a charge of sabbath-breaking, they must involve God in it!

The Jews were faced with a dilemma. If they accused Jesus of breaking the sabbath, they thereby acknowledged that he possessed power to heal that made him a most remarkable man; if they accepted that the power came from God, how could they charge Jesus without involving God? If they declared that Jesus performed the miracle by his own power, that would be an acknowledgment that he possessed God-like powers apart from God! Whichever way they looked at the matter, they were caught! After all, if his only crime was that he had manifested the power and glory of God by deeds which "God did by him" (Acts 2:22), then they could not charge him of sabbath-breaking without standing in judgment on God, and to do such a thing as that would ensure their own personal self-condemnation.

Quickly the Jews dropped the charge of sabbath-breaking, and instead attacked the Lord on the grounds that he had uttered blasphemy by claiming that God was his Father.

Jesus Acknowledges That He Is The Son of God

Jesus immediately replied with a statement that acknowledged that he is the Son of God, but rejected the idea that such a title made him equal with the Father. He declared: "Truly, truly, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do, for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise..."

Jesus thus claimed that he was "the Son." In doing so, he directed the attention of his Jewish accusers to two notable prophecies of the Old Testament: Psalm 2:7 where the title is applied to the Messiah as King; and Isaiah 9:6 where it is applied to the Messiah as Immanuel, "God with us."

If he could prove his claim to be the Messiah, there was no blasphemy in his use of the title of Son of God if the Jewish Scriptures were to be the court of appeal, for they endorsed its use in his case. In the course of his discourse, as we shall show, the Lord advanced five witnesses to justify his claim to the five titles found in Isaiah 9:6, and by so doing, completely silenced his Jewish detractors.*

---

* In the Talmudic teaching, the Jews discriminate between a Son of God (Elohim), and a Son of Yahweh (the Father). They look upon the former as a legitimate claim; the latter, as blasphemy. But they cannot refuse the force of Psa. 2:7 which clearly shows that Messiah would be the Son of Yahweh, and it was that very title Jesus claimed of himself, resulting in the anger of the Jews. He asserted it in a very direct relationship which they could not understand or tolerate, even though they boasted that they were sons of God (i.e. "Elohim"). See John 8:41.

Now, in Isaiah 9:6, there are five titles given to the Son there promised. He is declared to be:

1. The Wonderful;
2. The Counsellor;
3. The Mighty God;
4. The Everlasting Father;
5. The Prince of Peace.

As there were five porches overshadowing the Pool of Mercy (Bethesda), so Jesus now claimed these five titles, for, in manifesting the principles they suggest, he revealed the grace and mercy of Yahweh unto men.

Turning, therefore, to the Jews, and claiming the first title, the Lord declared: "The Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that Himself doeth; and He will show him greater works than these, that you may ***MARVEL***" (John 5:20). The miracle they had witnessed in the strengthening of the impotent man was merely a token of greater things that the Lord will do at the resurrection, things which will cause men to marvel, and so acknowledge that he is **THE WONDERFUL**!

The Lord continued with the second aspect: "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth *whom he will*" (v. 21). He will give eternal life to those whom, in his wisdom and counsel, he deems fit to receive it. Thus he made claim to be **THE COUNSELLOR.**

Then he declared: "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (v. 22). In the execution of judgment, whether on individuals or nations, he will represent the Father. In doing so, he will manifest mighty power, and will "rebuke strong nations afar off." Thus he will be seen as **THE MIGHTY GOD** (Heb. *El Gibbowr,* or the Warrior of God, as the phrase can be rendered).

Further: "That all men should honor that Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him" (v. 23). These words of Jesus reveal that the judgments to be poured out will bring honour to the Father, and men will honor Him the more as they see the principles of life manifested through the Son. Those who are saved will recognise that they have been brought to life through the Lord Jesus, and that therefore they constitute his "seed" (Isa. 53:10), his "sons" (Heb. 2:12-13), and that he is the Author of life (Acts 3:15, mg). In that sense he will be acknowledged as the **FATHER OF ETERNITY**, as the words "everlasting Father" in Isa. 9:6 can be rendered.

Finally, the Lord made claim to the fifth title: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is



passed from death unto life" (v. 24).* And what does this mean? It means that if men heed the teaching of Christ, they shall find a peace of mind that passes the understanding of men (John 14:27). In Christ Jesus, a person changes from a relationship of death which is his natural inheritance, to a relationship of life, so that he is able to confidently declare: "And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life" (1John 2:25). To such, therefore, the Lord Jesus is pre-eminently the **PRINCE OF PEACE.**

Thus, in his discourse to the leaders of the Jews, the Lord claimed the five titles found in relation to Immanuel, *God with us,* as outlined in Isaiah 9:6 (see page 335).

Note that in this discourse, the Lord also claims to be the promised Shiloh, or *Giver of Peace* (Gen. 49:8-10), and the authoritative prophet to whose words, Moses was told, the people must hearken if they would live (Deu. 18:15-19; John 5:24).

Christ Promises a Physical Resurrection

And now, in his discourse (John 5:25-27), the Lord taught that even as he had strengthened the impotent man, and caused him to be raised out of his living death, so he will spiritually strengthen those who come unto the Father through him, and will bring them out of their graves by a physical resurrection.

In his conversation with the Jews, he spoke of both resurrections, and men are in need of both. They are naturally "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), as helplessly impotent as the poor man laying on his couch by the pool of Bethesda, hopelessly awaiting somebody to help him. But in Christ Jesus they become subject to a spiritual resurrection through baptism (Rom. 6:4) which strengthens them by forgiveness of sins to walk in "newness of life." And so the Lord now taught the people: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and ***now is***, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live ..."

But this spiritual resurrection shall be followed by a physical resurrection at his return; and so he continued: "Marvel not at this: for

---

* The present tense is used in relation to "everlasting life" to indicate the certainty of the reward in the sense expressed in Romans 4:17, "God who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." Examples of this are found in such places as Luke 1:51-53 and elsewhere, where the past tense "hath" is used of things quite obviously still in the future. Eternal life is a matter of hope (Titus 1:2), and "hope that is seen is not hope" (Rom. 8:24), and therefore is not yet possessed. It is the promise of life that is possessed (1John 2:25) together with the certainty of possessing it if we faithfully carry out the conditions.

the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,* and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done (Gr. *prasso* — practised) evil, unto the resurrection of condemnation."

But Jesus was careful to disclaim that the power to do this was inherent in himself apart from Yahweh. "I can of mine own self do nothing," he declared. His power came from God, and the judgment he will mete out will be in accordance with the just decrees of his Father in heaven (v. 30).

The Five Witnesses Advanced By Jesus

Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, and therefore had appropriated to himself the five titles listed in the prophecy relating to the divine Son in Isa. 9:6. But could he prove his right to do so?

He could, and he did, by advancing witnesses to that end. As there were five porches overshadowing the Pool of Bethesda (*The House of Mercy*), and five titles to which he could lay claim, he now produced five witnesses whose combined testimony the Jews could not refute. But first he declared: "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true!"

This seems like a contradiction of what he says concerning himself in John 8:14, where he declares that his testimony ("record") *is* true. But the Greek word *alethes*, translated "true," when used in reference to the procedure in law-courts denotes, not what in itself is true, but what is *proved* to be so by the legal means of witnesses or similar evidence.

In this place, therefore, the word is to be understood in the sense of "confirmed."

To that end the Lord now produced his witnesses, not because his word should have been at all in doubt, but because he desired to bring the full evidence of truth to their notice that "they might be saved" (v. 34).

---

* Jesus said, according to the AV, that "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice" (John 5:28), but we know that many shall not be raised from the dead (see Psa. 49:19-20; 88:5; Isa. 26:14; Eph. 2:12). Is this a contradiction? No. Because, firstly, the word "all" is often used in a relative sense incorporating (in this case) both just and unjust. Other examples are: Luke 2:1, for *"all"* in the absolute sense were not taxed, only those that came under the decree; John 10:8, for not *"all"* shepherds in Israel were thieves and robbers, though relatively the statement was true; Gen. 6:13, *"all* flesh" was not destroyed, for those in the Ark were saved. Thus *"all"* relates to all whom the circumstances involve. Secondly, the word "graves" in John 5:28 is a translation of the Greek word *mnemeion* which denotes a memorial (akin to the word *manomai* — to remember), and thus relates to a certain kind of grave marked with a monument. The statement limits the raised, to those "in the memorial graves" i.e., all who have learned of God's purpose and who are kept in His remembrance. Many descend into the grave and are forgotten (see Psa. 88:5) but those who come to an understanding of the divine will and purpose will be brought from their graves (see John 6:39).

His first witness was John Baptist. The Jews had flocked to hear him and had readily accepted and believed his word. He was, the Lord declared, "a burning and a shining light,* and you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light."

And John Baptist had openly proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah!

They could not dispute that fact.

So there was witness number one!

The Lord's second witness provided even more telling testimony than John Baptist. He drew attention to the works that he did among them, the miracles they had witnessed, and he hinted at even greater ones to come. All these showed that the Father had sent him. How else was it possible for him to cure the impotent man? From what other source could he derive the power to perform such stupendous wonders as he had obviously done?

The Jews had no answer to this second witness!

The third witness (vv. 37-38) was the Father Himself. God had openly declared that Jesus was His beloved Son when the Lord had been baptised of John; but the Jewish leaders had obstinately closed their ears to this Witness.**

They had also failed to have "seen His shape" (John 5:37). What did the Lord mean by that? The word "shape" is translated "form" in the Revised Version, and from Phil. 2:6 we learn that the Lord Jesus had manifested the "form of God," revealing a glory as of the "only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14). But the Jews were as blind to this fact, as they were deaf to the open Voice of God.

The fourth witness was the Bible. "You search the Scriptures," declared the Lord (see Diaglott), "for in them you think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me, but you will not come to me, that ye might have life."

The Jews diligently studied the Bible, considering its every detail, but in their zeal for these minute things, they did not appreciate the

---

* The Greek word for "light" in this place is *luchnos,* and relates to a portable handlamp fed by oil, which burned for a time and then went out. It was a common Jewish saying for famous men that "in serving others I destroy myself." The "burning" related to the zeal of John, the "shining" pointed to his power of illumination, whilst "oil" is a common reference to the Spirit and the Spirit-Word. Jesus spoke of himself as a "light" (John 8:12), but the word in the Greek is different, and relates to that which never goes out!

**The words of the Lord in John 5:37-38 severely indicted the Jews. He declared that they had not "heard" the Father, and the word in the original means to perceive or understand. The Jews had deliberately closed their ears to the Voice of God in His Word, as they had to His testimony on behalf of Jesus at his baptism. They also refused the evidence of their eyes. They should have perceived, in the righteous character of Jesus, the shape or form of the Father, as the Lord later reminded Philip (John 14:8-9). But they were both deaf and blind to these facts.



Paralytic man carrying his bed — portrayed on a sixth century mosaic.

major issues involved, and through their very hair-splitting of the commandments and precepts of the Word, they failed to recognise the Messiah when he appeared among them. Thus the very Scriptures they studied comprised "a swift witness" against their formalised, lifeless worship (Mal. 3:5). They had condemned the Lord when he had claimed to be the Son of Yahweh, but they were silenced when he quoted the Scriptures against them.

And that brought him to his fifth and final witness: Moses, in whom they gloried (vv. 45-47). Yet, Moses condemned them, as the Lord declared: "There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom you trust. For had you believed Moses, you would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if you believe not his writings, how shall you believe my words?"

They "believed" Moses in that they acknowledged the truth of his words, but they did not "believe" him in the sense that the Lord used the term; for the word he used means to put faith in what is said, to be persuaded by it. Moses had declared that the Messiah would appear as a prophet among the people, speaking the words of God (Deu. 18:18-19), and he had warned that those who refused to hearken unto the words spoken would be dealt with by God.

Now that prophet was in their midst, but they refused his words, and so the warning words of Moses reached forth to embrace and condemn them.

The Jews seethed with anger as they listened to the Lord. A fierce hatred filled their hearts, resulting in murderous thoughts dominating their minds. Perhaps they were made the more angry because they could not answer him, for they had been completely silenced by his discourse. They could not refute that John had spoken of him; they could not dispute the wonder of his miracles; they could not successfully claim that the power he manifested was not of God; they could not contradict the fact that the Scriptures clearly show that the Messiah would be the Son of God; nor could they claim that Moses did not indict the nation.

The combined weight of the five witnesses proved Christ's right to assume the five-fold titles appended to the Son of God.

We are not told whether they attempted to answer him, so that they probably did not. Most likely they turned away completely discomforted under the steady gaze of the Lord Jesus as he brought his conversation to an end.

Chapter 2

AN ARGUMENT ABOUT SABBATH KEEPING

IN the land of Israel, the barley harvest (the first of the grain harvests) ripens about the period of Passover, and as this was the time when Jesus had visited Jerusalem, fields of standing and ripened corn would be seen not far from the city. It was a beautiful sight as the farmlands spread into the distant horizon.

When It Was Wrong To Eat

Before any of this could be touched, however, the Law of Moses decreed that a sheaf of the firstfruits, must be presented unto Yahweh, with other appointed offerings, as a token of thankfulness to the Giver of every good and perfect gift (Lev. 23:10-11).

The sheaf was "waved" to denote activity on the part of the offerer — the Jewish nation. It reminded the people that Yahweh had given the harvest, so they, in turn, should use the strength derived therefrom in service to His glory.

It was like beseeching a national blessing upon the harvest about to be reaped; and the Law required that this should be done before any of it was used by the people. It reminded them that they had to first give attention to the things of Yahweh before they looked to themselves. "Ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings" (Lev. 23:14).

The sheaf of the firstfruits having been offered unto Yahweh, however, it was then permissible for any Israelite to use the harvest to his own benefit.

The Disciples Pluck Ears of Corn (Mat. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5)

It was "the second sabbath after the first" (Luke 6:1),* and therefore the prohibition of the law against eating any of the harvest no longer applied, for the sheaf of the firstfruits had been offered. The Lord had left the city of Jerusalem with his disciples, and was making his way through a field of standing corn not far from where he was staying for the time being.

The disciples were hungry, the grain was ripe, and plucking some of the ears, they rubbed them, and began to eat.

* Note how carefully Luke explains this. On the first sabbath after Passover the sheaf was waved (Lev. 23:10-11), so that by the second sabbath the prohibition that rested on using the harvest had been removed.

It was a sabbath day, and the Lord saw what they did, but he did not rebuke them. The Law did not make it an offence to eat on the sabbath, and as they were engaged upon the work of God, and the sheaf of the firstfruits had been offered, there was no harm in what they were doing. In fact, it was in full accord with Yahweh's will that His workmen should be cared for.

But the Pharisees did not view it in that light, and there were some who saw what the disciples were doing. The Pharisees added to the Law many restrictions of their own, and the disciples had broken these. It was offensive, according to their ideas, that corn should be plucked on the sabbath day, even for necessary purposes such as to satisfy the hunger of those engaged in Yahweh's service — and doubly offensive that such should be rubbed with the hands. The Pharisees laid it down in their law that "plucking" was reaping, and "rubbing ears of corn in the hands" was threshing; therefore it was "work," and consequently it was wrong for anybody to do those things on the sabbath.

Artist's impression of the disciples at the cornfield



Probably smarting from the defeat of their earlier encounter with Jesus, they took the opportunity of accusing him and his disciples of breaking the sabbath law. "Why do you that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?" they demanded.

But the Lord did not agree that the Law of God had been broken even though the laws set up by the Pharisees may have been.

Why Did David Eat the Shewbread?

Instantly Jesus replied with words and reasoning that left the Pharisees speechless. "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, and those who were with him; how he entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the shewbread which it is not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who

were with him, but only for the priests?"

Yes, the Pharisees had read of the incident as they well knew, for in their writings they go out of their way to excuse David for doing so! But if they explained away the action of David to Jesus as they did by their traditions, excusing him because of his dire need and the peril he then faced, it would have played right into the hands of the Lord, for he could excuse his disciples for plucking the corn upon the same grounds that they, like David, were also hungry.

They, therefore, did not answer him. He paused for a moment, and when silence was the only reply they could offer, he showed how wrong they were to criticise his disciples, how wrong their ideas were in the excuse they offered for David's conduct, and the real reason why the faithful king acted as he did. Jesus revealed all this by a further question he put to his accusers: "Have you not read in the Law, how on the sabbath the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath" (Mat. 12:5-8; Mark 2:27).

In these words, the Lord drew the attention of the Pharisees to a matter they had completely overlooked in their consideration of the sabbath, namely, that there was a class in Israel which was exempt from the sabbath law! The priests in the temple were exempt from the sabbath law because every day was to them a sabbath in which they performed the will of God. Indeed, on the sabbath day, their work was doubled, so that instead of resting they worked twice as hard — but they were accounted blameless because what they did was by divine appointment.

It was because of this also, that David had been allowed to eat the shewbread by the high priest; for he, as the anointed of Yahweh, had represented himself as being on a divine mission, and God, who is a God of mercy and understanding, realises that His creatures are in need of the necessities of life.

If David and the priests were to be held blameless (and the Pharisees, in their writings, agreed that this was the case), then the disciples of Christ must likewise be accounted blameless, for they, too, were doing the will of God.

And should not the Son of man, as Messiah, be acknowledged as Lord even of the sabbath?

That was the question the Lord Jesus put to the Pharisees: a question they could not answer.

The reasoning of the Lord Jesus is important to recall today, especially when some people claim that we should observe the sabbath as required under the Law. They conveniently forget that

there was a class under the Law that was exempt from its requirements: the priests in the temple; and they overlook the fact that true believers are "priests" (1Pet. 2:9), whose lives must represent a daily offering unto God. Both the Lord Jesus, and the apostle Paul, clearly showed that we can serve God in the humble, every-day duties of service one to another; in the home (Eph. 5:22-25), in the workplace (Eph. 6:5), in business (Eph. 6:9), and in parental respect and care (Eph. 6:1-4).

And when our whole life is dominated by a desire to do His Will, and we attempt to carry this principle out day by day in this fashion, how can we make one day in seven more completely dedicated to that end!

The Glory and the Father's Will

There are two statements that the Lord made to the Pharisees at this time, to which attention can be given with profit. He declared, according to the RSV: "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here" (Mat. 12:6).

What did he mean?

He was referring to the glory that he manifested, the mental and moral reflection of his Father. The temple of Solomon had been filled with divine glory when it was opened for service, and this had been indicated by the Shekinah light that shone between the cherubim and over the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place (Psa. 80:1). But the temple restored by Herod lacked that glory. Yet it was greater than the temple, and the Lord Jesus was the manifestation of it. "We beheld his glory," wrote John, "the glory of the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14).

To the Pharisees, therefore, Jesus boldly claimed to be a manifestation of divine glory. They would have liked to dispute this, but with a knowledge of the miracles he had performed, how could they do so?

So, whilst they would have hated him for the saying, they remained silent in the face of it.

Then, in another statement made at the same time, he boldly attacked them. He declared: "If you had known what this means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless..." (Mat. 12:7).

This was a most telling point. Already the Lord had drawn their attention to David eating the shewbread. Why was he forced to do so? Because of the persecution of Saul! Saul was determined to kill David, and had driven him to such a state of despair that he dare not appeal to anybody for help, and had to have recourse to the extremity of eating the shewbread.

That had been brought about by the hatred of Saul who was

prepared to offer Yahweh sacrifices, but was not prepared to show mercy!

And what of the Pharisees? As Saul tried to hunt down and trap David, so they tried to do the same to Christ. Thus they criticised his disciples, whereas actually, the Law required that they care for them, that they should "show mercy," and offer food to the hungry (see Isa. 58:5-7). Instead they manifested a most ungodly desire to condemn the guiltless.

They were imitators of Saul whilst he represented the antitypical David!

With this very telling rebuke, the Lord left them for the time being, leaving Judea for Galilee and Capernaum.



A typical Pharisee, based on the description of Josephus, the Jewish historian

Chapter 3

A DRAMATIC SABBATH-DAY HEALING

THE HEALING OF THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND

In setting the period and place of this miracle, it is necessary to heed the statement of Lk. 6:6, "It came to pass also on another sabbath..." Luke is drawing attention to his statement in v. 1, which sets the time of the first few verses after the completion of the Passover. It appears that the Lord had left Jerusalem, and was probably moving north towards Galilee, and had come to a place where were fields of standing corn.

From there, the Lord moved north to Capernaum itself. This is suggested by Mark, for he shows that immediately after the miracle in the synagogue, the Lord retired to the sea of Galilee (Mk. 3:7), indicating that the synagogue was in close proximity to that locality.

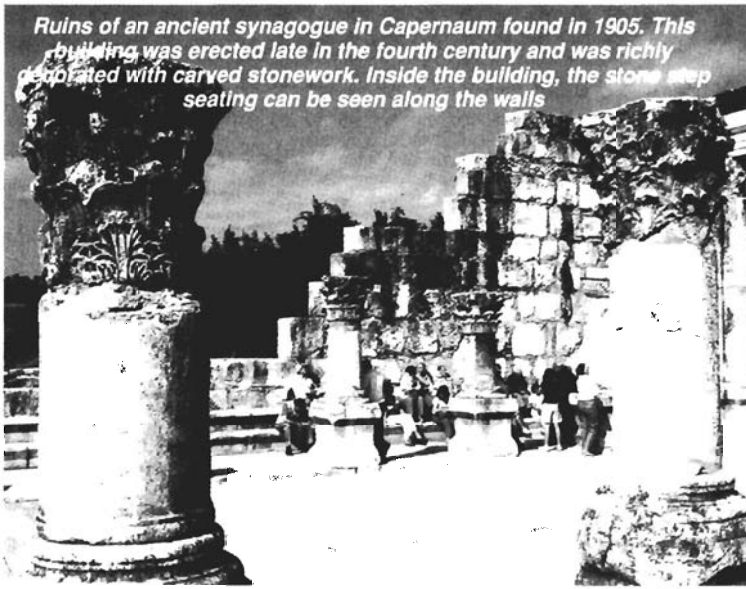
*Luke calls it "**the** synagogue" (Lk. 6:6), and his use of the definite article would suggest it was the one in Capernaum with which the Lord was most familiar.*

From these premises, therefore, it is obvious that the Lord had left Judea, and had returned home to Capernaum.

The circumstances of the miracle that took place in the synagogue on the Sabbath, brought out some important lessons for the profiting of all, and revealed Jesus in a most unusual light, as with angry, flashing eyes, he looked upon the hypocritical Pharisees before him.

BACK home in Capernaum, the Lord attended the synagogue on the sabbath day that he might teach the people (Mat. 12:8-14; Mk. 3:1-6; Lk. 6:6-11*). Among the audience was a group of scribes and Pharisees whose distinctive dress set them apart from the rest of the congregation. Self-righteous in their own esteem, they had little time for this prophet from Nazareth, and, with critical eyes and ears, they took careful heed of all that he might do and teach that they might have something upon which to accuse him.

* Keen students of the Bible might be interested in reading these three accounts, and noting how that each of the writers contributes something towards the completed picture. These details must be fitted together like the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle until the final picture is revealed in all its detail. This is a most interesting exercise, divinely designed that we might "think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).



Ruins of an ancient synagogue in Capernaum found in 1905. This building was erected late in the fourth century and was richly decorated with carved stonework. Inside the building, the stone step seating can be seen along the walls

There was also present another man who was conspicuous among the rest of the audience, but for a different reason. He had a very sad affliction: his right hand was withered and deformed, a mute testimony to his helpless state. He had taken a prominent position in the synagogue (Mat. 12:10) in the hope, perhaps, that the Lord might see his condition and help him.

The Pharisees also noticed the man, and wondered whether the Lord would attempt to heal him on the Sabbath day. If he did, they felt that they had cause to accuse him of breaking the Law.

With such evil motives, the Pharisees took their place in the synagogue, and prepared to worship God!

But Jesus read their very thoughts, and was deeply saddened that such wicked hypocrisy could be manifested by men.

He determined to teach them a much-needed lesson.

Thus, suddenly, having completed his discourse, he turned to the man with the withered hand, and addressed him.

"Rise up and stand forth!" he commanded.

The man did so, and the eyes of all the people in the synagogue turned curiously towards him. All could now see the nature of his affliction. But what was the strange prophet of Nazareth about to do! Surely he would not heal this man on the Sabbath and so antagonise the Pharisees who were present!

The tension in the synagogue mounted as the people considered the matter.

The Pharisees, too, looked on with growing excitement. They had

been wondering whether Jesus would heal on the sabbath day, and had been half-hoping that he might do so, that they might accuse him of breaking the Law. Little did they realise that their very attitude of mind fulfilled certain passages of Scripture which, though those verses applied primarily to David and Jeremiah, also had application to the Lord: "The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him" (Psa. 37:32). "They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long" (Psa. 38:12). "All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him" (Jer. 20:10).

That was the attitude of the Pharisees, and, the people sensing it, the synagogue seethed with suppressed excitement.

Jesus' Righteous Anger

But for the moment, nothing was done. The man with the deformed hand was standing up before all the congregation, and Jesus was seated on the platform in the teacher's seat.

At this point, the Pharisees challenged Jesus. "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?" they demanded.

But solemnly the Lord rejoined with a further question: "Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?"

What a question! By posing it, the Lord revealed that he knew the very thoughts that were in the minds of the Pharisees before him. How they must have squirmed in their seats! Not only so, but he was accusing them of breaking the sabbath, for he was telling them that they were only there with evil intent, and murderous thoughts in their hearts.

They could not accuse him without condemning themselves, and a deep silence followed the Lord's words in that synagogue (Mk. 3:4).

Their evil hypocrisy aroused the anger of the Lord.* He was grieved with the hardness of their heart, and as with flashing eyes and hot indignation, he turned scathingly upon them, to reveal their own man-made laws and how wrong they were!

"What man among you," he declared with deep irony, "that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not

* Anger is not necessarily an evil emotion, though it is one that we must guard against. Paul taught: "Be ye angry, and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). Unfortunately, in most people, anger usually ends in sin. But it does not have to be so invariably, for there is such a thing as a righteous indignation as the Lord manifested on this occasion. Righteous anger is a divine characteristic, for Yahweh is "angry with the wicked every day" (Psa. 7:11). Let us learn to use this emotion wisely as does our heavenly Father, and for good, not for self-justification. That demands strict discipline of our feelings.

lay hold on it and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days!"

Here was a direct and complete answer, and one which they could not dispute. Their own rabbis had laid it down that it was lawful to help a poor dumb animal on the sabbath day if it were in trouble and pain, and if that were so, how much more lawful was it to help a man!

And now, Jesus again turned to the man with the withered hand.

"Stretch forth thine hand," he commanded.

The man did so, and gasped with amazement and joy, for instantly, miraculously, the withered hand was healed, and appeared as its fellow!

The startled audience forgot the Pharisees in the wonder of the miracle.

The Frustrated Pharisees

It was an amazing miracle, and performed by a word! The Lord had not even touched the man! He had healed him, and yet in such a way as did not permit the Pharisees, with all their formalism, an opportunity of accusing him of breaking the sabbath.



A phylactery, shown in a leather box, containing small scrolls of the Law, 1st century AD, these were worn outwardly by the Pharisees, yet they constantly broke the Law!

Not only so, but they themselves seethed with anger, realising that they had been openly rebuked, and accused of breaking the spirit of the sabbath law before the people.

Mad with frustration, and furious in anger, they left the synagogue, and on that very day (Mk. 3:6), convened a counsel with the Herodians against Jesus, that they might kill him.

How low can men sink! What had Jesus done? He had rendered an act of mercy and of outstanding benevolence to a poor, afflicted man who was unable to help himself, but these self-righteous Pharisees, were ready to break every real law of the sabbath to murder the Son of God!

And they did it all under the cloak of religion!

So determined were their efforts, that for the time the Lord had to withdraw from Capernaum, so that the help that he could have rendered others was denied them through the wickedness of man.

The Lesson of This Miracle

The three accounts of this miracle are recorded in conjunction with the dispute that the Lord had with the Pharisees when they criticised the disciples for eating the corn that they had plucked and rubbed with their hands on the sabbath day, and therefore it is to be

considered in the light of that context.

On that occasion the Lord had shown that the Sabbath was not designed to deny men the necessities of life, but that Yahweh who is merciful will provide for those who are prepared to sacrifice personal wellbeing in His service.

Now, in performing this miracle in the synagogue of Capernaum on the Sabbath, he taught that the day was a fit occasion for doing the works of God (Isa. 58:13). The Sabbath was actually a day of release, and Jesus used it to release the man from an affliction that had prevented him from fully working for God. Thus Christ's healing words helped to better equip him to serve his Maker.

In his dispute with the Pharisees when his disciples were criticised for eating the corn, the Lord had pointed out that there was a class in Israel who were exempt from Sabbath observance because they were always engaged in the service of God (Mat. 12:5). That is also the case with Christ's followers, for, in him, their daily avocation can be made a means of serving God. To them every day is a sabbath when they try to rest from the works of sin, and dedicate their lives unto Yahweh, knowing He will provide for their needs, particularly if they minister the healing power of His Word in the proclamation of the gospel message. This seems to be the lesson of this miracle considered in conjunction with Christ's earlier rebuke of the Pharisees.

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew: The Business-Man who Left All

He is first seen sitting at the receipt of custom (Mat. 9:9); he is last referred to as abiding with the other Apostles in a house at Jerusalem, and praying with them for the gift of the Spirit that had been promised them (Acts 1:13-14).

His original name was Levi son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Levi means *Joined*, and Alphaeus means *That which passes* or *Transient*. As a tax-gatherer, Levi was joined to that which passes away with the using of it.

But Matthew means *A Gift*, and he had been offered the free gift of God (a great contrast to the mercenary demands he had made upon his fellow Jews), and being a practical business man, he could clearly see the value of that which had been set before him, and he instantly responded. Matthew seems to have recognised the significance of his two names in the light of his personal circumstances, preferring to be known as Matthew rather than Levi, for he never uses the latter name, though Mark and Luke do so, indicating that he was originally well-known by it.

Levi was a publican, a term which in Bible usage is not to be confused with its modern meaning. "Publican" is from the Latin word *publicanus*,

signifying a collector of Roman taxes, the gathering of which was farmed out to minor officials ready to undertake this odious duty among their countrymen. A publican's reward was that he could extort for his own benefit more than was due, so long as the extortions did not lead to revolt. They were spoken of as "leeches," gorging themselves with money in the process of gathering taxes for Caesar, and consequently they were reckoned to be outside the pale of decent society and of the synagogue. As a tax-gatherer, the Jews detested both Levi and his craft, for by vocation he was joined to the hated foreign power under whose yoke patriotic Jews chafed.

Matthew was taken from the receipt of custom, to receive and dispense the treasures of the kingdom, to which treasure there is frequent mention in his Gospel (Mat. 6:19-21, 33; 7:7; 10:41-42; 12:35; 13:11-12, 44, 52; 19:21). He made a parting feast for his business acquaintances which not only celebrated the end of his former manner of living, and his determination to follow Jesus, but also gave his friends the opportunity of meeting the Lord (Luke 5:29).

He thus left a lucrative position to become a man dedicated to Christ, and was chosen as an apostle (Mat. 10:3). The Gospel that he wrote emphasises the royal majesty of the Lord, and is remarkable for its frequent quotations from Old Testament scriptures, and their application to the circumstances of the ministry of Jesus, indicating that Matthew was a student of the Word as well as a man of business.

He shows a most becoming humility. In his account of his conversion, he omits reference to the personal sacrifice that he made, and which is recorded in Luke; in his list of the apostles, he not only indicated his name after that of his joint companion Thomas (Mat. 10:3), though according to Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15 it should have taken precedence to it, but he also added to his name the despised title of "publican" which they omit.

We see Matthew as a shrewd business man, a friend, a disciple, an apostle, and a student. As the first, he quickly summed up what was required of him and acted immediately in a practical manner. As the second, he provided the means whereby his former friends could share the opportunity opened out to him. As the third, he instantly and completely turned from a way of life that he now recognised to be obnoxious, and applied himself to following his Lord. As the fourth, he was able to appeal to others out of the depths of his own experience, and exhort them to seek that treasure which is from above. As the fifth, he clearly saw the application of Scripture to the Lord, and by its means made a reality of the glory set before all that follow him.

Trained to systematic procedures, and well acquainted with the Jewish outlook and religion, he was fitted to commend Christ to his own people, so that the Gospel he wrote is more calculated to appeal to Jews than others.

Tradition says that subsequent to the Jerusalem conference of Acts 15, Matthew took Ethiopia as the sphere of his ministry, and there suffered martyrdom; but as to the truth or otherwise of this, it is impossible to say.

Chapter 1

A PREACHING TOUR IN GALILEE

Jesus was forced to withdraw from Capernaum due to the conspiracy against his life (Mk. 3:6-7). The crowds, however, sought him out, and followed him in a healing and preaching tour that took him around portion of the Lake of Galilee. Matthew's application of Isaiah 42 to this occasion, as well as the crowds that followed him from such diverse places as are indicated in Mark 3:8, would suggest that some time was occupied in this tour, during which his reputation grew throughout the land.

THE Pharisees left the synagogue seething with anger against Jesus. He had so clearly, boldly, and yet courteously, revealed them for the hypocrites they were, that they had no way of justifying themselves. Angrily they discussed the matter among themselves. They had to get rid of him, but how?

One of their number suggested the Herodians might help them. Who were the Herodians?

They were a nationalistic group, found throughout Jewry, which was bitterly opposed to the domination of Rome, and was actively agitating in support of open revolt and war. The Herodians would not hesitate to murder to gain their ends.

They certainly did not endorse the teaching of Jesus who demanded that his followers submit to evil if necessary.

It would be easy to represent to the Herodians that the growing popularity of a teacher like Jesus, with a doctrine so opposed to their policy, would mean the defeat of their aims.

The Pharisees Conspire Against Jesus But the Crowds Follow Him (Mk. 3:7-12; Mat. 12:15-21)

So the Pharisees, who hated Jesus because he so clearly revealed the error of their ways, joined in conspiracy with the Herodians who feared that the growing support he was receiving might interfere with their political policy. And so determined were the joint efforts of both Pharisees and Herodians that the Lord, who was no political agitator, withdrew from a quarter where violence threatened, to the quietude of the seaside where, in the mountains and valleys that are along its shore, he might, for a time, find refuge.

This was his practice, at that time, under such circumstances (Lk. 4:28-30; Jn. 7:1; 6:15), for the time had not yet come when he would

be called upon to publicly defy the forces of fleshly ignorance and hate which were ranged against him, and which would ultimately bring him to the cross.

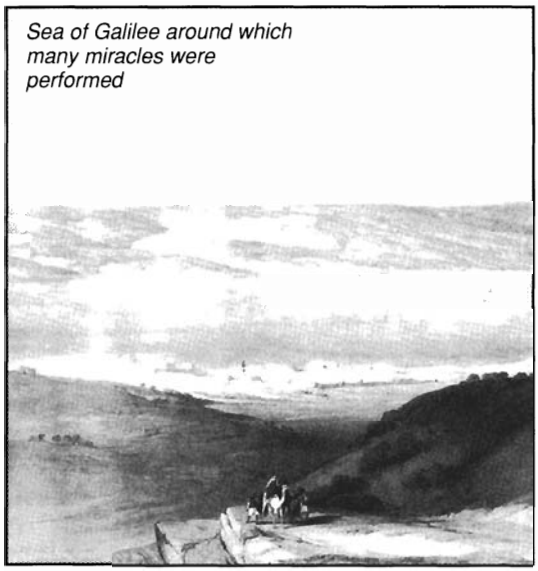
But though he sought quietude and refuge, the crowds sought him out and found him. Again he taught them, and healed their sick. His fame grew on every side. People converged upon him from every quarter, travelling far distances to do so. From as far south as Jerusalem and Idumea, from the east beyond Jordan, from the north and west as Tyre and Sidon, crowds gathered to watch and listen to him. Both Jews and Gentiles mingled together, to hear the Son of God, and witness his power. It was a wonderful opportunity and privilege for them to hear the Word of God expounded as never before or since, and to see the sick healed by the power of the Almighty.

So great were the crowds that now thronged him on the seaside, that they threatened to drive him into the water. People who were sick would struggle through the crowd that they might touch Jesus; others tried to force their way through on behalf of friends so desperately ill that they had not the power to do so themselves. It became difficult for him to continue his labours, and so he requested his disciples that a small boat should be put at his disposal. As he travelled from place to place around the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee, the little boat would follow him, and from it he was able to preach to the people on the shore, or in the boat, to obtain some privacy from the pressing crowds (Mk. 3:9-10).

His Healing Hands As the fame of Jesus spread abroad, people with all kinds of diseases were brought to him to be healed. Perhaps the most pathetic were the poor, demented folk, the "possessors of unclean spirits" as they are described in the Bible (Mk. 3:11).* These unstable people were brought to the Lord that he might restore their sanity, and in the excitement of the occasion, they would come running down to the shore, falling down before him, and crying, "Thou art the Son of God!"

Deeply sympathetic, the Lord Jesus calmed their excited instability with his healing hands, the power that he had derived from his Father, and then, when sanity had been granted them, he ordered them not to make him known. The Lord did not want the reputation of being a mere miracle-worker; he wanted people to hearken to the Word of God. He was not like those pretenders today who falsely proclaim they can heal people, and loudly publish the claim that all might come and witness their alleged power! On the contrary, he sought concealment. Already the crowds thronging him were an

* See page 284, for an explanation of what constituted these so-called "evil spirits."



Sea of Galilee around which many miracles were performed

embarrassment to him. Moreover, it did not help his cause to have people who were well-known for their demented or unstable state, proclaiming that he was the Son of God, for their testimony would only incite the ridicule of those who only knew them as madmen. Better for them to quietly return home and demonstrate his power without being unduly vocal concerning the miracles performed.

So, having cured them, having directed their attention to the Giver of every good and perfect gift, he called upon them to quietly go their ways, seeking God in truth, and leaving the preaching to those better qualified to minister it.

Matthew Sees a Fulfilment of Prophecy

Matthew was the interested spectator of all that was taking place. This deeply thoughtful disciple, was no longer moved by the desire for earthly treasure; his mind was exercised upon the Word of God, and he could see in all that the Lord was doing, a partial fulfilment of Bible prophecy.

As he took in the whole scene: the Lord's avoidance of trouble with the Pharisees and Herodians, the company of rejoicing Gentiles and Jews, the power that was manifest in the miracles of healing performed, and the gentle way in which Jesus dealt with his disciples, his mind went to the notable prophecy concerning the Messiah contained in Isaiah 42:1-3. Later, he wrote: "Thus was fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold My Servant, whom I have chosen; My beloved, in whom My soul is well pleased; I will put My spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust" (Mat. 12:17-21).

How true are these words!

The Lord Jesus was Yahweh's *Servant* (or slave). He fulfilled that in the way he wore himself out in continuous service day after day without thought for his own welfare.

He was Yahweh's *Beloved,* because he implicitly obeyed the will of his Father.

He was Yahweh's *Christ* (anointed). This was evident by the miracles of healing which testified that divine power was with him.

He was no political *agitator.* He avoided such agitation as the Herodians manifested, and invited their hostility by advising the people to do likewise.

He revealed *judgment to the Gentiles*. Many had been drawn to him from Gentile lands, such as Idumea and Tyre and Sidon.

He was *a teacher of tender consideration and gentleness*. He patiently bore with the weakness and ignorance of his disciples who appeared as bruised reeds (a symbol of weakness — Mat. 11:7) and smoking flax, in comparison to his fearless endorsement of Truth and clear, shining, teaching of light.

But, as Matthew's quotation also shows, the manifestation of these patient, godly characteristics would result in him "bringing forth judgment unto victory." That victory was manifest on resurrection morn, and it will be revealed in greater measure, in the Age to come. The forces of darkness were defeated when he rose from the dead, and will be completely destroyed when he comes again to earth.

A Night of Prayer But whilst Jesus was busy preaching to the people and healing their sick, and whilst they were thronging around him, struggling to get close to him, a great problem exercised his mind. The time had come when he must appoint those who would carry on the message of salvation to the people when his ministry on earth was completed. It was important that they should receive instruction under actual preaching conditions, before he left them, so that out of their own experiences, they should learn how best to continue on with the work in his absence.

Though he were the Son of God, and imbued with great wisdom, this was a matter he could not handle lightly, without the help of his heavenly Father. He felt the need of close communion and prayer and that required the quietness of isolation from the thronging, insistent crowds about him.

So, calling unto him a number of disciples, out of whom he had decided to make selection (Mk. 3:13), he ascended into a mountain, and in that quiet, exalted place, separated from the multitude, he gave himself unto prayer and communion with Yahweh, that he might receive guidance in his selection.

How important it is to choose the right people to do the right work for God! There is room for all in His service, but not all can occupy

the same position. Each has his own particular ability, and whilst each may be of equal importance in the work, they do vary. Frequently, in ecclesial life, people are appointed to positions for which they are not properly qualified, and then folk wonder why it is that the work of God is not as successful as it might be. The apostle Paul has a lot to say about this in his epistles to Timothy and Titus, and he specifically warns against appointing a novice to a position that requires a person of mature experience (1Tim. 3:4). Let us take heed of the example of the Lord who made this important choice a matter of prayer, and of Paul his servant who counselled in wisdom.

In the mountain, the Lord spent the whole night in prayer and communion with the Father. He had much to think and speak about. A most significant decision was about to be made, and this demanded thought upon what God would require, and earnest prayer for the proper guidance. No doubt, as he poured out his heart in prayer to God, he would mention not only the decision he then had to make, but also the labours and destinies of the apostles. Previously they had been undistinguished among the other disciples; now they were to go forth with divine authority and a clearly-defined commission. He would doubtless recall on such an occasion, the various prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the disciples, such as the statement

TWELVE APOSTLES ARE APPOINTED

At this stage, a most important aspect of the Lord's ministry occupied his mind: the appointing of those who would carry on his work. Until now (the first quarter of the second year of the Lord's public work), the twelve had not been officially appointed to office. He had called certain ones, such as Peter, Matthew, James, John and others, to "follow him," but had not specifically commissioned them as he was about to do.

The Twelve Apostles form the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). The use of "12" in the Bible has a spiritual significance, representing the number of Government, and in this light, the Twelve Apostles comprise the nucleus of the Kingdom of God of the Age to come, for they are destined (with the exception of Judas who was replaced) to sit upon twelve thrones in the immediate vicinity of Christ's throne (Mat. 19:28). The Twelve Apostles, therefore, comprised the inner group of Christ's most intimate associates. Next to them were the seventy evangelists whom he later appointed (Lk. 10:9-17), and finally, the full number of the disciples. The organisation that Jesus thus set up was similar to that of Moses. Moses also had his twelve leaders of the tribes, then his seventy elders (Num. 11:24), and through them he reached the great body of the people.

The twelve disciples were granted great privileges and experienced great trials, but they all surmounted these successfully except Judas, thus illustrating the truth of which one of their number afterwards wrote: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations [trials], and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2Pet. 2:9).

found in Isaiah 8:15: "Bind up the testimony, and seal the law among my disciples!"

The Twelve Appointed On the mountain-top, the solitary figure of the Lord remained in communion with God, whilst the rest of the called disciples remained at a distance. But, at last, the sun peeped over the horizon, and another day had commenced. It was a most significant day. He first called, chose, and commissioned the twelve disciples, and re-named them apostles (Lk. 6:13).

They were appointed to "be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach" (Mk. 3:14). They were now to constantly wait upon him, dedicating their lives exclusively to this service, above that demanded of other disciples (Mat. 19:27).

And so, on the mountain-top after a night in thought and prayer, he appointed these twelve privileged men. He gave them the power of the Holy Spirit, so that they too, could perform miracles, and thus provide evidence of their extraordinary ministry. By the Lord's teaching and power they were equipped to benefit humanity both spiritually and physically (see Heb. 2:3-4).

He named them "apostles." An apostle is one *"sent,"* a teacher, in contrast to a disciple, who is essentially a student learning from a master (Jn. 9:28). Jesus, himself, is styled the chief apostle (Heb. 3:1), for he was "sent" of God to teach the people (Jn. 8:42). The apostles carried the message of the chief Apostle to the people (see Jn. 17:20).

The names of the twelve apostles are as follows:

Simon Peter — His name means the *Hearing Rock.*

James the son of Zebedee — the *Supplanter,* filled with the *Gift of Yahweh.* He was a man who supplanted the things of the flesh with the things of the spirit.

John — He was the brother of James and his name means the *Grace of Yahweh.*

Andrew — His name signifies *Manliness.* He was Peter's brother.

Philip — His name means either *Warrior* or "Lover of the horse." As the latter, it signifies a swift and ready messenger, guiding people in truth.

Bartholomew — This name means *Son of the suspender of waters,* relating to a characteristic of God (see Psa. 93:4). In John's Gospel he is referred to as Nathanael.

Matthew — Whose name means *A Gift,* and who received the great treasure of divine wisdom as a gift from God.

Thomas — His name means *Twin,* or *Double,* and signifies that which completes or perfects a matter.

James the son of Alphaeus — James is from *Supplanter.* Alphaeus is from the Hebrew *alpha,* the *First,* or *Chief,* so that his

name signifies "the supplanter who is filled with the chief."

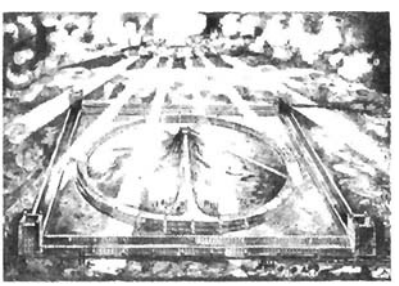
Thaddaeus — This is another form of Judah (called "Judas" by Luke in Lk. 6:16), and means *Praise.* He is also called Lebbaeus which means *Heart*, so taking his two names, the idea is presented of "praise from the heart."

Simon the Canaanite — The word "Canaanite" is of similar import to the word "Zelotes" (see Lk. 6:15), a title given to an organisation in Jewry dedicated to expelling the hated Romans. Most likely, Simon was originally a member of this group, but had been won over to the cause of Christ. The word "zelotes" signifies "zealous," so that Simon Zelotes means the *Zealous Hearer.*

Judas Iscariot — The most notorious of the apostles. His name means, *Praise the man of the city,* or *Praise the reward!* In view of his later history it is strange that he should have thrown in his lot with the Lord, though possibly the popularity which Jesus was then enjoying, lured him with the prospect of great and immediate gain.

To some of these men there are appended explanatory titles. Thus James and John were surnamed "Boanerges," which means *The sons of thunder,* doubtless because of their forthright, fiery attitude; and Judas is called "the traitor" because of the despicable part he played in the betrayal of the Lord.

These were the men the Lord chose as his immediate assistants. They were not men whom the world would commend. Ignorant fishermen, a member of the murderous Zealot organisation, a hated tax-gatherer, a shrewd, dishonest man of the city — not a group to inspire the confidence of the educated Pharisees and Sadducees of those times. They were but the raw material upon which the Lord had to work to produce the men he wanted to take forth his message, and the greatest work now before him was to change them to that end.



The apostles of the Lord will assist him in the future temple, to rule the people of Israel, and to educate the nations. He told them: "That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mat. 19:28).

Chapter 2

THE DISCOURSE ON THE PLAIN

IN the plain below the Galilean mountain where the Lord had spent the night in prayer, the huge company of men and women, from all parts of the Land, impatiently awaited the return of the Lord Jesus. They had with them many who were sick of various diseases, and when Jesus returned with his disciples, they again thronged around him, struggling to get close to him that they might touch him.

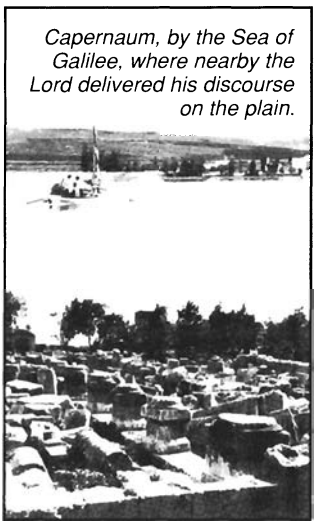
And the Saviour continued his work of healing.

He did not do this without personal effort. Luke records, "there went virtue out of him, and healed them all." The constant expenditure of this power must have been a constant drain of energy upon the Lord, leaving him physically weakened and exhausted. Paul taught that the Lord knows "the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15), for he knows the frailty of human nature in its physical and spiritual weakness, having being brought in close contact with both.

The Character of His Teaching

Poor, sick humanity, thronging around the Lord, felt the power and the blessing of his healing touch. Men and women, as they brought their ailing friends and relations to Jesus, and struggled through the crowd to get near him, had a physical demonstration of the benefits he can provide.

The Lord did not make the path easy for them; he did not order the crowd back that the sick may be better cared for! No, the benefits they were to receive were too great for them to be granted too easily! There was a powerful lesson taught when the people found they had to force their way into the presence of the Lord, for salvation demands similar energy and determination.



Capernaum, by the Sea of Galilee, where nearby the Lord delivered his discourse on the plain.

But at last the time of healing ceased, and Jesus occupied his attention to pointing out the lesson.

He proclaimed to them, once again, his policy speech. It was similar to the discourse on the mount, so much so, that many confuse the one with the

other. But this was a different speech, given under different circumstances, and at a different time.

The former, longer speech was given on a mountain (Mat. 5:1), this shorter one was given at a later time on a plain (Lk. 6:17).

The excitement, as the crowd struggled to get close to Jesus, had subsided, and now the people looked on, quietly wondering what next would happen. The disciples formed a group on their own, and doubtless, the newly-appointed twelve apostles, comprised a smaller, inner circle within that group.

There was a pause, and as the multitude looked on, the Lord lifted up his thoughtful downcast eyes, and singling out his disciples (Lk.

THE DISCOURSE ON THE PLAIN — An Epitome

Many people believe that Lk. 6:20-49 is but an outline of the Discourse on the Mount recorded in Mat. 5-7. The language is very similar, it is true, but this contains instruction of such a nature as may well have been repeated not once, but many times, during the course of the Lord's teaching.

The times and circumstances were different. The discourse in Matthew was given on a mountain (Mat. 5:1), that in Luke on the plain (Lk. 6:17); in Matthew it occurred before the appointing of the twelve, in Luke it was given after they had received their appointment.

Notice how values are changed in Christ:

Blessed the poor — v. 20.	**Woe to the rich — v. 24.**
Blessed the hungry — v. 21.	**Woe to the full — v. 25.**
Blessed the mourners — v. 21.	**Woe to the merry — v. 25.**
Blessed the hated — v. 22.	**Woe to the well-received — v. 26.**

But take notice particularly why the former are blessed, and woe is pronounced upon the latter. The former are blessed because they anticipate a glory and joy to come; the latter have woe because they seek their full pleasure in the present possession of material things, and despise the future.

Note the affirmative instructions of the Lord: Do good (vv. 27-28); resist not evil (v. 29); be liberal (v. 30); help as you would be helped (v. 31); be kind to your enemies (vv. 33-36); do not harshly judge (v. 37); be always abounding in assistance (v. 38).

Consider carefully the four parables: [1] The blind leading the blind (vv. 39-40); [2] The mote and the beam (vv. 41-42); [3] The good tree and corrupt fruit (vv. 43-45); [4] Building on a good foundation (vv. 45-49).

Lk. 6:31 records the golden, royal rule which the King laid down for his ministers: "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." In the following verses, the Lord was careful to show that we are not to wait until others should possess the right disposition before we so act (see v. 32), or when they might be in a position to return in kind what we may do (v. 35), but we should be ever ready to assist others as we are able, whatever their disposition or financial position.

Further comments on this theme can be found in our treatment of the Discourse on the Mount found in pages 290-299.

6:20), he spoke words which emphasised the attitude of mind they should manifest in the face of trials they were bound to receive.

"Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
"Blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled.
"Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh..."

So the clear voice rang out, setting before men a doctrine that was strange. Blessed be the poor? the hungry? the mourners? No, there is no blessedness in such! The blessing comes in looking beyond these things to the Kingdom of God! Here was a crowd of people struggling to get close to Jesus, but what for? Personal and immediate advantage! They were not concerned with the Kingdom of God. They were happy (the word "blessed" means "happy") because their loved ones had been cured of some illness or they had witnessed a miracle; but they had little thought for the Kingdom of God.

And so, to emphasise the source of true blessing, the Lord singled out his disciples and addressed them particularly, as though as to warn them not to make the same mistake as the multitudes thronging him!

He spoke to them of blessings (Lk. 6:20-22), and of woes (vv. 24-26). He called upon them to manifest God's attributes in love (vv. 27-36), and to avoid hypocritical judgment of others (v. 37); for if they make allowances for others, others will make allowances for them ("ye shall be forgiven"), and God will grant the same mercy (Mat. 6:14). He called upon them to be generous in their labours on behalf of others, and others would willingly and liberally respond (v. 38).

The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind

He spoke a parable unto them: "Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master; but every one that is perfect shall be as his master." What an important parable of instruction for the disciples of the Lord, and especially the apostles.

If they were to successfully lead men to Christ, they must, themselves, open their eyes to the need of providing a practical demonstration of what is required. They must not only be capable of *seeing* the way, or understanding the doctrine of Christ, but of *leading* therein by applying it.



Then, by very example, they would be able to guide people to the Lord.

They would then be like him, true shepherds of the flock!

Jesus moreover taught that the disci-

ples were to be as their Master. They were to "fellowship his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10), closely identifying themselves with him. If they were fully taught (and that is how the RSV translated the word "perfect") they would recognise that as he was poor, hungry, persecuted, so also would they be, but as he was blessed in spite of all these disabilities because he could clearly see the joy beyond the cross (Heb. 12:2), so must they rejoice in the hope of the Kingdom of God.

The Parable of the Mote and the Beam

As in the Discourse on the Mount (see Mat. 7:1-5), the Lord also gave them another parable of great importance, relating to the mote and the beam. It was absolutely imperative for them to see the significance of this parable if they were to be true disciples. So he declared: "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye."

What did he mean?

A mote is a tiny splinter of wood, and here stands for something in a person's eye, that prevents him seeing or acting properly. The smallest amount of foreign matter in the eye can be most painful. The eye begins to water, and sight is impaired in consequence; the irritation is such that one begins to concentrate upon it to the exclusion of other things.

The "mote" in question can be so small that it might be seen only with greatest difficulty, yet it causes great discomfort and suffering.

So it is with persistent sin, which can be likened to a splinter in the eye.

It can impair our sight as to what Christ requires of us, and it can cause us to concentrate all our efforts on it to the exclusion of other service to him!

What is a beam?

A beam is a huge piece of wood so large that it could hardly fit into one's head, let alone one's eye! Let a beam of wood rest against the eye, and it would block out light altogether, so that a person could not see at all!

The Pharisees were just like that, so that later on, Jesus called them "blind guides," addressing them as "*blind* Pharisees" (Mat. 23:16, 26).

What made them blind? Their perversion of true worship! They were so self-righteous in their own esteem, so busy creating religious

laws for others which God had never endorsed, that it blinded their eyes to essential matters, and to their own needs.

The "beam" in the parable, therefore, is something that blinds one to his own needs, whilst magnifying the failings of others!

It is the blinding sin of self-righteousness.

It is seen in a person who is completely self-absorbed, whose personal ego looms so large in his own estimation as to blot out anything else.

A true disciple of Christ must never allow that to happen, must never reach the stage when he sees himself only as righteous, and begins to seek out the sins of others. Personal pride, which is another name for egotism must be destroyed, and every true disciple needs to first recognise his personal need of God's forgiveness in his own weaknesses, so that in very humility he is able to help others.

It is sometimes thought that "the beam" is some terrible sin obvious to everybody; but that is not so. Usually, such a sin as that will cause a person to ignore the sins of others in justification of his own sad case. The beam is something that blinds us to our own need of God's forgiveness, and because of our very censorious judgment on others, and the air of superiority that we may adopt in consequence, prevents us from effectively removing the splinter in someone else's eye.

And note that Jesus did not teach that his disciples should not try to help the sinner, the one with the splinter in the eye; for he said, "First cast out the beam, and then you will see clearly to pull out the mote!"

Have you ever tried to extract a tiny grain of sand from the eye of another? How painful it is! How gentle one must be! How directly the eye must be turned to the light that with tender care the painful foreign matter might be removed! What agony and hurt would be caused if you tried to do it blindly. You would imbed the sand more deeply into this most tender part of the body and do more harm than good.

In like manner, the blundering, self-righteous do more harm than good in their clumsy attempts to help a sinning fellow-disciple!

What a wonderful little parable the Lord taught his followers!

And how he illustrated it in his own experience with them. Notice, as we study his life, the tender care he used on Peter to remove the mote out of the eye of this great apostle (Lk. 22:32; Jn. 21:15-19), and the great change in Peter when this tender operation was completed.

The Parable of the Good Tree and Corrupt Fruit

As the multitude listened with the disciples and the apostles standing in a little group apart, the Lord spoke a further parable: "A good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit, neither does a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is



— a symbol of Israel.

known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Lk. 6:43-45).

This little parable is likewise full of wisdom.

If a tree is corrupt, that is rotten or decayed at the core, it cannot produce good fruit, and in like manner, wrong thinking leads to wrong living. Falsehood in teaching, or in the teacher, will sooner or later manifest itself in all its evil, for not until the things we teach find practical expression in a way of life, can it be said that we have found the real result of our search for Truth.

Some of the corrupt fruits to which Jesus was referring, are outlined in Gal. 6:19-22, whereas the good fruit, the fruit of the Spirit is also described as "love, joy, peace, long-suffering" and so forth (v. 22).

A tree is known by its fruits, taught Jesus. It is foolish to expect figs off thorns, or grapes off bramble bushes; so it is impossible to expect to find the "fruit of the spirit," where the Spirit-Word is lacking.

Thus, in this parable, Jesus clearly showed that the test of bearing true witness to Christ is not revealed by words merely but by actions, by a practical manifestation of his characteristics.

How are we to do that? Cultivation and pruning is required to produce the best fruit! So with the fruit of our character that is to the glory of God. "Cultivation" and "pruning" are needed in our lives to produce these to the best effect (see Jn. 15:2).

Jesus also referred to the "treasure in a man's heart," which, he said, could be either good or evil. Pro. 23:7 declares that "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he!" A man might speak smooth words, he may talk of love, and of doing good, and the need to obey, but if he does not manifest the things he speaks about in a way of life, what is the use of his words? Actions, not mere words tell the true state of the heart. Treasure is something hidden which others normally do not see, but which is reflected in a man's character.

Finally the Lord declared: "Of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." Listen to a person's conversation, and you will learn something about his heart. Does he delight to speak about things of God? Can he help you in a better understanding of God's Word?



Does his conversation indicate that he has thought deeply on the Scriptures? If so, you are hearing something of the "abundance of his heart."

Thus Jesus taught his disciples that if they were to make good use of their privileged position they must cultivate good fruits, good treasure, good thoughts, and reveal all this in their good actions. By so doing, their teaching will have a powerful impact on those who hear it.

Dig Deep and Lay a Good Foundation

Jesus ended his discourse with a solemn warning. He told his disciples that it was no use them approaching him with the title of "Lord," if they were not prepared to obey his commands. He showed that true discipleship demanded three basic things (see Lk. 6:47):

A true disciple must come to him.
A true disciple must listen to him.
A true disciple must obey him.

A man who did all this is like a builder digging deep to lay his foundation upon rock. In time of flood or storm the house would not be affected because it would be anchored to rock.

On the other hand, a person who professes Christ by mouth, but does no more than that, is like a builder carelessly building his house upon sand without any proper foundation. In time of trial he will forget his profession of Christ, and be swept away.

What is the lesson?

Learn to dig deep and lay a good foundation. We do that by thoroughly mastering the Bible, by carefully building precept upon precept, word upon word, until we grasp the things of God in such a way that we can never be shaken therefrom.

True disciples of Christ must seek to do that.

Jesus Returns to Capernaum

This concluded the Lord's discourse at that time, and, dismissing the multitude, he made his way back to Capernaum with his disciples. There he resided for a time, probably in Peter's house (Mk. 3:19 — see margin), and doubtless gathered the apostles around him to instruct them further in regard to the duties that were soon to open out for them.

Chapter 3

A ROMAN CENTURION SEEKS HELP OF JESUS

JESUS' tour of northern Galilee, attracted the attention of many Gentiles. They had flocked to him from cities as far as Tyre and Sidon, and from countries such as Idumaea in the deep south (Mk. 3:8), to attend to his discourses, to observe with wonder the miracles he performed and upon their return home excitedly told others of his fame.

News of Activities (Mat. 8:5-13; Lk. 7:1-10) Reports of the wonderful miracles performed by him reached the city of Caesarea, on the seacoast of the Mediterranean, about 60 miles (96 kms) distant from Capernaum. They came to the ears of a certain Roman soldier stationed there,* who had been appointed to the position of centurion, commanding approximately a hundred men of a Roman legion of 6,000 men.

But though used to the ruthlessness of Roman warfare, and exercising considerable authority, he was a kind, compassionate, deeply thoughtful man.

The Problem He had a slave, for whom he had a great affection, but who was in dire agony with the painful disease of palsy. It concerned the centurion to see his beloved servant in such a state, and he cast around in his mind how he might help him.

As he pondered the problem of his pain-ridden slave, he recalled the news that he had learned of Jesus the prophet, and the miracles he did. He recognised that a man who could perform such wonders of healing as he was doing and who set forth such lofty principles as Jesus did in his teaching, must be more than mere man, and obviously in possession of the power of God.

Being a just man, the centurion reasoned this way, even though he did not fully understand the Truth of God.

He had, however, revolted against the gross pagan idolatry of Rome with its many gods, and had come to value the worship of the Jews in relation to the one true God. He was thus a God-fearing man, who respected the Jewish nation, though he did not embrace Judaism in its complete form, which would have involved circumcision and

* Assuming our suggestion is correct, that the Centurion was Cornelius (see Acts 10:1). However, there is no indication that the centurion was from Caesarea, and he may have been such an official stationed at Capernaum where the Lord was then ministering.

the keeping of the law.

He knew that normal physicians could not help his slave, but perhaps the prophet of Nazareth could!

But would he help a Gentile slave?

The centurion was prepared to make the request in his own name, but he also knew that many Jews, particularly those of Galilee, were very bitter toward foreigners, and even more so toward members of the Roman legions. Would Jesus help a Gentile?

He probably recalled that many Gentiles had flocked to hear the Lord during his recent tour, and therefore was encouraged in the resolve that he now made to seek the help of Jesus.

But though the centurion exercised considerable authority, he was a humble man. He realised that God was with Jesus, and therefore felt unworthy to personally approach him himself (Lk. 7:6). He besought the elders of the Jews, to whom he had granted great privileges, that they might approach Jesus on his behalf, and ask him to come and heal his servant.

The very fact that he thus humbled himself before the Jews reveals something of the humility and great kindness of this man, for he was doing all this for a slave. He was obviously a man of great concern for those under his care.

The elders of the Jews agreed to help, and in the name of the centurion, they approached Jesus with his plea:* "Lord, my slave lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented!"

As the Lord considered this unusual request, the Jewish elders added an appeal of their own. They had received great benefits from the centurion, and did not want him to be offended should Jesus refuse to meet him. "He is worthy of such help," they urged, "for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue."

The centurion, though not a Jewish proselyte, had certainly recognised the greater benefits in the Jewish worship of one God, with its strict demands of morality, than in the polytheism of the Romans and its dissolute and lax way of life. He could see the value of divine worship, and had encouraged the Jews to that end, even to building for them a synagogue.

Thus the elders of the Jews were anxious that this Roman centurion should be paid in kind for the way he had treated them. Nevertheless, the Jews did not realise how different their attitude was to that of this Gentile centurion. He had the wisdom to see that Jesus was no ordinary person, but one possessing great authority, greater than that which he, himself, wielded, and therefore one commanding mighty powers. Jesus had only to say the word and his servant would

* Mat. 8:5 represents the centurion as personally coming to the Lord, whereas Luke is insistent that messengers were sent. But it is axiomatic among the Jews that what is done on one's behalf, is considered as being done by oneself (cp. Mk. 10:35 with Mat. 20:20, and 2Cor. 5:10).

be healed! He never intended that Jesus should travel to attend his slave. In his great humility, he did not think himself worthy to come into the presence of Jesus, much less that Jesus should undertake such a wearying journey to come to him.

The Jews failed to realise that. They neither comprehended the fulness of Jesus' power and position, nor the intention of the centurion, and therefore had no compunction about thoughtlessly dragging the Lord from the shelter of his home in Capernaum to the place of the centurion, to perform a miracle which they did not realise could have been done by Jesus from a long way off.

But Jesus revealed himself as the suffering slave of Yahweh, as the servant of humanity, and recognising that it presented an opportunity of demonstrating to his apostles the need of selfless service and sacrifice, he "humbled himself" even before these Jews (Phil. 2:7-8). To them he uttered words that proved prophetic: "In coming," he said enigmatically, "he shall be healed" (Mat. 8:7 — Greek; the literal Diaglott Gr. has: "I coming, will heal him.").

The Promise The Lord, with his great insight into the hearts of people, instantly discerned the motives of the centurion, and knew what would be the outcome of his journey to the centurion's house. His reply to the Jews indicated that the servant of the centurion would be healed before he arrived, in fact, even as he was "coming."

So he left on the tiring journey, with no thought of his own convenience. And meanwhile some hastened ahead to tell the centurion that the Lord was on his way. But the Roman was aghast at the news. He did not think himself worthy of such treatment, or such a visitor. For one thing, he was a Gentile, and he recognised the privileged standing of Israel as a nation; and for another, he felt personally unfit to receive the Lord; and finally, he could not see the need. Why disturb the Master? He could just as easily have spoken the word from afar as near, so why drag him away to perform a miracle? After all, the very position of authority which the centurion held, illustrated what the Lord could do, if he were a man of God, for when the centurion wanted something done, he ordered his servants to do it! As a man of authority Jesus could do likewise, for undoubtedly he had servants (the angels) who would perform his bidding.

It was not right that the Master should be troubled in the manner that his Jewish friends had demanded.

He therefore sent further messengers to the Lord Jesus, that they might apologise for the great inconvenience to which he had been put.

The Performance The Lord, however, had almost arrived. The messengers found him not far off. They approached him and gave him the message of the centurion in his

own words: "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."

The heart of Jesus was warmed by the humility, faith, and understanding of this Gentile; but the crowd of people that followed him, listened to the message of the centurion without fully understanding its significance. The Lord, therefore, turned around on them, to point the lesson. "Truly, I say to you, that I have not found such faith in all Israel. And I tell you, that many will come from the east and the west, and will sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven whilst the sons of the kingdom *[i.e., the Jewish people]* will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Lk. 7:9; Mat. 8:10-12).

The Lord was referring to that grand time when he will set up on earth the Kingdom of God, and when, in the temple at Jerusalem, he will preside over feasts of remembrance which will recall the great sacrifice that he offered on Golgotha's Hill so long ago. At those feasts will be seen the patriarchs of Israel, the very root and stem of the nation, and with them will be gathered the immortal saints, called out of all nations, and made a royal priesthood under Christ (Rev. 5:9-10).

But many Jewish people, to whom were given great privileges, will be rejected in that day, to mourn their lost opportunities.

Israel had been greatly favoured with many helps to faith; the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea crossing, the provision of manna in the wilderness, the giving of the Law and the parable of the tabernacle, the ministry of the prophets, the instruction of the Scriptures — these and many other privileges were given to that nation as Paul observed (Rom. 9:4-5).

But the people had become so accustomed to these wonderful benefits, that they took them for granted, and had not allowed their minds to be exercised upon them to the point that faith might develop in them.

They would have dragged Jesus out of his home to perform a miracle for the Roman centurion; whereas this Gentile, by carefully meditating upon the work of the Lord and by recognising that he manifested the power of God, realised that there was no limitation to what he could do.

And so, turning to the centurion's messengers, the Lord declared: "Go; be it done for you as you believed."

The servants returned to the Centurion's house, to find the slave completely cured of his illness!

The Parable What a powerful lesson for the centurion and all who might heed. He learned that he was able to intercede the help of the Lord, and to receive a benefit from God, even though he could not see them personally.

Is not that our privilege today? By what means did Jesus heal the centurion's slave? By God's power. And cannot we bring the influence of God into our lives through the mediatorship of the Lord, even though we cannot see him? The prophet declares, that "Yahweh's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isa. 59:1), and, like the centurion, if we develop faith, we will have the confidence to realise that though Christ is not personally present, he can still help us, by interceding for us with Almighty God.

Let us ever remember the lesson of the centurion, and apply the principle to our circumstances. God will help us if we put our trust in Him, and through His Son, He will strengthen us to overcome all difficulties in life, and win, at last, the kingdom of God (Phil. 4:13).

The Impact The centurion appears for a moment in the Bible's story, and we catch a brief glimpse of a Gentile warrior who loved Israel, who built the people a synagogue, who had a respect for God and recognised His power, and who showed great faith, great kindness, and great consideration.

And then he disappears in the narrative of Scripture, and we hear no more of him.

Or does he?

There is another incident in Scripture, connected with a centurion, which seems like a sequel to the miracle that the Lord performed on this occasion. It concerns Cornelius who received a vision from God, and to whom Peter was sent that he might be baptised (Acts 10).

Both were centurions stationed in Palestine (Lk. 7:2; Acts 10:1), and both showed remarkable similarities in character.

They were lovers of Israel. "He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue" (Lk. 7:5). "He gave much alms to the people..." "of good report among all the nation of the Jews" (Acts 10:2, 22).

They were lovers of God. "He is worthy for whom you should do this" (Lk. 7:4). "Cornelius... a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house... a just man" (Acts 10:2, 22).

They were lovers of Jesus. "Lord, don't trouble yourself, I am not worthy..." (Lk. 7:6). "You know of the Word preached... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth... who went about doing good, and HEALING" (Acts 10:37-38).

If this centurion was Cornelius (and this may have been the case), the remarkable miracle resulted in the whole of his house fearing God (Acts 10:2), and prepared the way for their ultimate acceptance of the

gospel in Christ Jesus through baptism in his name. At that time, the centurion would have surrendered the last shreds of Roman citizenship to become a true son of Zion (Acts 10:48).

The character of the centurion is worthy of emulation. Though he was a man in high authority, he proved himself to be kind and thoughtful to those under him, humble and considerate before those whom he recognised were appointed of God, and pious and faithful to the Creator Himself.

Above all, he was intelligent, and thought deeply upon all that happened at the time. Thus he was drawn to Jesus, and experienced a great benefit from him as a result.

But if the character of the centurion commends itself to us, what of the example set by the Lord!

Assuming the Centurion lived in Caesarea, as Cornelius did (Acts 10:1), and this is implied, for Jesus, on the return journey, next day passed through Nain (Lk. 7:11)*, the Lord had walked some 60 miles (100 kms) from Capernaum to the home-town of the centurion, to give some help and comfort to a Gentile slave. He had gone out of his way, at great inconvenience of time, to engage upon a tiring journey for the benefit of another.

Would we do likewise? Or would we indignantly order the centurion to come to us!



* However, the record merely shows that the Lord went to Nain — whether from Caesarea (as suggested by Mr. Phillips), or from Capernaum, cannot be determined. Luke 7:11 merely says that "it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain..." The day before he "entered into Capernaum" (v. 1), and it seems that the miracle occurred in this place, so that the next day the Lord moved across to Nain. It would have been difficult to traverse the distance to Caesarea in two days—*GEM.*

Chapter 4

THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW'S SON

BETWEEN Caesarea and Capernaum there stands the little village of Nain (Lk. 7:11). Today it is a tiny hamlet, almost a cluster of ruins, with ancient caves not far distant which were used as sepulchres. Its elevation (some 1690 feet; 515 metres), however, gives a superb view of the Valley of Esdraelon on the south and southwest, and of Mount Tabor on the northwest.

The Significant Town of Nain

Nain is about five miles (8kms) southeast of Nazareth, and a couple of miles from Endor, and therefore, is situated in a most significant part of the land as we will see as the story of Christ's visit to this place unfolds.


Nain and Mt. Tabor today

On the day following the healing of the Centurion's slave, Jesus made for the town of Nain. The Lord walked at the head of a considerable company of people including the newly appointed twelve apostles.

The Funeral

As they approached the gate of the city, they came upon another procession of people, but this company followed an open coffin (a bier), and mourned the death of the young man upon it.

The two processions stopped. One had been rejoicing at the presence of the Lord of life who had remarkably healed the centurion's slave; the other was giving itself over to expressions of grief at the presence of death.*

The principal mourner was a widow woman who had seen much sorrow. Though Nain signifies *Pleasant House*, it had proved far from pleasant for this woman. Like Naomi, who changed her name to Mara (which means *Bitterness*), she had seen sorrow upon sorrow. First her husband had died, and she had then poured out all her love and joy upon her only son.

But the grim enemy of death had struck again, and she was now left completely bereaved of her whole family.

She stood beside the bier a lonely, mourning, weeping widow.

The pleasant town of Nain, with its lovely scenery had turned into a place of desolation and bitterness for her.

---

* Notice the marked contrast expressed in the narrative: "with him much people" (Luke 7:11), "much people with her" (v. 12).

Her friends certainly flocked around her in her distress, but what could they do! They mourned with her; they sympathised with her; they tried to help her; but they keenly felt their inability to really comfort her.

And so, outside the gate of the town, the two groups, so completely different, stopped and looked at each other with curiosity.

The Lord of Life Takes Over

Jesus took in the whole scene at a glance. By the divine power granted unto him, he instantly discerned the desolate state of the widow woman and filled with compassion, he decided to help her.

Gently, he stepped forward, and stood by her side. "Weep not," he said quietly, his voice filled with compassion.

The widow looked at him in amazement. Why should she not weep? Had not she sorrow enough! But now, to her amazement, and the astonishment of the crowd, the Lord went forward, and touched the bier.

This was a most unusual thing for a Jew to do, for the Law decreed that anybody who touched a dead body, or anything the dead body lay upon, was defiled, and had to be cleansed by a special offering (Num. 19:22).

Amazed as the crowd must have been when the Lord went forward and touched the bier, it was even more consumed with wonder, to hear this strange, noble-looking young man addressing the inert body of the dead boy upon the open coffin. They heard his voice, clear in the still air: "Young man, I say to thee, Arise!"

A gasp of astonishment went up. Never had a funeral ended like this one! The dead boy sat up, remarkably revived, and began to speak! The widow crouched back, dumb with fear; hardly believing the evidence of her senses. The two companies of people were thunderstruck by the miracle.

But the compassionate Lord, full of grace and understanding, led the now living boy to his mother whose fear was quickly changed by an overwhelming joy. And now a babble of voices replaced the previous silence, as the people recognised that they were in the presence of miracle. They "glorified God," and murmurs of admiration arose from the crowd:

"This is the power of God!"

"A great prophet is risen among us!"

"God has visited His people!"

A feeling of awe swept the crowd. It was obvious that such a miracle was beyond man, and therefore a manifestation of divine power. They gave expression to their belief. But even so, and because they were interested only in the immediate benefits derived from Christ, they "did not know the time of their visitation" (Lk. 19:44),

and later allowed the One who had so graciously expended help and compassion on them, to be led away and crucified as a criminal!

That is the attitude of flesh to the precious gifts, and wonderful benefits, derived from Yahweh.

The Drama of Nain Being so close to Endor, it is of the greatest significance that this miracle should have been performed at this particular locality. It was to this place that Saul, Israel's first king, hastened to consult the dead through the witch of Endor, when Yahweh had turned His face from him (1Sam. 28:7-20); and now one thousand years later, Israel's last king (yet to sit on David's throne) went to the same district and demonstrated his triumph over death, his ability to wipe from the eyes of the weeping widow, the bitter tears of anguish.

The people of Nain saw in this action, a token of the future glory and happiness when the Lord shall be revealed as "a father of the fatherless, and a judge of widows... setting out the solitary in families" (Psa. 68:5-6). In that day, he shall "swallow up death in victory; and will wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isa. 25:8).

The token of this was seen in Nain when the weeping widow met the Lord and had her tears wiped away, and the mourning funeral cortege was sent back into the city, a changed, rejoicing community, testifying that "God hath visited His people."



Artist's impression of a funeral procession at the time of Christ

Chapter 5

THE POWERFUL LESSON OF JOHN BAPTIST'S IMPRISONMENT

IN one of the dungeons of the gloomy palace-fort of Herod, perched high above the valley that gave access to the Dead Sea far below, John Baptist languished in prison, eating his heart out in frustrating idleness.

He had dared to oppose the King's marriage (see page 251), and had been flung into imprisonment — the worst possible punishment for the fiery, eloquent, restless John.

Occasionally, he was allowed visitors, and his disciples used to periodically visit him. They told him of the prophet of Nazareth whom he had baptised in the Jordan; his cousin Jesus, who was drawing great crowds to him, and performing the most remarkable miracles.

The Demand As he listened, John's heart beat with excitement — this is the Christ — but why the delay? When would Jesus assert himself as King of Israel, and sweep aside all the wickedness rampant on every side! As John considered all that was happening outside, he impatiently paced up and down in his prison cell. How he would like to be outside, to assist his Lord. It seemed so futile that he should languish in prison, fretting himself away in impatience for his release, daily expecting Jesus to assume his position as king, and lead the nation to its promised glorious destiny.

True, he had called Jesus the "Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world," but he had not properly understood that this implied the sacrificial death of the Lord. He had predicted that Jesus "must increase" (Jn. 3:30), and the reports being carried to him by his disciples, testified to the truth of his prophetic words.

Impatiently he waited for the Messiah to move and vindicate his position and power.

As his disciples continued to speak of the labours and success of Jesus, John could stand it no longer. He called two of them to him, and sent them to Jesus with a typically forthright statement: "Are you he who should come? or look we for another?"



Aretas IV: the fourth Nabatean king of that name (BC9-AD40) whose daughter was married to and divorced by Herod Antipas (who unlawfully married Herodias). The capital of the Nabatean kingdom was Petra.

And so, shortly after the Lord left Nain, he was accosted by the two disciples of John, who came bearing the question their leader had sent.

The Demonstration Jesus gave no verbal reply. Instead, he took the two disciples with him, and gave them a dramatic demonstration of his power. Before their eyes, he did many miracles. He brought health to the sick, restored sanity to the mentally deranged, cleansed the lepers, granted sight to the blind.

It was a most convincing answer that he was of God, the One who should come.

He then sent answer back to his cousin John: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them..."

It was a partial fulfilment of Isa. 61:1, and from this well-known Scripture, John would have the complete answer to his question: "The Spirit of Yahweh is upon me; because Yahweh hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh..."

And then he added a kindly word of rebuke and encouragement to John: "Blessed is he who shall not be offended in me" (Lk. 7:23).

The word "offended," comes from a Greek word signifying *stumbling block*, and the Lord's comment seems a direct reference to the Immanuel prophecy of Isa. 8:14, "He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem..."

The disciples of John were sent on their way with a complete answer to the question as to whether Jesus was the One who should come, and were given as well an exhortation to comfort and patience: "Blessed is he who shall not be offended in me."

Thus the Lord reminded John that it was the time of the cross — not of the crown; of sacrifice — and not of conquest.

The time of kingly glory is yet to come.

The Design And now the Lord, for the benefit of his disciples, pressed home the powerful lesson of John Baptist. They had heard the question of the two disciples of John, they had witnessed the miracles of the Lord, and heard the reply he sent to his cousin.

What did it all mean? What was it designed to accomplish? And why is it recorded in the Bible?

It taught a most powerful lesson which the Lord proceeded to

press home. If a man of such determination, courage and faith as John manifested, could be shaken in his confidence of the Lord, how would weaker men fare? How much more easily would they be offended! How important, then, to learn the lesson later stressed by Paul: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!" (1Cor. 10:12). Outstanding courage and faith is necessary if we would gain the kingdom.

And so, after the messengers of John had departed, Jesus spoke to the people concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind?"

No, they had not seen a mere reed bent over by the wind, but a stern, upright, forthright prophet, fearlessly denouncing the two most powerful sects of the day (Lk. 3:7, 17), publicly indicting the king himself for his adulterous union with the woman who conspired to have John flung into prison (Lk. 3:19), and openly rebuking the people for the folly of their ways.

If such a fearless man as that could doubt, how great was the need to seek God's help and strength that lesser men might not fall!

The instruction continued: "What then did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who are gorgeously apparelled and live in luxury are in kings' courts..."

John was in a king's prison, not in his court! He was no diplomat, no politician, carefully framing his words so as not to give offence, he was no mere time-server, but a man in deadly earnest, who was prepared to endure a horrible imprisonment for his faith — yet he had begun to doubt.

What a lesson for lesser men to take heed to themselves!

And still the warning voice continued: "What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.' I tell you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God, is greater than he..."

John was a prophet, and as a prophet his testimony should be heeded, not his subsequent doubts. In fact, he was more than a prophet, greater than all who had come before him, for he was the forerunner of the Messiah. Nevertheless, the one considered "least" in the kingdom of God is greater than John!

By the "kingdom of God" is undoubtedly meant the Jewish nation (see 1Chr. 29:23; Acts 1:6), but who "least" in that kingdom was yet greater than John?

The answer is, Jesus himself! Notice that the Lord used the present tense. He did not say, "He who is least *shall* be greater," but, "*is* greater." Jesus "made himself of no reputation," he "humbled himself" to the status of a common slave; yet though considered the

"least" among men, he was and is greater than John Baptist, whom all men followed and applauded.

The Lord could have had Daniel 4:17 in mind. According to the original Hebrew, it should read: "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and the lowest *[one]* of men *["one set at nought by men" — Septuagint]* He will set over it" (see also 1Cor. 1:27-31).

Jesus was despised of men, one over whom the Jews stumbled, or were offended, but though "least" in their considerations, he was nonetheless the Messiah, greater than John Baptist.

The Lesson of John Baptist's Message

The doubt that John expressed in the message he had sent to the Lord, showed how easy it is for normally bold men to become discouraged under trial, and therefore how necessary it is for Christ's followers to manifest great determination and courage in the things of God, refusing to be deterred from the way of righteousness, come what may.

Jesus pressed the point of this lesson home to his disciples in the following words: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has required force to obtain it, and only men of force will gain it. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

These are difficult words to understand, but there is a profound and important truth contained in them.

Firstly, the Lord declared that from the days of John Baptist, the leaders of Jewry had so opposed the Truth, that only men of determination would surmount the trials that faced them to lay hold on to the kingdom of God. It is only "obtained by force." In other words, it demands much in the way of courage, and only those of outstanding determination, and virile faith, would be able to surmount the opposition of men and the problems of life, and battle through to successfully lay hold on to the Kingdom of God. The difficulties of doing so have always been great, but they had intensified since the days of John Baptist. His forthright witness had called forth bitter opposition, and only "men of force," or people with outstanding zeal and eagerness were able to press their way into the things of the Kingdom, undeterred by difficulties. Such people grasped hold of the things of Christ in complete disregard, or defiance, if need be, of popular opinion, and refused to release their hold on these matters, come what may.

Secondly, the Lord stated that the prophets and the law prophesied until John. At first sight, the statement seems unconnected with its context, but the Lord was teaching, by implication, that what followed

after John — his own ministry — was a fulfilment of these prophetic Scriptures. Thus, by following him, they would be taken beyond the law and the prophets.


Statue of Elijah on Mount Carmel

Thirdly, he told the people, "If you will receive it, this is Elias..." In other words, if the nation had heeded the teaching of John, he, in the spirit of Elijah, would have led it back to God, and it would have accepted its Messiah.

But the nation had refused the opportunity to "receive" John's instructions, and so the Lord, finally, made a personal appeal to individuals. He finished his discourse much the same as he did later when addressing the seven ecclesias of Asia (Rev. 2, 3), by directing an invitation to those with an hearing ear: "He that hath an ear, let him hear..."

On this personal note, he brought to a completion his exhortation, based on the request of John Baptist.

Summary of Christ's Discourse on John Read Mat. 11:7-15, and see how beautifully the following ideas are woven into Christ's discourse. The disciples should take heed to the warning expressed in the fact that even such a man as John could doubt, for such a one appeared the least likely to be offended in Jesus. [1] He was firm (v. 7); [2] He was used to hardship, and unlikely to so quickly sink under despondency or become impatient through trial and imprisonment (v. 8); [3] He was not merely a prophet but the divinely chosen messenger (vv. 9-10); [4] Had the nation heeded him it would have been converted in the spirit of Elijah; [5] Instead, there was such opposition raised that only the forceful could press their way into the things of the Kingdom (vv. 12-14); [6] In consequence, Christ's appeal was to individuals, and not to the nation (v. 15).

The People Accept, the Pharisees Reject His Teaching The Lord's discourse concerning John Baptist had been proclaimed before a company of people, among whom there were a number of publicans. They all acknowledged the truth of what Jesus said concerning John, and in doing so they justified God, for they had been baptised of John.

But there was also a group of Pharisees present, together with some lawyers, men skilled in the law of Moses. They had rejected the ministry of God, and in doing so had frustrated the counsel of God in regard to salvation against themselves, by refusing repentance according to His terms. John had publicly rejected the Pharisees because they would not acknowledge that they were sinners (Mat. 3:7-8); and when he openly proclaimed their errors and called upon them to turn from them, they began to call in question his mission (Jn.

1:19-25), and took the opportunity to dispute with his disciples (Jn. 3:25), rejoicing when they saw evidence of his waning popularity (Jn. 3:26; 4:1).

Thus, whereas the common people accepted John Baptist, recognising their need of repentance, the pompous, learned Pharisees rejected his teaching as well as the Messiah whom he heralded. Yet they were the religious leaders of the day!

The Lord Likens the Pharisees to Sulky Children

The company of people whom the Lord addressed, was therefore sharply divided into two classes. The Pharisees stood in a group on their own, fearing that they might be contaminated by the common people. By their very dress, as well as the supercilious attitude they adopted towards Jesus, they tried to show that they were superior to all around them.

But the Lord singled them out in his address, and pointing to them as "this generation," he described their childish attitude in the hearing of all the people: "To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the public square and calling out to one another, 'We have played the flute to you, and you have not danced; we have sung dirges, and you have not shown sorrow.' For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon!'* The Son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'See this man! given to gluttony and a winebibber, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children" (Lk. 7:31-35. See Waymouth translation.).

How the lordly Pharisees must have squirmed with anger at being publicly described as irresponsible children! But how true the analogy is! John had appeared among them as a man who denied himself the normal provisions of life, setting forth the strictness of the Law in its Nazarite concept (Num. 6:3); calling upon the people to follow him, and deny themselves to serve God. He had called for a national mourning before Yahweh, but the Pharisees had decried his mission on the grounds that he was mad!

Jesus appeared before them in a different character. He proclaimed to them the hope of the gospel. To use his analogy, he piped to them a joyful message, that should have caused them to dance for very happiness.

But with the peevishness and fickleness of sulky children, the Pharisees had rejected both the warning of John and the appeal of Jesus. They had refused either to mourn or to dance!

---

* To describe one as "having a devil" was the popular way of saying, "He is mad!" (see Jn. 10:20). See the article: *What Were the Unclean Spirits?* on page 284.

There were, however, some among the Pharisees and the people who had manifested wisdom by accepting the teaching of both John and Jesus. Of them the Lord made reference when, in concluding his discourse, he said, "Wisdom is justified of all her children."

Children of wisdom are those in whom God's Truth so dwells that they are moved by it to reveal it in their lives. The Pharisees, as a class, who *thought* they were so wise, were really fools, and fulfilled the words of Jeremiah: "The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the Word of Yahweh; and what wisdom is in them?" (Jer. 8:9).

Paul, later, recognised this truth, though at first he did not do so, and wrote to the 'children of wisdom' in Corinth: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty..." (1Cor. 1:25-27).

True wisdom is found in God's way, though it may be despised by the world; and true strength is revealed in controlling self to His glory, though people might ridicule one for so doing.

The Doom of Capernaum

It was not only the worldly Pharisees who rejected the teaching of Christ, but many of the common people did likewise. It is true that multitudes followed him and listened spell-bound to his preaching; but they, also, were like the "children in the market-place," for they hearkened but refused to act. Cities like Capernaum, and smaller towns like Chorazin and Bethsaida which were close to Capernaum, had witnessed remarkable miracles, but the people had not properly heeded the true spirit of his message. In fact, in comparison to the Jewish people, the Messiah found greater response in Gentile cities such as Tyre and Sidon.

And so the Lord warned the people of Capernaum and its neighbouring villages: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe to thee, Bethsaida! For had the mighty works been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in both of you, they would long ere now have repented in sackcloth and ashes. Only I tell you that it will be more endurable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven,



Ruins of a synagogue at Chorazin, as Christ foretold would happen.

shalt be brought down to hell! For had the mighty works been done in Sodom which have been done in thee, that city would have survived until now. I tell you all, that it will be more endurable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for thee" (Mat. 11:21-24).

These words of the Lord show just how stubborn the Jewish people were, and how they despised the privileges granted to them. Gentiles were more amenable to divine Truth than they were, as the Centurion had just previously shown! Why was that? Because the Jewish people had become so used to God's teaching that they had begun to take it for granted, accepting it as so much formalised instruction in an academic sense, but not as a practical way of life. They thought that if they mouthed the name of God, and observed the ceremonies of His law, it was enough! They did not realise that they had to humbly accept God's word by putting into daily practise the precepts that it taught.

Because the people of Capernaum and its neighbouring towns treated the witness of Christ with such indifference, he proclaimed these woes against them. They would experience a judgment similar to that of Tyre. Tyre had been invaded by enemy armies, and the original city was overthrown; but there is to be a latter-day revival of symbolic Tyre (Isa. 23:18), as there will be for the "land of Sodom" (though not the city; Mat. 11:24; Eze. 47:8). The towns of Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida, however, will be completely and everlastingly destroyed. Capernaum, particularly, had been greatly privileged by the fact that Jesus spent so much time there; in that sense, it had been "exalted unto heaven," but, like Tyre (Eze. 26:20), it would be "brought down to hell," the grave, with no hope of revival such as mystical Tyre shall see in the Kingdom of God (see Psa. 45:12).

The fate of Capernaum was thus pronounced and later fulfilled. Forty years after Jesus spoke these words, the Roman legions smashed their way through Palestine, destroying badly as they came, and these cities suffered greatly. Attempts were later made to rebuild Capernaum, but again it was overthrown, so that today, all that remains, are some mute ruins of its past glory.

Today, Capernaum is a city of the dead. And even these ruins will one day disappear, for the return of the Lord Jesus will be followed by a tremendous earthquake that will result in great changes in the Holy Land (Zech. 14). Among other things, it will bury the remaining ruins of these disobedient cities, and elevate the "land of Sodom."

Jesus Invites the People to Come Unto Him

As the Lord looked upon the concourse of people before him, he recognised that though the pompous, self-righteous Pharisees and learned lawyers might reject his message, there were some in his audience humble enough to see their need of

Yahweh, and prepared to seek Him through His Son. For these he responded in a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father: "I praise Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for such has been Thy gracious will. All things are delivered unto me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son will reveal Him" (Mat. 11:25-27).

Jesus publicly thanked Yahweh that the hope of the gospel is not a matter of worldly wisdom and prudence, is not dependent upon fleshly ability or brilliance of intellect, but is a matter of humility and faith. He also revealed in his prayer that there is only one way to reach the Father, and that is through the Son, who, in turn reveals the character of the Father to the world.

A person cannot truly understand Jesus until he recognises that he is the manifestation of God in flesh; then he will realise that it is the strength of God in him that enabled him to overcome the flesh (see 2Cor. 5:19).

The Jews did not understand that doctrine. They thought that Jesus was no more than the natural son of Joseph and Mary. They did not realise that he was and is the Son of God, and that God had been with him from birth, reproducing His glorious characteristics in flesh. They did not understand this, even though their Scriptures predicted it, for Psa. 80:17 declares that he would be "the Son of man whom Yahweh made strong for Himself."

That, indeed, is the lesson of Jesus' life; a lesson that we must learn. Flesh unaided cannot reproduce the divine likeness, and where that is not found in a man or woman, they are of no use to God. Jesus teaches us how we can conquer, for He did so in God's strength, willingly submitting himself to the divine will. He co-operated with his Father, drawing upon the strength of God that was readily available. And in that, he pointed the way for us. We will only conquer the flesh if we draw into our lives a strength greater than our own. Paul declared: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). If we imagine that mere fleshly determination or strength of will is sufficient for us to gain the victory over self, we will make a terrible mistake; for only those will conquer who recognise their own personal weakness, and allow God to mould their lives according to His will, that "the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2Cor. 4:7).

That is what the Lord was saying when he prayed: "All things are delivered unto me by my Father."

Furthermore, the Father has only been truly revealed through the Son, and therefore for any to seek the Father they must do it through the Son. This is what the Lord meant when he said, "No man knoweth

the Son, but the Father." The Greek word for "know" in this verse denotes a personal and true relationship between the person knowing and the object known, so as to reproduce the likeness of one in the other (see Mat. 7:23). Thus Jesus claimed to reveal to them that intimate relationship and revelation that God had granted to him alone.

The public prayer being finished, the Lord now turned to the people with a personal appeal: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mat. 11:27-28).

His invitation was directed to those in his audience who felt the oppressive burden of sin that the Law made obvious. The Pharisees, though they might *understand* the Law, did not *feel* its burden, for they were self-righteous and in their own esteem, "not like other men" (Lk. 18:11). They did not hesitate to place "burdens" on others, however, demanding that they observe ceremonies and rites quite apart from the Law of God. These gave the people no rest, and only oppressed them with the utter impossibility of rendering complete obedience (Lk. 11:46).

But, "take my yoke and learn of me," invited the Lord. He was "meek and lowly in heart." In other words, he submitted to what the Father required of him without question; and as he cheerfully and completely gave himself to performing the will of his Father, without opposing it by his own desires, he found the yoke easy and the burden light.

Jesus invited the people to "learn of him," and to "take his yoke upon them."

In this commercial and mechanical age, we may not appreciate what the Lord meant by these words, for they had particular reference to his times. Ploughing in the fields was often done then by a pair of oxen upon whose necks was placed a double yoke. If the animals accepted the yoke willingly, it would settle on their shoulders, and they would pull the plough with the least trouble. If, however, they struggled to escape the yoke, it would shift into an uncomfortable position on the neck that would result in chafing, making the work difficult and painful. The ploughing still had to be done, and the oxen could not escape the yoke, but what could have been performed easily and without trouble, was made difficult and painful by twisting the yoke on the neck.

A young ox was sometimes taught the work by being yoked together with an older, more experienced animal. Unused to the yoke, the young animal might throw its head about causing the yoke to fit into an uneasy position, or in ploughing it might strain forward with

eager, impatient steps that would soon tire it out. Not until it learned to imitate the more experienced animal by its side would it "find rest for its soul." That animal would let the yoke settle properly upon its shoulders, and would move forward with quiet, regular steps that made ploughing easy. When the younger animal learned to use the yoke in that way, and to match its tread with that of its more experienced companion, it would find that comparatively the "yoke is easy and the burden light."

"Come unto me," and "learn of me," is the invitation of Jesus. See how quietly he submitted to the trials that came upon him! Observe how he turned to the Father for strength! Notice the patience that he manifested under all circumstances! He remained calm, he did not give way to panic, he was not easily excited into making mistakes, he did not lose his temper.

He was "meek and lowly in heart," or submissive and humble. He cheerfully performed the work given him to do, did not at any time question the wisdom of the Father's way, at all times accepted His will even at the expense of his own; and thus did not chafe against the yoke.

"You shall find *rest*," he told the people (Mat. 11:29). The word he used, is the one used to describe the sabbath rest. Doing the Father's will, and "ceasing from the works of flesh," constitutes the true sabbath rest (Heb. 4:10-11; Isa. 58:13), though the Pharisees, in their blindness, could not see this. They thought the sabbath was kept by observing the petty little laws that they themselves had made concerning the keeping of it, many of which God had never endorsed. Now, publicly before all the people, Jesus told them that the only way that burdened humanity would find rest would be by heeding his example, and matching his steps.

GOD MANIFESTATION
AS EXPRESSED IN MATTHEW 11:27

"No man knoweth the Son, but the Father" — The revelation concerning Christ is from God, as Jesus told Peter (Mat. 16:17), and not from man. The philosophies and universities of human wisdom cannot reveal this truth.

"No man knoweth the Father but the Son" — The Lord Jesus is the revelation and manifestation of the Father. See Jn. 1:11; 14:9; 17:6, 26. He manifested the Father in word (Jn. 7:16), deed (Jn. 5:19), and character (Mk. 14:36), and now does in nature as well (2Cor. 3:18, mg.).

As the Father revealed Himself in the Son, so men can only come to know the Father through the Son, and this is the means that God has designed for the attainment of life eternal (Jn. 17:3).

Chapter 6

THE DISCOURTEOUS PHARISEE AND THE FORGIVEN SINNER

AMONG the people listening to Jesus was a Pharisee who had carefully observed all that the Lord said and did. His name was Simon. Proud and self-righteous though he was, he nevertheless was impressed with the miracles and teaching of the Lord, and felt that he would like to know him better.

An Invitation to Dine
Luke 7:36-50

He invited Jesus to dine with him, and the Lord accepted the invitation. But Simon was very anxious to make it clear to his other guests that he was not a disciple of Jesus, and therefore, when the humble Nazarene entered the wealthy Pharisee's home, he treated him rather haughtily, neglecting to extend to him the courtesies normally paid to visitors.



In those days, it was usual for hosts to greet their guests with a kiss, to anoint their heads with oil, and to arrange for their feet (made dusty through walking the unpaved streets) to be washed.

But none of these amenities were offered to Jesus!

He entered the Pharisee's home as a curiosity to those assembled. There was no warm gesture of hospitality extended

This is the story of a Pharisee and a woman (described as a sinner) who both probably acted on the public invitation of Christ recorded in Mat. 11:28. The Pharisee had been impressed by the miracles and discourses of the Lord, but remained unconvinced that he was the Messiah. Swayed by conflicting emotions, he was not sure whether the Lord was genuine or not. He therefore invited Jesus to dine with him, but made it quite clear that he was not a disciple. The woman had no such doubts. She believed that Jesus was the Messiah and desired to demonstrate her belief in action. She was anxious to be unburdened of the load of sin she bore, and in the presence of the Lord, gave way to the deepest, most heartfelt emotion. The feeling she exhibited is worthy of thought and meditation — have we such realisation of our unworthiness, and such love for Christ?

to him, no real indication of pleasure at his presence. He was received with chilling indifference, and conducted to the table with cold formality.

In fact, Simon was somewhat confused as to what to make of Jesus (cp. Lk. 7:39). Was he a man of God, or a charlatan? Was he a prophet, or a fake?

He hoped that the conversation at the dinner table would reveal the answers to these questions.

An Uninvited Visitor In those days, it was customary for Jews to recline at the meal table, not sitting upright as is the manner today. A couch was provided, and on it the guest made himself comfortable, reclining full-length on his side.



And so, with Jesus and the other guests in this position, the meal commenced.

But it was suddenly interrupted by a strange, uninvited visitor.

A woman, described as "a sinner"* had heard that Jesus was to dine with the Pharisee that day, and, possibly having listened to Jesus' invitation to "come unto him," had decided in her great need, to accept his invitation.

In her humility, she recognised the great privilege for her to come into the presence of the Lord; and in order to honour him, she had gone to some expense and trouble to prepare a gift for him. Obtaining a beautiful casket made of bright, polished alabaster (similar to marble), she filled it with ointment, and with some trepidation made her way into the house of the Pharisee.

She took her place at the feet of the Lord, behind him, as he reclined at the table on the couch provided him. And now, her pent up emotion welled up within her. As she looked at the Lord and considered her own sinful life, her desperate need of forgiveness, in her ardent desire for a better way she began to weep. And once the flood of her emotion was unloosed, she could not stem it. Tears of penitence poured from her eyes and bathed the dust-covered feet of the Lord. She saw this, perceiving that the common acts of hospitality had been denied him, and as an act of reverence and deepest humility, she began to wipe his feet with her hair, and then to caress and kiss them in her excess of feeling.

She then took the ointment from its casket, and feeling unworthy

* This term is used in the New Testament to describe Gentiles, or Jews who acted as Gentiles (e.g. Gal. 2:15). Nevertheless, the emotion shown by this woman in the presence of the Lord, indicated that she had much to atone for, beyond normal Gentile conduct.

to anoint his head, she poured it over his feet.

In her humility she extended to Jesus the benefits of hospitality and kindness that had been denied him by the haughty Simon.

She was like those sisters, whom Paul commends, because they have "washed the feet of saints" (1Tim. 5:10). She had humbled herself before her Lord, not only by so doing, but also by wiping them with her hair, for it was an ancient custom for noble and important visitors, after washing their hands, to wipe them on the hair of some young attendant. And then, when she had thus served the Master, she kissed his feet, expressing by this reverential gesture, her desire to be subject unto him and to do his will (see Isa. 49:23).

Her actions were not those of an hysterical woman who did not know what she was doing or for what reason; they were, each one of them, deeply significant in meaning. She was trying to tell the Lord by her actions (for so deep was her emotion that words were beyond her) that she needed his help, and would humbly submit to what he desired.

In the deep intensity of her feeling, she realised that she was in the presence of the Messiah, the One sent of God to save humanity from its sins.

She was moved by a love that could not be expressed in words, but had to be shown in action.

What a contrast to the cold formality, the mere intellectual curiosity of the haughty Simon, whose hard, critical eyes were now centred on the Lord! How do we compare in our emotion toward God and Christ?

Simon's Contempt of Jesus

With the exception of Jesus, the attention of the guests around the table was now riveted on the sobbing woman. They noticed that Jesus had accepted her services as his due, without remark or sign.

Not so Simon. He viewed the emotion of the woman coldly because he could not understand it. In fact, the whole scene was repulsive to him. He felt that it provided him with the answer to a question that he had been seeking, and because of which he had invited Christ to dine with him that day. Previously he was undecided in his mind about Jesus, but now he was sure. If Jesus were a man of God, he would recognise the character of the woman who was even then fondling his feet; he would know how common and detestable she was, and would repulse her defiling touch. He reasoned within himself: "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner" (v. 39).

The cold, dispassionate, moralistic, self-righteous and conceited Simon knew the disreputable character of this woman. He disap-

proved of her unrestrained emotion, and the way she handled the feet of the Lord.* In his formal self-righteousness, in the certainty of his own moral rectitude, he had only harsh consideration for such a woman as this, and any who associated with her for any cause. She was beyond the pale. There was no forgiveness, no help for such as she. He shuddered within himself to think of her fondling *his* feet! So, in his mind, he condemned both the woman and Jesus, who (although Simon did not know it) had come into the world to save sinners.

The Parable of the Two Debtors

To Simon's astonishment and embarrassment, however, he found his thoughts interrupted and answered by the Lord who, by his very courtesy and frankness, gave the discourteous and hypocritical Pharisee a suitable lesson in good manners.

"Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee."

"Master, say on," answered the hypocritical Pharisee who now really no longer looked upon the Lord as "master."

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors," continued Jesus, "the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?"

The question was a simple one, and the mystified Simon had no trouble in answering it.

"I suppose he, to whom he forgave most," he replied, rather superciliously.

"You have rightly judged," answered the Lord.

And now the Lord turned to the woman and drew the attention of the whole company to her. "See this woman?" he said.

They saw her! They knew her! They could tell Jesus all about her if necessary. But the Lord continued.

Addressing Simon, he said: "I entered your house *[implying that it was an act of condescension on his part to do so]*, you gave me no water for my feet; but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. You gave me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil you did not anoint; but this woman has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I say unto you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little!"

The woman must have stood in amazement at such a revelation. Here was her Lord, honouring her above the important, well-known,

* The Greek terms indicate the deep emotion of this woman. The phrase "began to wash" really means to "wash with a shower," indicating the copious tears that fell from her eyes; and the word for "kiss" signifies "to kiss fondly, to caress, to kiss again and again."

self-righteous pompous Pharisee, and his guests. Could it be true? And turning to the woman, the Lord said: "Your sins are forgiven!"

This claim to forgive sins offended the guests around the table. Indignantly they began one to another (see RSV) to call him in question. "Who is this that also claims to forgive sins?" they demanded.

Tension was mounting around the dining-table of the Pharisee; but ignoring it all, the Lord quietened the agitated woman with the comforting words: "Thy faith hath saved thee! go in peace!"

The Parable Explained

We cannot over-estimate the importance of this parable in the teaching of the Lord. It expresses a principle that can lead us to serve God more acceptably in spite of our failings. It demonstrates a way in which we can ensure for ourselves a place in the Kingdom of God.

Consider the two main characters: Simon and the Sinner.

Simon was morally upright, but cold and conceited. He felt no *need* of a saviour, but was prepared to entertain the Lord on the presumption that he might be a prophet. He thought he was conferring an honour on Christ by supplying him with a morsel of bread. His love was all self-centred; he loved much, but it was himself. He was satisfied with his own goodness, dignity and importance, completely wrapped in the mantle of self-complacency and respect that he had made for himself, and merely curious as to whether Jesus was really a prophet.

On the other hand, the woman felt herself unworthy of paying Christ the most costly acknowledgments. It was usual for hosts to anoint the head of their guests with olive oil, but she brought expensive aromatic balsam, and even then did not feel herself fit to anoint his head, but instead anointed his feet. She had not come to eat, like the other guests, but to seek the Lord and beseech his help, and in this way she was moved by a faith that broke through every barrier.

"Seest thou *this* woman?" the Lord said to Simon.

Simon saw her as altogether detestable. He knew her reputation: she was beyond the pale; there was no good in her at all.

But Jesus looked beyond the outward front of evil for which the woman was notorious, saw into her heart where was a deep longing to be free from the past and a yearning to find her God. She was capable of a warmth of life that may have been partly responsible for her downfall, but now could be devoted to her Saviour. Jesus recognised that love, saw that it was genuine and expansive, and therefore pronounced that her sins were forgiven.

He illustrated the principle upon which this was done by the parable of a creditor with two debtors, one of whom owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty pence. Both had nothing with

which to pay. Both were forgiven their debt. But whom would the creditor esteem most? The one who took it for granted, or the one who loved him for his goodness? Once forgiven, both were on common ground; but the debtor who loved most had repaid his lord best!

In short, Jesus told Simon that once this woman was forgiven her sins, she was esteemed more in Heaven's sight than the cold, dispassionate Pharisee who had "nothing to pay" despite the formalised religion he practised.

And what of us?

Paul wrote: "When we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly... God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6, 8).

Before accepting Christ, we were like the debtors who had nothing with which to pay the creditor. But do we truly appreciate all that was done for us? Do we recognise that we owed 500 pence, or do we think that it was only 50 pence? There is an easy way to obtain a true answer to that question, and it is not in words — it is revealed by our love in action. Read carefully 1Jn. 4:9-21, and learn again how that by our love to God personally, and obedience to His Word, we can render back to Him some payment for all that He has done for us. How can we show that love? John tells us in this place, and he sums up his exposition with the statement: "We love Him, because He first loved us."

Let us take this matter a little further because it is so important. Christ told Simon that if a person loves God enough, his sins will be blotted out; and he illustrated how boundless is God's love by forgiving that erring woman the terrible sins she had committed, sins that Simon would never have forgiven! What caused Christ to forgive her sins? The love she manifested for God. This is illustrated by natural relationships: Yahweh has invited us to call Him, "our Father." What does that mean? All who are parents will understand what it means as far as love is concerned, if they carefully consider what they, as parents, desire most in their children. Is it not filial love? If you have a child that deeply loves you, who does things for you not because they are commanded, but because of the child's love for you, will you not forgive it the little waywardnesses that are incidental to children? Of course you would! Let a child love its parents deeply enough, and it will honour them, and seek to obey them in love. And are we not children of God? Let us, then, show a deep, personal love for Him, seeking to honour Him in our words and our ways, not merely because it is the right thing to do (that was Simon's idea), but because we feel a warm love toward Him and desire to manifest it "for His sake."

We will sin, for human nature (like small children) is so wayward;

but our love will ensure forgiveness.

On the other hand, if we look at God through Simon's eyes, we might be morally upright in the sight of our fellows, and very careful to observe all the formal things that go with divine service, but it will be done without love. How irritating a loveless child is! There is no response to the warmth of affection, no appreciation of benefits conferred; it is all taken for granted. There might be obedience rendered to commands, but it is obedience to authority. The lesser sins of a loveless child are remembered, whereas acts of warm affection and love will blot out greater sins in a loving child.



So let us learn to love the great Creator in the heavens who has freely cancelled out the debt owing to Him in the forgiveness provided through His Son.

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

ZEBEDEE
The Man in the Shadows

Though he is mentioned quite a few times in the New Testament, Zebedee, whose name means *The Gift of Yahweh,* is only referred to incidentally. No specific action, no word that he uttered, is recorded in the narrative.

Yet circumstantial evidence indicates that we owe a lot to this silent, self-effacing character, for it is obvious that he encouraged his sons, James and John, in their service to Christ, and supported Salome, his wife, in her ministrations on his behalf.

He thus gives the impression of being a generous, pleasant, faithful man. He was a prosperous fisherman, since he employed hired servants in the management of his boats (Mk. 1:19), and was in association with Peter and Andrew in their fishing venture (Lk. 5:10). He was of some social standing, for the family was on terms of intimacy with the high priest (Jn. 18:16), and were property owners, not only in Galilee, but also, apparently, in Judea (Jn. 19:27). He did not restrain his sons from following the Lord (Mat. 4:21), but probably remained to manage the business in their absence. In this he was doubtless influenced by the zeal of Salome his wife, who ministered to the Lord of their substance (Mat. 20:20; 27:56; Lk. 8:2-3).

From Mat. 27:56; Mk. 15:40; 16:1; Jn. 19:25, it seems that Salome was sister to Mary, the mother of the Lord, in which case, Zebedee would have been uncle, by marriage, to Jesus.

Chapter 7

WOMEN HELPERS OF JESUS

SHORTLY after the incident in the house of Simon the Pharisee, the Lord left the northern city of Capernaum for a further tour of Galilee. He travelled from town to town and village to village preaching the good tidings of the Kingdom of God. The twelve went with him now as his constant companions, learning by personal experience, lessons that they would be able to apply when they were sent out on their own.

Another Tour of Galilee: Lk. 8:1-3

In addition, certain women also sojourned with them, helping them in their labours and providing for them of their substance. Some of these women were well to do, and of high repute in the land. There was Mary of Magdala, a woman who had been grievously sick in both mind and body,* but who had been miraculously cured by the Lord, and who ever afterwards remembered, with tender affection and deep gratitude, the benefits she had derived from him. She became a loyal disciple, continuing with him whenever possible, until his death and afterwards (see Mat. 27:55–28:1).

There was Joanna, the wife of Chuza, the steward of Herod Antipas, a woman used to luxury and high society, but who recognised the royal authority of the Lord, and desired to minister to his need, supplying him of her substance to help him on the way.

There was also Susanna, and others, who possessed the material means to ease the labours of Jesus and his disciples.

These fellow-travellers assisted Jesus as faithful women down through the ages have ever been ready to help those who labour in the things of God. How often has the encouragement and assistance of a faithful woman eased the work of others in their walk Zionwards! How frequently has the instruction of mothers been instrumental in guiding their sons or daughters to be staunch in the Truth in later years! Such influence has helped to mould the character of a Moses, a Samuel, a David or a Josiah.

It is worthy of comment, that in the greetings of Paul to the brethren in Rome, commendatory mention is made of at least ten sisters, and the chapter commences with the statement: "I commend unto you Phebe our sister..." (Rom. 16:1).

So, as Jesus made his tour of Galilean cities, these faithful women

* She is described as having been cured of "seven devils," and this statement is usually interpreted as describing one who is morally impure, but there is no reason for such an interpretation. See page 284.

helped him, "ministering unto him of their substance." They were always there to encourage, support, and provide, though little is heard of them in the narrative.

We may be sure that Jesus will not forget their labours of love in the day of his coming.

Return to Capernaum The preaching tour of Galilee resulted in vast crowds following the Lord Jesus. They swarmed around him and his followers in such numbers, and with such persistence, that he could not find time even to eat.

Jesus' Relations Hinder Him Mk. 3:20-21 Reports of his preaching reached the ears of his relations (Mk. 3:21, mg.), but in addition they also heard rumours claiming that he was mentally unstable, driven to extreme actions in his preaching campaigns. These rumours were circulated by the Pharisees in their growing enmity of him and in an attempt to stem his increasing popularity. It was a charge that was to be frequently hurled at him during his ministry (Jn. 10:20).

But, on this occasion, it unfortunately adversely influenced the Lord's relations. They saw their half-brother in the midst of an excited concourse of people, foolishly (as they thought) wearing himself out in preaching a strange doctrine that conflicted with that set forth by the learned leaders of the nation, not caring whether he received the common comforts of life, without time even to eat! They heard the report circulated by the scribes of Jerusalem that he was possessed of a devil, and acted strangely through the influence of Beelzebub!

And like close relations in every age, they did not pay their brother the honour that was due to his position.

Little did they realise that they were fulfilling a prophecy by so doing! But it was a fact. Psa. 69:8-9 predicted concerning him: "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children *[not his Father's!]*. For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon me."

His kinsmen, seeing his consuming zeal, concluded that he was beyond reason, and decided to restrain him.

What a reflection upon human nature and human relationships! How completely it illustrates the popular saying that "familiarity breeds contempt," or the words of the Lord: "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house" (Mat. 13:57).

It was a further trial that the Saviour had to bear, and it precipitated an incident that brought him into conflict with Pharisees and scribes who had visited Galilee to oppose him.

Chapter 8

JESUS CURES A BLIND AND DUMB MAN

THOUGH the Pharisees were busy secretly ridiculing the Lord before the people so that even his own relations were adversely influenced by their libellous talk, he still remained the centre of attraction for large, excited crowds that continued to throng him. And in the midst of teaching them, an incident occurred that precipitated a crisis which brought him into violent verbal conflict with a company of scribes and Pharisees who had just arrived from Jerusalem.

A Man in Great Need
Mat. 12:22-23

A most pathetic case had been presented to him for help. A man, completely blind and dumb had been led stumblingly into his presence. Unable to speak, unable to see, it had been left to his friends to guide him to Jesus and plead his cause.

And the man of compassion did not fail them.

He healed the poor, afflicted man, so that he both saw and spoke!

The ease by which he performed the miracle upon such an extreme case of need amazed the people. "Surely this is the Son of David!" they exclaimed in admiration.

The Pharisees Become Jealous

This open confusion of belief by so many people disturbed the Pharisees who were mingling with the crowds. Some of the Jewish leaders had come from far away Jerusalem to view the Lord, and to try and stem, if they could, the growing enthusiasm by the people in following him.

They recognised that such miracles as this could only increase the Lord's popularity with the people, unless they could be explained away.

But how could they do that?

Only by refusing to recognise that the obvious power he manifested came from Yahweh, and by claiming instead that it stemmed from some secret, evil power he possessed.

"This fellow does not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the Prince of the devils," they boldly declared.

Beelzebub was a pagan god, and the Jewish scribes and Pharisees did not really believe that it possessed any power; but they had to say something to stem the growing popularity of Jesus, and so they sarcastically made this suggestion to the superstitious people. They claimed that only by some form of evil influence, akin to personal



A humped-back beggar from the 1st century BC.

madness, did Jesus perform the miracles he did.

Thus they wickedly attempted to sweep to one side the evidence of their own senses.

Who was Beelzebub?

The name signifies, *The God of the Flies.* Beelzebub was worshipped by the Philistines of Ekron who imagined that this pagan god had control over the insects, and especially flies, that infested those warm climates and which frequently proved a pest, resulting in noisome and deadly plagues sweeping the people. As a mark of contempt, the Jews changed the name to *Beelzebul* (see Mat. 12:24, mg.), signifying *The God of the Dungheap,* and it was this word the Pharisees now used. They wickedly claimed that the act of compassion and goodness that the Lord had just performed was derived from the refuse heap, and not from God. As the dungheap was responsible for much disease, due to the insanitary conditions of some of the eastern towns of those times, Beelzebul was looked upon as the Prince of demons, mainly responsible for many of the diseases that affected the people.

And now these jealous Pharisees, by their pernicious, evil words, sneeringly mocked at the Lord by claiming that his miracles were due to some association with the mythical god of the manure-heap, guided by the prince of demons. In short, they claimed that the Lord had an "unclean spirit" or was mad (Mk. 3:30), and any success was due to excitation developed out of an over-wrought mind of insanity.

By their attitude they revealed that they were as spiritually blind, as the man Jesus had cured had been physically so; how much better for them if they had been as dumb as he!

Their words were a terrible reflection upon Yahweh and His Son, as Jesus proceeded to show.

The Parable of the Divided Kingdom

Jesus knew the jealous thoughts that dominated the minds of his detractors and caused them to make the foolish claims they did, and as a warning to them, as well as to the multitudes swarming around him, he decided to teach them a lesson.

He singled them out of the crowd, and called them to him (Mk. 3:22). The attention of all the people was thus drawn to the Pharisees, and as all faces turned in their direction, he addressed them by parable "How can satan cast out satan?" he asked them. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation! If a kingdom be divided against itself, it cannot stand. If a city be divided against itself that city cannot stand. And if satan cast out satan, he is divided

against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand? And if I, by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you. How else can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Mat. 12:25-30; Mk. 3:23-27).

This parable contains two appeals of warning, two prophetic utterances, and two unanswerable arguments.

The first warning-appeal is the reiterated statement that a kingdom, or a house, divided against itself cannot stand. The nation of Judah — the "house" of God on earth — was in a divided state at the time, and so Christ issued an impassioned appeal for unity, lest the inevitable disaster overcome it.

The second appeal was a plea to the people to heed the obvious significance of his presence in their midst. He was performing miracles, and obviously this was only possible by the Spirit of God. Granted that, then it was obvious that the power of God's kingdom was manifest in their midst, and they should heed it. Surely his very teaching should be sufficient to cause them to acknowledge that he was working for God, and not against Him as the Pharisees alleged!

He also spoke to them prophetically. He declared: "A city divided against itself shall not stand" (Mat. 12:25). It is significant that the Lord's detractors came from Jerusalem (Mk. 3:22) in which city these words were afterwards remarkably fulfilled. When Rome attacked Jerusalem in AD70, it was brought to destruction mainly because it lacked unity. With the enemy at the walls, the people were hopelessly divided within, so that even in the very precincts of the temple, factions sought to destroy each other, and thus hastened the destruction Jesus had predicted.

The second prophetic utterance relates to binding a strong man, entering his house, and spoiling him of his goods (Mat. 12:29). The "strong man" that ruled Jewry at the time was the flesh (Jn. 8:44), but the power the Lord manifested in healing the blind and dumb man showed that he had the power to capture and conquer the man of the flesh, and spoil his goods.

The first of the two unanswerable arguments is found in the question, "If you claim that I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your children cast them out?" There were those among the Jews who claimed to be able to heal, and this was applauded as a good thing by the Pharisees. These healers did not claim to have God's power, nor could they match the miracles Jesus performed! Did the Pharisees go around claiming they did it through Beelzebub? The answer was an emphatic, No! Why then make the claim against

Jesus? To that question there was no answer!

The Lord concluded with the second argument, "He that is not with me is against me..." He had already shown that his miracles were performed through God's power, so that to oppose him was to oppose God. They could therefore take their choice! They could either co-operate in assisting the work of the Kingdom of God, or they could oppose him in the interests of the Kingdom of Satan.

What did the Lord mean by the use of the word "Satan?" Note, first, that Jesus was not teaching a doctrine, but proclaiming a parable (Mk. 3:23). The word "Satan" means *adversary,* and the great adversary to God is the unenlightened thinking of flesh (Rom. 8:7). Wherever this rules there is found the Kingdom of Satan. Very often satan is found fighting satan, but such a state of division will never be found among those in whom God's Word truly rules. The world around us is governed by the thinking of the flesh, and therefore "scattereth abroad" (Mat. 12:30), but where the Word of the Kingdom finds a lodgment in the hearts of men and women there will be found unity one with the other and with Christ and God.

The Jewish people were divided among themselves: a token that the Word of God was not dominating them, even though they claimed to be His people. They were under the influence of the great Adversary, the mind of the flesh, as the Lord declared: "He that is not with me is AGAINST ME;" he is of the Kingdom of the Adversary (the *Satan*).

The Unforgivable Sin Having completed his instructive parable, the Lord now spoke in solemn terms to the scribes and Pharisees, warning them that they were guilty of committing the unforgivable sin.

He declared: "Therefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men. Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in that to come" (Mat. 12:31-32).

The enormity of their conduct in deliberately closing their eyes to facts, and claiming that the miracles of Jesus were performed through the influence of a pagan god, an unclean spirit of madness (Mk. 3:29-30), is shown by this open and stern rebuke. Thereby they were guilty of wilfully rejecting God's goodness, and when the open manifestation of the Spirit is in evidence as it was then, there is no forgiveness. Later, Christ freely forgave those who opposed him in ignorance, pleading their case with the Father on the grounds that they so acted "because they knew not what they did" (Lk. 23:34), and the same measure of forgiveness has been extended to others who

once were in a similar position of publicly repudiating the Lord (see Acts 3:17; 1Cor. 2:8; 1Tim. 1:13).

But there is no forgiveness for those who wantonly and knowingly reject an obvious Spirit-attested message (1Thes. 2:15-16).*

The Pharisees knew that their sarcastic explanation of Christ's miracles was a lie, for Nicodemus had declared: "We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles thou doest, except God be with him" (Jn. 3:2).

Nicodemus was frank and open, and voiced the secret belief of the Pharisees; but these who had come from Jerusalem merely to destroy the Lord's work were prepared to close their eyes to the fact that they were fighting against God. They deliberately sought to defeat God by ridiculing His work as manifested through the Son.

Christ warned them that there is absolutely no forgiveness for such flagrant folly; he warned them to carefully discriminate between a good work and an evil one.

"Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit," he declared.

He thus taught them to carefully examine the fruit of a tree, to determine whether it was a good or corrupt tree. In that light, the words and actions of the Lord should have been carefully compared with those of the Pharisees, and if proved good, accepted as such.

The Lord's penetrating words must have made the Pharisees squirm with indignation, especially as he had singled them out to address them, bringing them prominently before the attention of the whole multitude.

But worse was to follow for them. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," declared the wise man (Pro. 27:6), and the Lord, with such a motive, now publicly indicted the Pharisees, wounding them with words of rebuke. He classified them as the Seed of the serpent whose murderous desire was to bruise the heel of the seed of the woman; he described them as a brood of poisonous reptiles, revealing their venom by their words. Though they stood before the people in their Pharisaic robes which openly proclaimed that they were a separate community, more holy than others, the Lord revealed that their bitter, sarcastic, lying words were but an open manifestation of their wicked thoughts — that hidden behind their facade of self-righteousness was a fountain of iniquity, an evil heart that bubbled up words of wickedness. So he castigated them: "O generation of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the

* Christ's words do not relate to one who may drift from the faith, and, then seek to return, for, after all, Peter did that and found forgiveness. The Lord's warning relates to one deliberately distorting the obvious work of the Spirit into an action of the flesh. As the spirit gifts are not in evidence today, it is doubtful whether a person could today be guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle *["pernicious" – Diaglott]* word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned" (Mat. 12:34-37).

Though spoken directly to the Pharisees, the Lord's words are worth pondering over by all. The little word "idle" is better rendered "pernicious" (see Diaglott) and upon this theme, Paul utters some words of warning in Eph. 4:29-30; 5:4-6; 1Cor. 15:33. Jesus described those Pharisees who had used their ability to speak in order to defame his work as a "generation of vipers," thus tracing them back to the serpent in Eden. The serpent used his God-given ability to speak to utter wicked, pernicious words that led to sin, and was condemned for so doing, losing the power of speech. But the figurative seed of the serpent lives on, and has been noted for its lying speech ever since (Jn. 8:44). The God-given attribute of speech can be used to glorify Yahweh or otherwise as the Scriptures reveal in many places, and as we shall learn at the judgment seat of Christ (see Pro. 13:3; Rom. 10:10; Dan. 12:3; Lk. 19:12; Jude 15; Jas. 3:2-12). What powerful lessons the dumb, blind man learned on that day when he saw and spoke for the first time!

And what care we should exercise in our use of speech!

The Only Sign to be Given: That of Jonah

But not all the Pharisees present had endorsed the blasphemous suggestion that the Lord was insane; there were some who were impressed with all that they had seen and heard, though they were too cautious to come out boldly in support of Jesus. They had ample evidence that God was with him, and yet they were not too sure!

They desired a great sign from heaven to prove conclusively that he was the Messiah, something like the signs that Moses showed the people of Israel in Egypt to prove that he had been sent of Yahweh to them.

In their caution, therefore, and overlooking the notable miracle recently performed by the Lord, they now addressed him: "Master, we would see a sign from thee!"

This was the constant plea of these cautious Pharisees (see Mk. 8:11; Lk. 11:16; Jn. 2:18; 1Cor. 1:22). Time and again they were to request this, completely ignoring the fact that the miracles Jesus performed, the doctrine he enunciated, as well as the glorious character he revealed, demonstrated the truth of his claim that he was the Christ.

No other sign was to be given, for it was up to them to make the

best use of that which they had presented to them.

So the Lord replied: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign: and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth..."

The word Jonah means *Dove,* and it is very significant that at the baptism of the Lord, the Holy Spirit was seen descending upon him in the form of a dove (Lk. 3:22 — See *Story of the Bible,* page 181). The remarkable experiences of this prophet of doom foreshadowed those of the Lord Jesus. Jonah figuratively died and rose again, and then proceeded to Nineveh, to warn the people that if they did not repent they would be destroyed in forty days.

The Lord did the same, but the Nineveh to which he was sent (Jerusalem) did not repent, and forty years later was destroyed. So Jesus warned the people of their responsibility: "...The Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here..."

If those Pharisees had been godly-minded men, they would have searched the Book of Jonah to see what Jesus meant. Perhaps three of them did, for when Jesus hung lifeless from the cross, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea publicly acknowledged that they believed in him, as though his sacrificial death was the final piece of evidence they required to prove it (Jn. 19:38-39); and Paul the Pharisee later wrote: "Christ was buried, and rose again the third day *according to the Scriptures"* (1Cor. 15:3).

True Reform Demands that Evil be Replaced with Good

Meanwhile, the Lord Jesus earnestly continued to exhort the people to take heed to the message he had for them. He urged upon them the need of an affirmative religion in addition to a negative one. It is not enough to destroy evil, he told them, it must be replaced with good. For example, he had just cured one "possessed of a devil" who was both blind and dumb, and he had given him the power of sight and of speech. It was now important that the person should use these attributes to glorify God; for it is possible to use them for evil purposes.

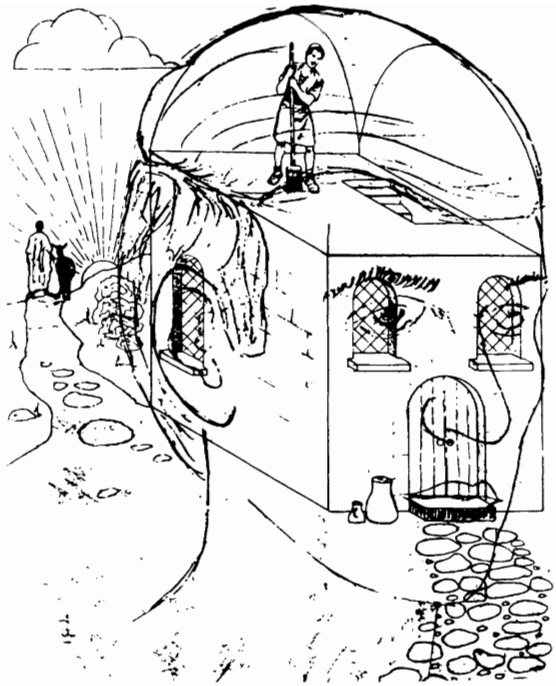
In like manner, it is useless people making promise of reform and breaking off bad habits without filling the vacuum thus created with the things of God, for otherwise, when temptation offers they will easily and quickly succumb. He declared: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits

more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation" (Mat. 12:43-45).

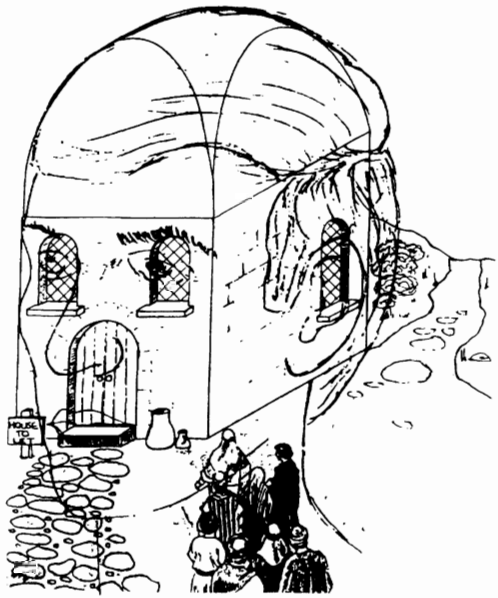
"This wicked generation" described the nation of Israel; and in his parable, Jesus likened it to a man out of whom evil had been cast, without goodness taking its place; or a cure being effected in a person without him using the miraculous, God-given health to glorify Yahweh. The reformations of both John Baptist and the Lord Jesus, had the effect of "sweeping and garnishing the house," so of cleansing the nation of much evil. But because the people neglected to apply the good spirit of divine teaching, the cleansed "house" remained empty. This, warned Jesus, provided opportunity for the re-entry of that which had been driven out, together with other evils, in which case, the last state would be worse than the first.

The parable was prophetic, for the Lord added: "Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation." The prophecy was fulfilled in the tragic events that led to the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus by the nation, and its destruction at the hands of the Romans. John Baptist's reform had been successful to the point that the people flocked to him in their thousands, and were baptised in the waters of repentance confessing their sins, and publicly proclaiming that they would forsake them; but they had rejected the practical application of Christ's teaching. The result of this negative approach to Truth was that they soon drifted back to their old ways and worse. In the terms of the parable, the old spirit returned bringing worse ones with it, and this led to the people committing the worst crime in history: even the crucifixion of the Messiah. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 at the hands of the Romans was the just judgment of God upon a nation that had turned from the privileges He had set before it.

Though Christ's parable had particular reference to his generation, it also has an application today. Nobody is spiritually safe whose life is empty. To "do" no harm is to do nothing; and even this negative attitude will not continue unless we are actively doing good. We might break bad habits, but unless we replace them with good habits, we leave but a void that must be filled with either good or bad, for we cannot exist without any habits at all! Paul has some powerful words of exhortation on this theme in Eph. 4:22-23.



The Lord's parable illustrates that if a person's mind is swept and garnished (above), but not filled with spiritual principles, the vacuum will be filled with the evil thinking of the flesh entering therein (right).



Chapter 9

JESUS' RELATIONS TRY TO RESTRAIN HIM

DURING the course of his teaching the people, Jesus had retired inside the house where he normally stayed in Capernaum; but intent upon listening to his every word, and thoughtlessly refusing to give him time for relaxation and meditation, many had followed him there.

Gradually the large reception court of the house became packed with people, all anxious to hear his discourse; and then there occurred one of the saddest incidents in his ministry, one which must have occasioned him the greatest pain, even though he knew it was predicted in the Old Testament.

In the House at Capernaum (Mat. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35)

His relations had been swayed by the whispering, slanderous campaign of his enemies into believing he was mad! Already they had sought to forcibly restrain him (see page 392). They had evidently been repulsed in this attempt, but now, having secured the support of his mother, they made their way to the house where the Lord was preaching, determined to remonstrate with him.

Their attitude towards Jesus had greatly changed in recent months. During his early ministry, his brethren followed with him (Jn. 2:12), but as it gathered momentum, they became ashamed of him. They misunderstood his dedicated life and burning zeal (see Psa. 69:9), whilst, on the other hand, they heeded the whispers of the Pharisees who were circulating the slander that he was "possessed" or demented. Perhaps their very familiarity with their half-brother bred a contempt and misunderstanding of his mission, so that they felt they must, for his own sake, interfere.

Thus, at a time when the people's enthusiasm for Jesus was nearing its peak, his own brethren had lost their belief in him as the Christ (ct. Jn. 2:12; 7:5)!

What of Mary his mother?

She, of course, *knew* that he was the Christ; the manner of his conception demonstrated that beyond any doubt. But now she saw her son in conflict with the leaders of the nation; she heard rumours circulated by men she respected, claiming that her son was demented; she could sense that the growing opposition from the rulers could lead to tragic results; she wondered whether her son was taking the right course; she had perhaps forgotten that it had been predicted that both she and her son must suffer (Lk. 2:35). Torn by conflicting emotions,

urged on by her own children who did not believe in their half-brother, completely confused in her mind, she gave her support to the unwarranted interference in the Lord's ministry that now took place.

"Thy Mother and Brethren Want Thee" Mary and her sons hastened to the house in which Jesus was teaching, but found it packed out with people. It was impossible to make their way inside, and yet they felt that their plea to Jesus had an urgency that would brook no delay.

Pleading with the people to, at least, get a message through to Jesus, they asked that he be told that they desired to speak with him.

So little did they appreciate the importance of his ministry and his preaching to the people that they would interrupt him in his work! They completely failed to recognise that first things must come first, and God's work must not be hindered under any consideration!

And so it was, that, in the middle of his discourse, when his mind was doubtless concentrating upon the theme of his preaching to the people to the exclusion of all else, Jesus was rudely interrupted by a disturbance among them, and as he looked enquiringly for the cause of this, he was told: "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee!"

Steadily the Lord looked at the now silent crowd before him. All had heard the request; all knew that his own family thought nothing of thoughtlessly interrupting him in the performance of God's work. In this, his brethren were quite unlike the little band of dedicated disciples that stood in a group on their own, not far from the Lord; they were not even like the audience of the people who had crowded into the house to hear him speak! No, on the grounds of fleshly relationship, his brethren would stop him in his labours to reproach him!

But, as Jesus later taught (Jn. 6:63), fleshly relationship counts for nothing if God's will is ignored. It is service to Yahweh that really counts, and which establishes a real relationship one with the other.



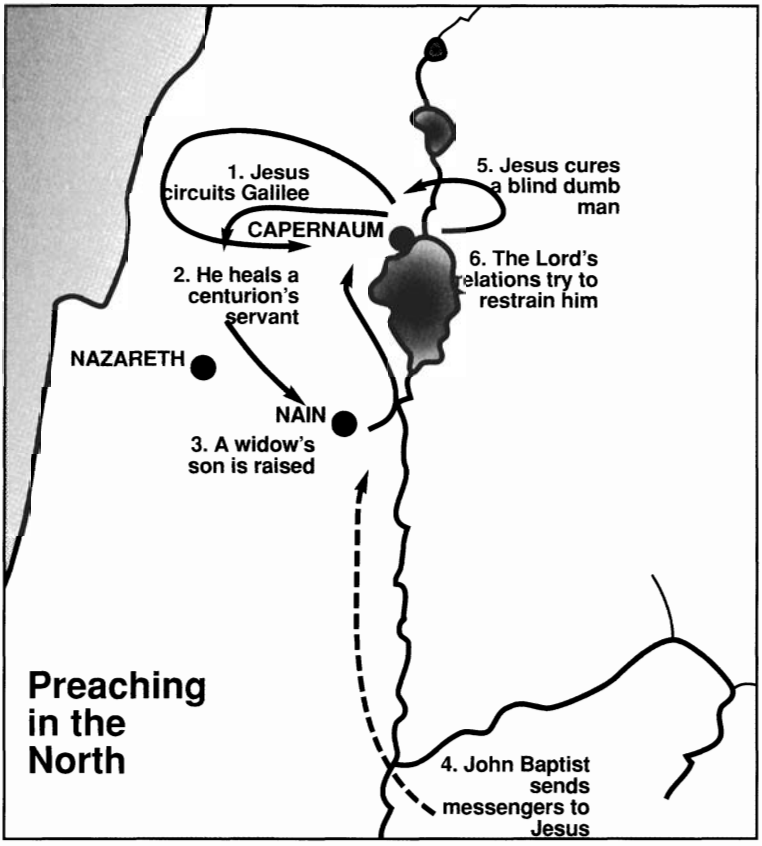
The Lord decided to impress this lesson upon all. He therefore answered the appeal first with a question, and then followed with an answer that must have made all present think deeply. "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" he asked.

And then he turned, and stretching forth his hand towards

his disciples, declared: "Behold, my mother and my brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother!"

This answer taught that faith is greater than flesh, that through it a person can attain unto a spiritual relationship with the Lord and with the Father that will constitute him a brother of Jesus and a son of God. Such a sonship is predicated upon action not upon fleshly descent or worldly claim. A true son of God is one in whom God dwells by His Word, for in the Hebrew, the term "son of" signifies *filled with*. Thus a Son of God is one filled with God, and this will be revealed by his anxious desire to do God's will. On the other hand, a son of Belial (worthlessness) is one filled with worthlessness, whose very actions demonstrate the fleshly motives of his heart.

What a glorious privilege it is that we can join the family of God, and claim the Lord Jesus as our brother.



Parables and Teachings

Chapter 1

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

HAVING ended his discourse in the house, the Lord retired from the city of Capernaum, to make his way to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. This is a lovely inland stretch of fresh water, mostly ringed by high bare hills that rise up steeply to overshadow its blue, sparkling surface. At the site of ancient Capernaum, however, a wide, fertile plain (then heavily populated) gives easy access to the water's edge, and the Lord thoughtfully walked to the beach below.

Teaching by the Seaside (Mat. 13:1-9; Mk. 4:1-9; Lk. 8:4-8) As news of his movements spread abroad, people followed him to the seashore, crowding around him in such numbers, struggling to get near him, that he was in danger of being forced into the water. Taking refuge in a little boat which was then pushed a short distance from off the shore, the Lord stood up to teach the people.

From the boat, Jesus looked back on a most colourful scene. The blue waters of the lake were fringed by a strip of yellow sand that ran around its edge, and on this stood the crowd of eager listeners in their colourful eastern robes. Beyond his audience could be seen the plain he had just traversed, sloping gradually upwards until it merged into the hilly countryside. Fields ready for sowing ran up the sides of these slopes, and possibly, as the Lord viewed the scene, he saw on the side of a hill, behind the beach, a sower scattering his seed from his bag, with birds excitedly flying around and behind him.

It was all parabolic of his own mission. He was sowing the seed of the kingdom, and his disciples were to follow him in this work. Before him, in the various types of people, there were different kinds of "soil" in which the seed could be sown. There were the hardened Pharisees in their self-righteousness; there were the eager, but superficial listeners, caught up in the general excitement, hoping to witness a miracle; there were the worldly-minded businessmen and pleasure-seekers, curious of the message that Jesus gave, but whose worldly responsibilities or love of pleasure took precedence over their affections; and there were also some like Nicodemus the Pharisee, or the eager, enthusiastic Peter, or Matthew the publican: men who generally could be classed as wayside ground, or rocky ground, or thorny ground, but whom Jesus, by the influence of his teaching, had improved to become "good ground" and to bring forth fruit of varying quantity to the glory of the sower.

The Lord realised, as he pondered upon these things, that each soil needed different treatment, if it was to become really fertile, a fruitful medium for the development of the seed of the Word, that he and his disciples were to sow.

It was under these circumstances, that the Parable of the Sower was presented to the people.

It provided the key to all parables, as the Lord later implied when he revealed its meaning to the disciples in the seclusion of their home when they had returned there (see Mk. 4:10, 13).

Meanwhile, in the ship by the seashore, he commenced his address to the people: "Behold!" he said, indicating the sower on the distant slopes, "hearken!"

These two words prefaced this most important parable (Mk. 4:3). They are words of emphasis. The word "behold" is calculated to arrest attention, whilst "hearken" indicates that something of unusual importance is about to be imparted to the hearers upon which they need to carefully ponder. The importance of the parable was again emphasised at its conclusion, when, in words which are typical of him and were later used by him seven times in sending important messages to the seven ecclesias in Asia (Rev. 2-3), the Lord exclaimed: "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear!" (Mat. 13:9).

The Lord Jesus, therefore, in these parables, in turn urged the people to use their eyes ("behold"), hearts ("hearken"), and ears ("who hath ears") in order to grasp the divine message.

The Parable of the Sower was then unfolded:

"A sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up..."

It was a common, every-day happening, and with such scenes the people were well-familiar, but the significance he placed upon it charged the incident and the parable with power.



Unfortunately the people did not understand what it was all about, and later, when they returned home, the disciples asked him why he taught in parables, and what was their significance anyway. The Lord then explained it to them in detail, revealing in turn the significance of the Sower, the Seed, and the Soil.

The Sower The parable of the sower did not originate with Jesus. Many centuries before, the Spirit of Christ in Isaiah had proclaimed a similar parable to the people of Judah. Like the Lord, the prophet also added the admonition: "Give ear and hear My voice; hearken, and hear My speech" (Isa. 28:23-29).

Then followed Isaiah's Parable of the Sower. In that case, the Sower was Yahweh, and the prophet, on Yahweh's behalf, asked some very pertinent questions.

He saw Israel as hard, unyielding soil. But the divine plowman knew how to treat such soil, and the rough, harsh plow had been brought to bear upon it, ruthlessly tearing the ground open that it might receive the beneficial influences of heaven, and so become capable of producing fruit after sowing. Isaiah asked this question:

"Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? Doth he open and break the clods of his ground?" In other words, is Yahweh, the Plowman, to continue plowing among His people without sowing seed and reaping a harvest?

The answer is, No! He desires a crop, otherwise He will abandon such soil.

That was also implied in the Lord's parable proclaimed in the ears of the wondering people on that sunny day, from the ship not far from the shore of Lake Galilee.

The Lord was the Sower on the day the parable was given, but later, when he had ascended into heaven, that duty and privilege rested on his disciples; and today it remains with those who would teach the things of Yahweh to their neighbours.

What are the responsibilities of a sower? To discern the different kinds of "soil" outlined in the parable, and provide for the needs of each. If seed is only scattered on wayside ground, or stony soil, or among thorns, there will never be a bountiful harvest. It is inevitable that some must fall in such places, but he is a poor sower who will scatter only on such ground, or who will not provide proper treatment for sterile soil where it exists. Each type of soil needs special preparation before it will bring forth fruit. If it is hard, wayside soil, the plow must be used to tear it apart; if it is stony soil, the stones must be carefully gathered out; if it is thorn-infested, they must be ruthlessly torn down.

By these means, even poor ground can be made to bring forth fruit.

The Soil The "soil" represents those to whom the Word is preached, and the Lord described four different kinds of soil.

• *The Wayside:* This soil was trodden hard by the feet of men, so that the seed rested on its surface to be eagerly gobbled up by the

shrill, excited birds that followed the sower. All the toil and labour that he expended in the heat of the day was a dead loss when the seed fell on such ground.



Four different kinds of soils

The Explanation: See Mat. 13:19. This describes the type of person to whom the Word may be preached, but who does not thoroughly understand it, or does not properly consider it so as to absorb it (the word "understand" can signify this). The "wicked one" (satan, the flesh), will quickly, like the birds following the sower, catch away that which has been sown, so that no lasting impression will be made.

The Lesson: It is not enough to interest people in the Word; they must be given to such instruction as will cause them to "consider" deeply the things taught (Mat. 13:19; *Diaglott*). The plow is necessary on such soil before it is fit for sowing. The soil of the heart must be ruthlessly torn open by the gospel-plow preparatory to carefully sowing the seed, if fruit is to be expected. Forthright, straight-forward talking is often needed to bring home properly to some people their true standing and responsibility in the sight of God, and then must follow careful after-tuition.

• *The Stony-places.* This is termed "rocky ground" in Lk. 8:6, and relates to rock covered with earth. Such acts as a basin, holding moisture more than does deep soil where it will drain away. With its shallow covering of well-watered soil, stony ground will give early indication of quick growth; but, alas, when the sun is hot above, such shallow soil dries quickly, and as the roots have no opportunity to dig deep, the plant of early promise soon withers and dies. The early growth of such plants will be greater than those with deeper roots, but will not be sustained.

The Explanation. See Matthew 13:20. Some hear the Word and quickly, all too quickly, accept it ("anon" is rendered "immediately" in Mk. 4:16). They joyfully pronounce it as truth, and accept all that they are told without question. They appear so enthusiastic, as to delude the sower into believing that they are just the kind of people for whom the Truth was designed, and they make extremely rapid and early progress.

But soon their spiritual growth withers, for their's is but a surface acceptance of Truth. They have no real depth of understanding, no deeply-bedded anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, reaching beyond

what can be seen with the eyes (Heb. 6:19), no grasp of the essentials of faith; therefore, when tribulation arises (and Christ showed that it is inevitable that it will do so) they are "soon offended" or stumble and fall, as the word in the Greek signifies.

They are those who, the prophet declared, "sought Yahweh daily, and delighted to know His ways" so long as it did not involve anything more than that (Isa. 58:2); they are those who "with their mouth show much love, but their heart [secretly] goeth after their covetousness" (Eze. 33:31); or those whom Christ described as being "willing to rejoice" whilst the light of popular appeal shines (Jn. 5:35), but who are soon discouraged by adversity.

The Lesson: The skilful sower, knowing that tribulation is inevitable, will see that the seed has ample soil in which to become rooted. His teaching will be of such a character as to provide for such needs when they arise. He will warn against a merely fleshly, superficial exuberance of spirits, or sense of well-being, by soberly stating the real issues involved and the need for personal sacrifice. He will teach the need of "crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24 — another way of describing the tearing out of thorns), and of "fellowshipping the sufferings of Christ" (Phil. 3:10), so that his instruction will centre upon the atonement and its personal application. The depths of the Word will be explored to that end, and the soil prepared in such a way as to allow the roots to penetrate.

• *Among the Thorns:* No matter how good the seed or the soil may be, if the latter is thorn-infested, the former will have no chance to grow, for these strong, rank, virile plants will surely choke it. The sower must therefore remove the thorns, otherwise his labour will be a complete waste of time. Nor is there any use him being gentle with them, or cultivating them in the hope that they will turn into useful plants — they must be torn out by the roots, for otherwise they will clutter the ground, and destroy hard work.

The Explanation: Jesus described the thorns as "the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the lusts of other things," and "the pleasures of this life" (Mat. 13:22; Mk. 4:19; Lk. 8:14). These, he declared, will "choke the Word," so that it will bring "no fruit to perfection" (Lk. 8:15). These things must be ruthlessly torn out of the soil by the sower before he can expect to obtain fruit from the seed. It is foolish to allow the choking thorns to remain, on the excuse that "these things are necessary," and "we must not be too narrow," or "you cannot put old heads on young shoulders." That sort of worldly advice will only encourage the thorns to grow until they choke the Word, for the seductive attractions of material prosperity or pleasure can divide a person's loyalty to Christ and finally overthrow it. It is always easier to produce a crop of healthy thorns than to cultivate seed that will reproduce fruit!

The Lesson: It is significant that the very things described in this parable as "thorns," are elsewhere described as "time of the end" temptations (see Lk. 21:34-35). Material prosperity and pleasures are thorns that threaten to destroy the seed of the kingdom today. The minds of most men are dominated today by greed; greed of money, of pleasure, of possessions. That constitutes the modern environment, and special attention should be given to this on the part of "present-day" sowers of the Word as they go about their work. Candidates for baptism must be taught that they cannot serve two masters; they cannot be slaves of Christ and of Sin at the same time. Worldly sport, worldly pleasures, worldly interests can choke the seed of the Kingdom if permitted to gain the ascendancy over the things of God. A wise sower, therefore, will seek to carefully clear the ground of thorns when planting the seed.

• *Good soil:* This is soil that has felt the impact of the plow, that has been cleared of stones, and is empty of thorns. Even so it will vary in its productivity, bringing forth varying degrees of fruitfulness: "some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold." The sower has done all he can for it, tending it properly, permitting the rain and warmth of heaven to fructify it, and now he must wait the blessing of heaven itself. He now learns the lesson of patience, of waiting; and finds that the poorer the soil, the more attention he must give it if he expects to gather the fruit.

The Explanation: The Lord declared that good soil represents those who "hear the Word, and understand it" (Mat. 13:23). They are those who give it admission in their hearts to that end. They are described as "receiving it" (Mk. 4:20), or (in Luke's account of the parable) "in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit WITH PATIENCE" (Lk. 8:15). Good soil having been turned over by the plow, having been cleared of stones and thorns, is receptive of heaven's beneficial influence, so that seed planted therein will bring forth fruit.

The Lesson: The three accounts of this parable, in Matthew, Mark and Luke, should be closely studied to obtain the greatest lesson. Soil must be *made* receptive to the influences of heaven before it can be styled "good." The plow must turn it over, so that the impact of rain, oxygen and warmth will be properly felt. As the rain will soak into such soil and be retained therein, so "a good and honest heart" will reflect upon the seed of the gospel sown therein, and will produce growth to the glory of its Creator. But this requires patience and faith. James wrote: "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient..." (Jas. 5:7).

With patience, the fruit will be revealed in such, for those described as "good ground" are they who are deliberate in their

choice, and steady in its maintenance. They are not stolid and indifferent to the teaching of God as are those described as wayside soil. They do not reveal the rapid growth and rapid decline as those who are likened to stony ground; they do not allow the cares and pleasures of life to unduly move them, as those represented as thorny ground; on the contrary, they are receptive of divine influences and reveal steady, constant, quiet progress to produce fruit of varying degrees; for all have not the same abilities or the same opportunities.

The Seed

The seed is the Word of the Kingdom. Peter describes it as "incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth forever" (1Pet. 1:23). The fruit of this seed is the new way of life in Christ Jesus, called by Paul, "the new man renewed in knowledge" (Col. 3:10). The Lord taught "The words I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (Jn. 6:63), and if we sow to the Spirit-Word, we will reap life everlasting (Gal. 6:8). If that seed is sown in good soil, it will bring forth its fruits as Paul taught the believers in Galatia: "For the fruit of the Spirit [i.e., the Truth — see 1Jn. 5:6] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law..."

Let us open the soil of our hearts to the influence of God's Word, let us remove the stones and thorns that are natural to the flesh, and let us cultivate the good seed of the kingdom in the assurance that by so doing we shall ultimately find an entrance therein when the King returns to claim his own.

The Parable as an Allegory

The Lord gave special prominence to the parable of the sower, representing it as the key to all his parables. When, later, his disciples asked him the meaning of it in the house, he answered them: "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" (Mk. 4:13).

The parable seems to contain an allegory as well as moral teaching, roughly dividing the areas where the gospel made its appearance, and predicting the reception it would find in those places. It is not only a wonderful expression of Truth, but also a remarkable prophecy of how the Word would be received by mankind in the outworking of history.

In his description, the Lord declared that grain fell first on the well-trodden wayside where it had little opportunity to spring up. This sowing of the seed by the wayside can be compared to the ministry of the Word to the Jewish people, along a path so often trod by the prophets. It had comparatively little impact upon the Jewish people.

From Judah, the Truth spread first to Asia. Here ecclesias quickly sprang up; but time revealed that they had little true endurance. The

messages of Christ to the ecclesias in Asia (Rev. 2-3) revealed that sad fact, for like the seed on stony ground, the Truth quickly flourished there, but as quickly withered away.

Meanwhile, the gospel message moved on to centres such as Greece and Rome. Here eventually, however, in Greek and Roman Catholicism, it encountered many thorns which sprang up to choke the good seed of the kingdom, so that it "became unfruitful."

Finally, in latter years, the gospel moved further west, to find its greatest fruit, in these times, in the English-speaking world. There it has flourished to bring forth, "some an hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

This parable is therefore full of deep principles and instruction. It teaches the sower how he should go about his work; it instructs the receiver how he should accept the seed. It is prophetic of the whole purpose of God in sowing, describing, by four different soils, the major divisions in the development of the Truth during the ages. Above all, it provides encouragement, for it shows that not all are expected to bring forth the same amount of fruit, but that each one with patience is only expected to develop that of which he or she is capable. God asks no more than that!

Chapter 2

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES

FROM the boat, a short distance from the shore, the Lord continued to instruct the people. He had concluded the parable of the Sower* and in order to impress the importance of his teaching, he added some words which were possibly confusing to many of the people who did not care to seek out their meaning, but which were designed to show the need of those who have received the Truth (the seed) to dispense it to others.

"No man, when he has lighted a candle (this should be rendered, 'a lamp') covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light," he declared.

What did he mean?

"Let your Light Shine..." (Mat. 13:24-30, 36-43)

In these days of electric lighting it seems a strange remark, but in those days of oil lamps it was perfectly obvious what he meant.

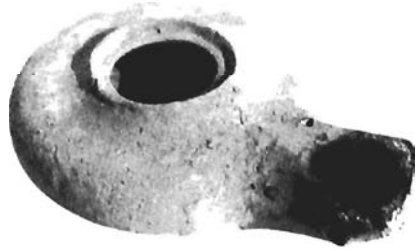
In Mark's account of the parable, the word "vessel" is rendered as "a bushel" (Mk. 4:21), and this was the name then given to a lamp-cover that was placed over the lamp to conserve the oil. When the "bushel" was placed over the lamp it did not use much oil, because its light was muted.

However, the bushel was never used when visitors were to arrive; on those occasions, the lamp was made to shine forth at its brightest, in order to attract and welcome those expected.

In like manner, taught the Lord, those who have the oil of Truth, should allow the light of its teaching to spread abroad amid the prevailing darkness as much as possible, in order to attract those who may be drawn by its shining message.

Jesus continued: "For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear!"

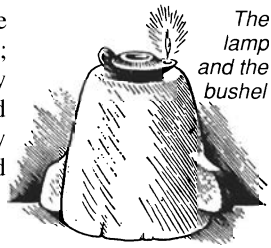
In those words, he taught his disciples that the time was



Oil lamp in the days of Jesus

* See Mk. 4:21-25; Lk. 8:16-18 for these additional comments after the parable of the sower had been completed.

at hand when the full revelation of the divine purpose would be made (Rom. 16:25-26; 1Cor. 2:7-10) and it was their responsibility to carefully hear and heed all that was told them, that they might be equipped to carry the message to others throughout the world when the time had come for them to do so.



The lamp and the bushel

Another Parable by the Seaside

With this introduction, Jesus immediately commenced his next parable. It was related to the one he had just finished (that of the Sower), but this time it concentrated attention on the seed sown rather than on the type of soil used; and by so doing, the Lord showed the importance of vigilance in the work of preaching. He began: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field..."

On the distant slopes, beyond where the people were standing on the shore, the Lord could see the fields where possibly a sower was at his toil, walking up and down the field and carefully distributing the seed.

The Lord's previous parable had impressed the need to carefully prepare the soil in order to get the best results from sowing; this one embraced the harvest-time, and revealed that a careful discrimination will then be made between that which is sown. It taught that the greatest care and vigilance must be exercised by those who are styled "co-labourers with God" lest evil seed be found among the good. Paul later taught: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8).

And so Jesus told the story of the man who sowed good seed in his field, only to find when the crop grew, that his enemy had secretly sown tares there also!

The Parable

A certain farmer, he declared, having carefully chosen the best possible seed, sowed it in his field, and retired to leave it to the supervision of his servants.

But they were not as vigilant as they could have been, for whilst "they slept" (Mat. 13:25), the farmer's enemy stealthily crept into the field, and sowed tares among the wheat.

The soil was good, and soon, under the beneficial influences of heaven's blessing, a crop gradually made its appearance. Soon the field was a sea of waving green shoots, with every promise of excellent harvest; then the ears formed, and there appeared the grain in the ears.

But to the consternation of the servants, the action of the enemy was now revealed.

Many of the stalks of supposed wheat proved to be tares! There was little, if any, grain in those stalks, and it was obvious that somebody had deliberately spoiled the crop by sowing among it the bad seed. Sometimes it is very hard to tell the difference between tares and wheat, for when they are growing they are very similar. It is only at harvest time, when the plants have matured, that the tares become apparent.

Hastening to the husbandman, the servants made their report: "Sir," they said, "You planted good seed in your field, from whence has come these tares?"

"It is the work of an enemy," declared the sower as he inspected the crop.

"Shall we go and gather them out?" asked the servants.

"No," replied the sower, "for in doing so you might also root up the wheat with the tares. Let both grow together until the harvest, and then I will command the reapers, Gather together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn!"

This completed the short parable. It was but a simple story, yet it taught a profound truth relating to the things of the kingdom.

The Explanation Later, the Lord explained the meaning of the parable to his mystified disciples. He had sent the multitude away, and had returned to the house in Capernaum (Mat. 13:36), and there he discussed with his disciples the meaning of the parables he had delivered unto the people.

"Explain to us the meaning of the parable of the tares of the field," they asked him.

Jesus did so.

"He who sows the good seed is the Son of man," he commenced.

Jesus sowed the good seed at his first advent. He then ascended into heaven and the "field" was given into the care of those who are elsewhere described as his "co-labourers" (1Cor. 3:5-9), but in the parable are called "his servants" (v. 27; cp. Rom. 1:1).

The first of these were the apostles, but after their death, whilst they "slept," the care of the field was given into the hands of others who were not so vigilant.

This allowed the enemy to secretly sow his seed among the wheat (cp. Acts 20:30; 2Tim. 3:13; 4:3-5).

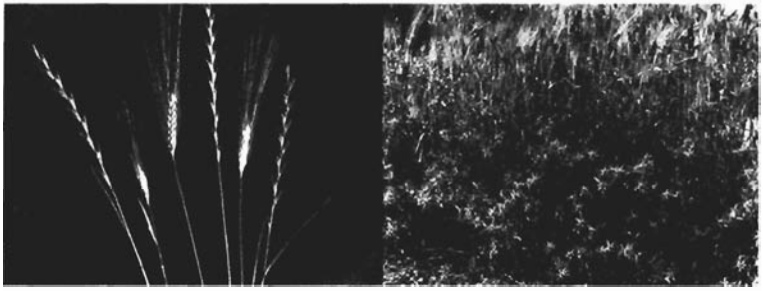
This enemy, explained the Lord, "is the devil." By that he did not mean a fallen supernatural angel, as some people teach; for the devil is a Bible synonym for the physical lusts of the flesh which are at enmity with God. This is shown by the statement of Hebrews 2:14,

which defines the devil as that which Christ came to destroy, and as that which has the power of death; for elsewhere, we are told that Christ came to destroy sin (Heb. 9:26), and that sin holds the power of death (1Cor. 15:56; Rom. 5:21). Sin, however, is used in two senses in the Bible. Firstly, it relates to active disobedience; and secondly, it is used as a figure of speech for human nature (Rom. 5:19-20; 6:10; 7:17, 23; 2Cor. 5:21). That is why Paul taught that he who sows to the flesh will reap corruption and death; and why Jesus taught that gratification of the unbridled lusts of the flesh will lead men from God (Mk. 7:20-23).

It was the seed sown by this enemy that caused the tares to appear; and the tares, explained the Lord, represent "the children of the wicked one." This "wicked one" is the flesh, so that whereas the "good seed" represents the children of the kingdom, or those who reveal the fruits of Christ's teaching, the "tares" represent the children of wickedness, or those who reveal the works of the flesh.

Who are the Tares? Jesus described the children of wickedness as "tares." This weed is a noxious plant which grows in the east, and is very much like darnel. It very closely resembles the wheat of eastern countries, so as to be almost indistinguishable from it, except on the closest scrutiny.

At maturity, however, the difference becomes slightly more marked. For example, it is coarser and less compact than wheat, and the principal difference is shown by its want of fruit, only a few grains appearing in a large, full ear.



Wheat and Tares

Tares are unprofitable, for they clutter up the ground at the expense of good grain; but even worse, they can be very dangerous, for they have poisonous tendencies. If its seed is mingled in the flour, it can cause undue sleepiness, inebriety, nausea, convulsions, and even death. The effect of eating it is said to particularly affect the head and the eyes, causing difficulty in clear thought and in proper sight.

The tares, therefore, relate to a class of people who apparently accept the gospel, and who look so much like genuine converts as to

be indistinguishable from such until close scrutiny at the harvest (the judgment) reveals their coarse stalks and lack of fruit!


Women sifting corn

When the servants of the sower asked him whether they should go through the crop and root out the tares, he commanded them not to do so unless they destroy some of the wheat with the tares. He instructed them to leave this work of gathering out the tares until the harvest time when the reapers, with their superior skill, and commanded by the sower, would first gather the tares into bundles to burn them, and afterwards bring his wheat into his barn.

These instructions give us a clue as to what type of person is referred to as "the tares."

The tares are those found in the ecclesias, who are almost indistinguishable from the good grain, and over whom the present servants of the Lord have no power to exclude.

They, therefore, cannot relate to the openly wicked, for such are to be removed out of the ecclesia (1Cor. 5:13). They are not obvious heretics who have turned from the Truth, for such are to be rejected (Tit. 3:10). The tares are illegitimate wheat, having the outward appearance of true discipleship, but in reality producing none of its true fruits. They are hypocrites, mouthing words of sanctity, manifesting promise of good things to come, but never really revealing its true fruits. At present, because men cannot read the hearts of their fellows, it is difficult to discriminate between them and true wheat, so that in attempting to root out one, there is a danger of destroying the other. The true state of each plant, however, will be revealed at the harvest time, and then will be shown whether it is wheat or darnel.

How the Tares will be Removed

The Lord explained to his disciples: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

When the Judgment Seat is set up at Christ's return, he will use

the angels as his reapers (Mk. 8:38; Lk. 12:8-9). Even now they overshadow our lives (see Mat. 18:10; Psa. 34:7; Exo. 23:20), recording our development or otherwise, as the seed takes root in our hearts. In that age, when Yahweh's harvest is to be reaped, they will assist to bring light to our true motives and character (Lk. 12:2; 1Cor. 4:5; 2Cor. 5:10). Scandals that offend,* and those who practise iniquity, will be figuratively cast into a "furnace of fire" which is symbolic of the second death (Rev. 20:14), whilst the wheat, the good grain, will be revealed as such to be honoured in the kingdom then to be set up on earth.

What profound teaching is found in these parables! First, in the parable of the sower, the Lord had shown how needful it is to properly prepare the soil for sowing, then he revealed the duty of his followers to clearly reveal the light that others may be attracted to it, and now he taught them to exercise due care and vigilance after the seed has been sown, lest "the enemy" assert his influence, and tares are found among the wheat.



* Notice the rendering in the margin of Mat. 13:41. The word literally means "stumbling blocks," and is here used in relation to persons. At the Judgment Seat of Christ many scandals that have disturbed ecclesial life will be revealed for what they truly are, and those responsible for them, and whose actions are persistently hypocritical, will be dealt with in the manner indicated in the Lord's explanation of his parable. They will be consigned to the second death.

Why Speakest Thou unto Them in Parables?

This question was put to the Lord Jesus when he was in the house alone with his disciples. It is not set in proper sequence in Mat. 13:10, but was asked by his disciples at the end of the day during which he had expounded a number of parables to the people.

The sequence of incidents on this day is as follows:

1. **He was teaching in the crowded house, and received the message that his mother and brethren were seeking for him (Mat. 12:49-50).**
2. **At the conclusion of his discourse he went down by the seaside and taught in parables from out of the boat (Mat. 13:1-2).**
3. **At the end of the day he returned to the house and discussed the parables with the twelve and others of his disciples who crowded its interior (Mk. 4:10).**
4. **His mother and brethren tried a second time to restrain him and received the same answer of reproof.**

Why did Jesus speak in parables? There were important reasons as follows:

1. **It fulfilled Old Testament prophecy: "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old" (Psa. 78:2; see also Psa. 49:3-4).**
2. **It set an example to the disciples, teaching them to seek spiritual instruction from the natural things of life (cp. 1Cor. 15:46).**
3. **It provided a more telling and unanswerable form of reproof (Mat. 21:28-46).**
4. **It was a more effective means of illustrating Truth to those prepared to seek the meaning of the parables (see Mat. 13:11, 18).**
5. **It was a means of separating those who were anxious to learn God's way from those who were indifferent to it; for the latter would be impatient of seeking the meaning of the difficult lessons presented (see Mat. 13:13-14). Note that Mark renders this: "I speak to them without in parables" (ch. 4:11).**
6. **These "secrets" excited the righteous to search, and their curiosity thus aroused led them to seek out other deep "mysteries" of the Word, and so increased their understanding and desire to learn more (cp. Mk. 4:13; 1Cor. 4:1).**

The word "parable" comes from a Greek word *parabole*, signifying, "to compare together; a similitude; a parallel." A parable is thus a similitude taken from a natural object to illustrate some spiritual truth.

Chapter 3

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SEED

FROM the ship just off shore, Jesus continued to teach the people. The two previous parables prepared the way for the next which Mark records in his Gospel, though Matthew does not. The Lord had shown the need to prepare the ground and plant good seed; and now he revealed from whence will come the blessings of a good growth. The parable clearly illustrates that in the absence of the divine blessing, men labour in vain. Paul later made use of this thought when he taught: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1Cor. 3:6-7). He showed that a gospel-worker must labour in faith.

The Lord, from the ship, taught the same truth.

Man's Labour Dependent on God's Blessing (Mk. 4:26-29)

He described the labouring sower. He rose early in the morning to perform his work, and he slept at night. But all the time, whether he was up and working, or in bed asleep, God was labouring! The rain continued to pour down from the heavens, the sun arose to warm the earth, and gradually the life in the tiny seed burst into being — without the labourer knowing the means whereby it was done! He could plant the seed, but he could not provide the rain or the sun, and even though he might provide water or light artificially, who controlled nature so that under these influences, the seed died in the soil, to bring forth a new form of life?

The farmer is utterly dependent upon the blessing of God.

So also is the gospel-worker.

The Psalmist declared: "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so [better: "thus"] He giveth His beloved sleep."

Isaiah declares: "As the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord Yahweh will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (Isa. 61:11).

It is all the work of Yahweh.

Contentment induces good sleep, for a man can properly rest in the assurance that all is well. The gospel labourer who exercises faith, leaving it to Yahweh to grant His blessing, will discover a "peace of mind that passeth the understanding" of man. And he will receive a blessing, "he knoweth not how." But he must exercise patience.

In his parable, the Lord spoke of the slow growth of that which is

planted: "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The process of natural growth cannot be hurried; it comes to maturity "of itself." First the tender blade appears; then, as the stalk grows to maturity the farmer, with pleasure, anticipates the fruit of his toil. He observes that the ear has formed, that the full corn has ripened in the ear, after which he prepares to reap the harvest.

Patience, care, and trust in God are all required. James taught: "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" (ch. 5:7).

Labour, patience, faith — all are necessary in this vital work of sowing the good seed, and reaping a harvest!

These are some of the important lessons the Lord taught in this parable. He concluded it by saying: "When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

The word "immediately" is a reference to the offering that a true Israelite was called upon to make as soon as the grain had ripened. Before harvesting it for his own use, he had to cut a sheaf of the first fruits and offer it to Yahweh. This was the way Yahweh had appointed that thanks should be paid to Him (Lev. 23:10), and in obeying this law, the worshipper acknowledged that the blessings of the harvest had come from the Almighty.

Though we are not today under the Law of Moses, we must not forget the principles and lessons set forth by it, and therefore we should ever be ready with our thanks to God for blessings received from Him. We are always ready to pray to Him for help; let us be just as ready in our thanksgiving to Him for benefits received, and let those thanks be not in word merely, but in some tangible evidence of our appreciation.

The firstfruits of the harvest belonged to Him (Exo. 22:29), and it was for that purpose that the man in the parable "immediately put in his sickle" because the harvest had come. This is particularly the case with the harvest to be gathered in by the preaching of the gospel. Those who shall be accepted at Christ's return are styled a "kind of firstfruits" (Jas. 1:17-18), and as such they will be associated with the Lord Jesus in the kingdom he will set up on earth (Rev. 14:1-4).

Progressive Teaching of the Parables

On this one day, by the seaside, Jesus spoke five parables unto the people, four of which are recorded in Matthew's Gospel, and one by Mark (the third, the Parable of the Good Seed — ch. 4). Whilst each of these parables is complete in itself, they also set forth progressively the purpose of Yahweh concerning His kingdom (they are all parables relating to the kingdom), as well as revealing in sequence important practical lessons.

Prophetically, the five parables showed the divine purpose in relation to the Kingdom thus:

1. THE SOWER — The widespread proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

2. THE TARES — Coming discrimination among the household and the world at the judgment.

3. THE GOOD SEED — The blessing of God on the righteous.

4. THE MUSTARD SEED — The future magnitude of that which is today despised.

5. THE LEAVEN — The powerful influence of the Kingdom message in the coming Age.

Notice the development: 1. The proclaiming of the Gospel; 2. The setting up of the Judgment Seat; 3. The blessing of the righteous; 4. The worldwide development of the Kingdom; 5. The final impact of the presently-despised gospel message on the whole world at Christ's coming.

Now observe the practical lessons progressively set forth in these five important parables:

1. THE SOWER — Take care how you teach and hear.

2. THE TARES — Do not be led astray by false teaching that has the appearance of being true.

3. THE GOOD SEED — The labourer in God's field should seek the divine blessing on his toil.

4. THE MUSTARD SEED — Under God's supervision small things can produce great results.

5. THE LEAVEN — Divine teaching works silently to reveal its influence in future times.

Chapter 4

THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND LEAVEN

JESUS continued his discourse with another two parables. The first concerned a tiny mustard seed which grows into a tree large enough for birds to be able to lodge in its branches. The second drew its lesson from the very small piece of leaven that is required to leaven a large amount of meal.

The parables were based upon common, everyday incidents; but they expressed profound truths, as the disciples later learned.

Two Parables Used on Two Occasions (Mat. 13:31-33; Mk. 4:30-32)

We have joined them together because the Lord used these two parables in exactly the same order on two occasions. The first was when he was teaching from the boat as recorded in Mat. 13:1-2, 31-32, and Mk. 4:1-2, 30-32, and the second was some months later, after he had performed a notable miracle (Lk. 13:11-19).

As parables, they both seem to teach the same lesson, but as we will show there is a very important difference between them both. For it was a man who sowed the tiny mustard seed in the ground which grew into the large tree; but it was a woman who hid the leaven in the three measures of meal until it was all leavened.

Why the man in the one case and the woman in the other?

It is natural, of course, for a man to do planting and a woman to do cooking, but we feel that in the significance of the two parables it was necessary for a man to appear in the one and a woman in the other.

Why?

Well, notice, first, that the Lord used both parables to illustrate the things of the Kingdom of God, so that, in some way, they relate to that which is yet to be established in the earth.

Let us first consider the mustard seed and the tree that grew from it, and afterward we will consider the man who sowed it.

Botanists suggest that the species spoken of is the *Khardah,* which is Arabic for "mustard." It is a tiny



The Mustard Plant

grain, which, because of its minuteness, came to symbolise small beginnings. Jesus described it as the "least of all seeds," and it could well have been the smallest seed known to Jews at that time.

But the *Khardah*, unlike the mustard plant of western countries, grew into a tree which, in comparison with the usual run of herbs, can well be described as "the greatest among herbs."

How like the Kingdom of God! The things concerning the Kingdom of God, which were then planted by the "man Christ Jesus" are least in the consideration of men today, so that in all their plans and schemes for the future, they take not the slightest interest in the fact that Yahweh has a purpose with the earth. Moreover, the foundation of the Kingdom of God of the future, is the humble, despised carpenter of Nazareth, yet to be revealed before all mankind as universal monarch exercising omnipotent authority, whilst the symbol of the kingdom he shall establish is a little stone that grows into a mountain filling the whole earth (Dan. 2:35).

What a wonderful, inspiring parable, teaching the disciples never to despise small beginnings, or the humble efforts of men and women performed in faith. Like the mustard seed, from small beginnings these can produce mighty results.

As the people pictured the large mustard tree, with its wide-spreading leafy branches among which the birds found lodgment, Jesus called upon them to consider that it all sprang from the tiniest seed!

How was it possible?

Only by God's power in nature.

And only by His intervention will the humble efforts of men and women today, and in past ages, be merged into a movement which shall result in the Kingdom of God dominating all nations. The resurrection will bring this about.

In the parable, the Lord described how the "fowls of the air" lodged in the branches of this tree. Elsewhere in the Bible (cp. Dan. 4:12), they are used symbolically of the nations, so that by the use of this figure, the Lord revealed that ultimately all nations will find shelter in the Kingdom of God to be set up on earth.

In nature, birds are attracted to the mustard tree, not only because of the shelter of its branches, but also because of the food it provides them. They like the invigorating and warming flavour of the mustard seed, being drawn to the tree because it provides both shelter and food.

How like the Kingdom of God!

The Woman and the Leaven

The next parable concerned a woman baking bread. She took a tiny piece of leaven, and hid it in three large measures of meal. Secretly and silently the leaven commenced to work until all the meal

was affected by it.

It was a common-place affair that the Lord described; all knew the process by which bread was baked; they knew how a very small piece of leaven was sufficient for such a purpose.

And in this parable the Lord was again illustrating how the small, secret, hidden things of the Kingdom of God will ultimately affect vast multitudes.

Normally, leaven is used in Scripture to symbolise that which corrupts, but that obviously is not the sense in which it is used in this parable. Rather does it illustrate how that which is least shall finally influence all. The word "leaven" signifies *to boil up*... It comes from a root word, *zeo,* signifying *to be hot*. In Acts 18:25 and Rom. 12:11, it is translated "fervent," and in those places, believers are called upon to manifest that quality.

Why did the woman take "three measures of meal" to do her baking? From the natural standpoint there is very little significance in the amount of meal she took, because it was the normal amount used for baking as is shown in such places as Gen. 18:6; Jdg. 6:19; 1Sam. 1:24. Therefore, the "three measures" stand for the whole.

There is a way in which this can be applied prophetically, however, for in establishing the Kingdom of God, it is revealed that spiritual Babylon will be divided "into three parts" (Rev. 16:19). Into these "three measures," the leaven of Truth will be mixed until the whole is changed by its influence.

The Man and the Woman

In these two parables, the Lord described "a man" as sowing the mustard seed, and "a woman" as mixing the leaven in the meal, and whilst it is natural for men to sow, and for women to bake, there is a further significance in introducing the man and the woman in this way.

The tree that grew from the seed represents the Kingdom of God in its political aspect, and the leaven that affected the large heap of meal represents its teaching. It will be pre-eminently the "man Christ Jesus" who is responsible for the development of the Kingdom in its political phase; but the perfected ecclesia, the Bride of Christ, will co-operate with him in causing its teaching to penetrate all mankind. Therefore, the first parable illustrates a man at work, and the second one, a woman.

The very order in which the Lord set out these two parables is also significant (and remember that he used them in this order on two occasions), for the Kingdom will be set up first in its political aspect, and then its teaching will spread throughout the earth.

The parables of Christ are certainly simple in the incidents they relate, but they are most profound in the teachings they express.

Chapter 5

PARABLES FOR THE DISCIPLES

THE parable of the leaven and the meal completed the Lord's discourse to the people from the boat. Indicating that his teaching was at an end, he dismissed them, and with his disciples, made his way back to the house in Capernaum (Mat. 13:36).

It was a rather puzzled and thoughtful group of disciples that followed him. They comprised more than the twelve apostles, and filled the main room of the house to overflowing.

And there the Lord continued to teach them.

They could not understand why he persisted in speaking to the people in parables! They could not understand the meaning of the things he spoke, and they were certain that the general public could not either!

A Discussion in the House (Mat. 13:44-52)

In the privacy of the house, therefore, they asked him why he did so, and what was the meaning of the things he had spoken. Quietly and patiently, the Lord set about explaining these matters and continued by teaching them in parables which have a particular application only to his followers. There were four such parables, and Matthew alone records them. They are the parables of the treasure hid in the ground (Mat. 13:44), the merchant-man and the pearl (vv. 45-46), the fishing net and the catch (vv. 47-50), and the old and new treasures (v. 52). These four parables teach in sequence the need of:

1. ***A complete dedication of self.***
2. ***The careful selection of Truth and rejection of error.***
3. ***The realisation that both good and bad will be attracted by the gospel.***
4. ***An understanding of the Word and skill in expounding it.***

They also show that:

1. ***There is hid treasure to be found.***
2. ***A true disciple will sacrifice to obtain it.***
3. ***All kinds of people will seek it.***
4. ***Having received it a disciple will dispense it.***

The Treasure Hid in the Field

A certain man was walking in a field, declared the Lord as he commenced these parables for his disciples, when to his amazement and delight, the man came upon a cache of treasure hidden in the ground.

It was a grand opportunity for him to become rich for, according to Jewish law (unlike modern English law), such treasure was considered the rightful property of the person owning the field. The man realised that if he could buy that field he would have treasure such as he had never had before!



Treasure in the field, excavated in the area of Ras Shamra, Syria, in the 6th century BC approx.

Nobody else knew that the treasure was there! Like the multitudes who had listened to Jesus that day, and from whom the true secret of the kingdom was hidden, many had walked across that field not realising that they were tramping on treasure!

However, when this man came eagerly to purchase the field, and could hardly restrain his excitement to do so, he found that the seller wanted a large price.

But having seen the treasure, he knew that the field was worth much more than the owner was asking. He set about raising the money to purchase it, and found that he had to sell everything that he had to do so. That did not concern him, for he knew that he would receive a far greater compensation for the loss of his possessions than they were worth, and therefore, instead of bemoaning the need to give them up, he rejoiced in the good fortune that had come his way.

It is not difficult to apply the meaning of this parable, and the disciples instantly recognised it (v. 51). The treasure is the Gospel, more valuable than any worldly possessions, and once a person recognises the prospects it holds out, he will realise that any sacrifice is worth making to obtain them. The wise man declared: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Pro. 3:13-17).

But having stumbled upon that which is hidden (see Pro. 25:2), what next must a true disciple do?

Exactly what the man in the parable did!

Having discovered the treasure, he carefully "hid it" until he was in a position to purchase the field and enjoy the fruits of his search.

Has that any application today?

Certainly it has. When a person learns of the secret treasure of Truth, he needs to ponder it in his heart until he is in a position to make it his own. He will learn the price that must be paid, and will

come to realise that he must "give up" much that normally would be considered lawful to do (Lk. 14:33). When Paul stumbled on the hid treasure in the field, he learned this lesson, and set about selling everything to obtain it. He declared: "What things were gain for me, those I counted loss for Christ... for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:7-8).

Paul recognised the value of the treasure, and saw no loss in parting with much to obtain it, but instead, experienced a great joy in so doing.

The Merchant Man and the Pearl

The previous parable had taught the disciples that the gospel comprised hidden treasure; this one taught them that it must be diligently sought. A merchant man went about seeking goodly pearls. Many were shown to him, but they were not just what he wanted. He desired one of superlative value. Nothing else would do. At last he came upon the very pearl he desired above all others. It was a beautiful specimen. It had been perfectly moulded around the grain of sand that irritated the oyster so that it had secreted the nacreous substance that formed the pearl, and the outer layers having been carefully skinned off, it now reflected the light of the sun with a soft silver glow! The merchant man was delighted with the prospect of acquiring it.

There is great significance in the fact that the Lord built this parable around a pearl, and much that can be considered in relation to it: the dark depths of the sea (the nations) where it is formed and lies hidden until discovered; the sand-irritant that causes the oyster to secrete the substance and cover the irritant that forms the pearl (trial and preparation for glory); the peeling off of the outer skin that its full beauty might be revealed (baptism); the way it reflects the light of the sun (manifesting the Truth); the soft, silvery glow that speaks of redemption.

These are all powerful lessons, though they were not the lessons that Christ wanted to impress at that time. He was trying to teach his disciples that they must be as carefully selective as was the merchant-man. Many pearls had been set before him, and they doubtless all looked good. But he kept seeking until he found the right one.

And when he saw it, he recognised its value and purchased it. As a merchant man he saw that great profit would be his ultimately by so doing. The price was high and taxed all his resources, but gladly he sold his other possessions to obtain the pearl of his desire, and having obtained it, left a happy man!

How like David who declared: "One thing have I desired of Yahweh, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life, to behold His beauty and to inquire in

His temple" (Psa. 27:4).

How like Paul who wrote: "This one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind... I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13).

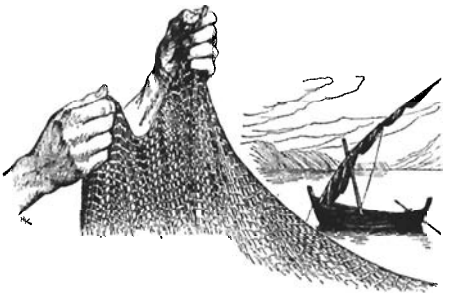
David and Paul were men with singular minds! They saw only one objective in life and concentrated on obtaining it. The merchant man had the same attitude. He was not content until he found that for which he was seeking; and Christ, by this parable, impressed upon the disciples that they must do likewise.

The Gospel Net and the Catch

In his next parable, the Lord taught the disciples that not all who seek the gospel would be worthy of it. On an earlier occasion, he had told some of them that he would make them "fishers of men" (Mk. 1:17), and now warned them of the tremendous responsibilities attached thereto.

He told them that a large drag-net (for so the original Greek word signifies) was cast into the sea, and collected a large harvest of fish of all kinds. It was hard work pulling that large drag-net to shore filled with wildly struggling, protesting, excited fish, and it required the co-operative efforts of several fishermen! They had to pull together, and they had to use all their strength! But at last it had been dragged in, and the full value of the harvest could be seen. Many of the fish were of excellent quality, but some were useless, like the dog-fish that bite and snap the other fish, but is of no marketable value!

The harvest having been gathered in, there was now the need to separate the good fish from those that were useless. The former were carefully placed in baskets and containers and protected from the sun; the latter were carelessly flung on the hard, hot ground, there to jump and struggle in misery until death ended their ineffectual jerkings.



The drag-net spoke of the need of co-operation in preaching the gospel, and the fish taught that not all results will prove satisfactory. All kinds of fish are being caught in the gospel net as it is being drawn to the shore, and, unfortunately, there is often much biting and snapping among those captive fish!

The fact that some of the fish were rejected warns that we must not rest upon man merely because he embraces the gospel. One naturally imagines that all who embrace the Truth and are associated

with the name of Christ will reveal appropriate qualities in their lives; but that does not necessarily follow, as this parable shows. A day of selection in the future will reveal that some of the catch will be rejected. Christ taught: "The angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

The word "sever" implies pain, and how painful will be the realisation that we have failed to properly use the opportunities that God has set before us! The "furnace of fire" speaks of the second death (see Rev. 20:14), and in the parable finds its analogy in the hot ground or stones upon which the useless fish were carelessly flung there to miserably perish.

At least seven of Christ's apostles were fishermen, and would have quickly grasped the significance of the parables he had revealed unto them.

The Householder's Treasures

Jesus was anxious that his disciples should understand the significance of the parables that he now spoke unto them.

"Have you understood all these things?" he asked them.

"Yes, Lord," they replied.

"Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old..."

So he continued to instruct them. He taught that as they came to understand the Truth, they must be prepared to reveal it unto others. They all knew of people who had treasure chests where they stored their precious possessions, which they would take pride in displaying to friends and visitors. They knew that people interested in such things were constantly adding to them if they could, so they had "things new and old."

An understanding of God's Word can be like that if we give it our first love. Then, for the admiration and edification of our friends, we can bring out of our treasure-chest "things new and old" that we have obtained therefrom, and so excite their interest to do likewise. A true disciple, therefore, will be constantly adding to his store of Truth, and will be busy displaying its beauty to others.

As far as the apostles were concerned, though they understood partly what the Lord was then teaching them, the fulness of the revelation did not come until after he had risen from the dead (Jn. 14:26; 16:13). Once it did come, however, they were not backward in displaying their "new and old" treasure to others.

We can do likewise.