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The Funny Side of Life

I wish to apologise for the unintentional puzzle that I set to readers of the last issue, who, on reaching p.36, would have found that they were in a literary maze. My apologies are also due to the authors whose articles were affected by the lapse of my editorial (anagram of 'real idiot') skills. The explanation seems to be that in certain circumstances clicking on two pages on screen will interchange the pages which drags others into the confusion. I must have done something of the kind just before emailing the copy to the printer. It was certainly not his fault. I trust that you will not discover the same problem in this and future issues!

(To number the pages correctly, change 36 to 40; 37 to 41; 40 to 42; 41 to 43; 42 to 44; 43 to 45; 44 to 46; 45 to 47; 46 to 36; 47 to 37; and then read the pages in numerical order.)

Editor

New Booklet

The Frustrations of Life – Studies in Ecclesiastes
Wilfred G Lambert

The contents of this booklet first appeared in *The Endeavour Magazine* as a series of 21 articles, the first in E92, November 1994, and the last in E113, June 2005. They have been edited in minor ways by John Stephenson (NZ) to link them together to form this booklet, and by Les Boddy. Together these articles are effectively Wilfred's commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes.

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The Hope of a Better Future

It has been well said that the Bible is not our saviour, it is not the promised salvation, but it is the signpost pointing to the true Saviour and the salvation he brings. In John 5:39,40 Jesus says to his Jewish adversaries: 'You study the scriptures diligently, supposing that in having them you have eternal life; their testimony points to me, yet you refuse to come to me to receive that life.' (Quotations are from the REB unless otherwise stated.)

The Bible is not just a simple book. It is more like a mini-library of 66 books published together. A further complication is that the 66 books are divided into two testaments/covenants, with 39 in the old and 27 in the new. This makes it somewhat more difficult to understand. In particular our understanding is affected by what we consider to be the relationship between them. There is certainly a large degree of continuity between the two but there are also significant differences. Whatever balance we settle for will inevitably affect our overall understanding of the Christian hope.

Moving from old to new covenant has led we Christadelphians to give up, for example, animal sacrifice, circumcision and bearing arms. The NT also makes it clear that the notion of the people of God has to be redefined, for in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor freeman. If the people of God has to be redefined, then it should not be surprising that other features of the OT hope of Israel might need to be redefined too.

It seems to me that the letter to the Hebrews has much to contribute to our understanding of this matter. It was written to Jewish Christians whose Christian faith was wobbling to such an extent that they were likely to revert back to the Judaism that they had been familiar with in earlier days. The writer is doing his utmost to persuade them not to give up their new found faith in Jesus as Messiah, in spite of the problems they were having to face and to deal with. He does so by explaining several OT passages in such a way as to persuade them that in Jesus what they had highly valued as Jews had been superseded by what they now had in Christ. In 6:9 he says: 'We know that you have the **better** blessings that belong to your salvation' GNB. REB says ... 'we are convinced that you ... are in a **better** state, which makes for your salvation.' The writer speaks frequently of things that his readers **have** as Christians. It is worth looking out for that little word 'have' (*eko* in Greek) as you read through the letter. The writer does not want his readers to give up what they have come to have in Jesus.

Did they appreciate how what they have in Christ is superior to or better than what they had as Jews? Do we appreciate it? Hebrews will help us to know in what way we are better off. The Greek word for better, *kreisson*, appears 19 times in the whole of the NT. The writer to the Hebrews makes use of it 13 times in this one letter, 13 out of 19 in the whole of the NT! That is extraordinary! What is the reason for it? Do we appreciate the force of the writer's argument? We can only find that out by looking carefully at the way he uses this word better. You might like to do so yourself before reading the rest of this article. If so, you will find the GNB versions of the passages concerned on p.7. Look them up for yourself and come to your own conclusions. Here are mine for what they are worth.

Let us begin at the beginning with the first three verses of Hebrews. Although the word *kreisson* is not used here, the clear implication is that Jesus, and what he came to reveal, are both far and away better than what God spoke through the prophets.

The next verse involves the first appearance of the word *kreisson* and reminds the readers that when Jesus had brought about purification from sins, he took his seat at the right hand of God's Majesty on high, raised as far above the angels as the title he has inherited is **superior** to theirs. This is reinforced in verse 13 where the writer asks: 'To which of the angels has he ever said "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool?"' He continues,

in chapter 2, verse 5, to say: 'For it is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, which is our theme.' The writer continues with an interpretation of Psalm 8 and says, in verse 9, 'What we do see is Jesus, who for a short while was made subordinate to angels, crowned now with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by God's gracious will, he should experience death for all mankind.'

The writer could not have emphasised more firmly, at the very beginning of his epistle, that Jesus was to be understood now as superior to both prophets and angels. Who would be next?

Not surprisingly, the writer soon refers to both Moses and Joshua. In 3:2-6 Moses is referred to as a faithful servant in God's household but, by contrast, Jesus is seen as a faithful son, set over the household. The writer then pleads with his readers saying: 'And we are that household, if only we are fearless and keep our hope high.' Then, in chapter 4:8, Joshua is mentioned and it becomes clear that Joshua did not give God's people the rest that God really wanted his people to enjoy. However, that rest is now on offer through Jesus not Joshua. Although again, the word *better* is not used here, the writer clearly implies that Jesus is superior to both Moses and Joshua.

Reference is also made to Melchizedek approvingly in 5:5-10 but it is Jesus who became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. It seems to me that all these OT worthies - prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua and Melchizedek - have been referred to in order to show the wavering Hebrews that what they were wanting to backtrack to was inferior to what they now have in Jesus, if only they will stick with him. This brings us to the second time the word *kreisson* is used in this epistle, 6:9, where the writer says: 'Yet although we speak as we do, we are convinced that you, dear friends, are in a **better** state, which makes for your salvation.' He clearly remains very hopeful that his readers will not give up on what they have already experienced of the better things in Christ.

He continues writing of Melchizedek and Abraham in chapter 7 and in verse 7 says, 'and, beyond all dispute it is always the lesser who is blessed by the **greater**.' He thereby makes it clear that there was an important sense in which Melchizedek was greater than Abraham but goes on to argue that Melchizedek is superseded by Jesus (see 7:15ff). The outcome is that: 'The earlier rules are repealed as ineffective and useless, since the law brought nothing to perfection; and a **better** hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.' (v. 19) He continues to argue that, since God swore an oath to establish Jesus's priesthood, this 'shows how **superior** is the covenant which Jesus guarantees.' (v. 22)

Chapter 8:1-5 refers again to the High Priest and Moses and says of the old sanctuary, the tabernacle, that it was 'only a shadowy symbol of the heavenly one.' In verse 6 the writer says; 'But in fact the ministry which Jesus has been given is superior to theirs, for he is the mediator of a **better** covenant, established on **better** promises.' This is followed up with the longest biblical quotation of the whole letter, Jer 31:31-34, that speaks of the new covenant. In 8:13 the writer then comments as follows: 'By speaking of a better covenant, he has pronounced the first one obsolete; and anything which is becoming obsolete and growing old will shortly disappear.' Is this perhaps a reference to the Temple and an indication that perhaps Hebrews was written before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple?

Chapter 9 compares the old and the new and leads the writer to say of the old that: 'All this is symbolic, pointing to the present time. It means that the prescribed offerings and sacrifices cannot give the worshipper a clear conscience and so bring him to perfection; they are concerned with...external ordinances in force until the coming of the new order. But now Christ has come, high priest of good things already in being. The tent of his priesthood is a greater and more perfect one, not made by human hands, that is, not belonging to this created world.' (vv 9-11) He later comments in verse 23 that: 'If, then, the symbols of heavenly things required those sacrifices to cleanse them, the heavenly things themselves required still **better** sacrifices; for Christ has not entered a sanctuary made by human hands which is only a pointer to the reality; he has entered heaven itself, to appear now before God on our behalf.'

He continues in 10:1 by emphasizing that: 'The law contains but a shadow of the good things to come, not the true picture.' And later, in 10:32-34, he appeals to his readers to 'Remember those early days when, newly enlightened, you were publicly exposed to abuse...you shared the sufferings of those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the seizure of your possessions knowing that you had a **better**, more lasting possession.'

All the worthies of old mentioned in chapter 12 are celebrated for the faith they demonstrated in one way or another. However, the writer presents them as not receiving what was promised (see vv 13 and 39). Yet, he says, they had seen them far ahead and welcomed them acknowledging themselves as strangers and aliens without fixed abode on earth. His explanation is that they did not receive what God promised because God had made a **better** plan, that only with us should they reach perfection. The implication seems to be that all these faithful OT men and women

never had their aspirations fulfilled because God did not want them to reach perfection until his son arrived on the scene to inaugurate a new covenant and a new age better than anything they could have anticipated. They continually ‘longed for a **better** country, a heavenly one’ (presumably ‘not of this world’ is implied). That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he has a city ready for them. (v 16) Some ‘were tortured to death, refusing release, to win resurrection to a **better** life. (v 35)

The last use of *kreisson* in Hebrews comes in 12:18-29 where the author reminds his wavering readers that ‘you have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to myriads of angels, to the full concourse and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of good men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, whose sprinkled blood has **better** things to say than the blood of Abel.’ Whereas normally, among humans, blood calls for vengeance, this blood has a better message as it calls for the forgiveness and salvation of those who have Jesus as their high priest.

Summary

It seems to me that we cannot take Hebrews seriously without concluding that what was revealed and believed and practised in OT times was but a copy, a shadow of the heavenly which came with Jesus. There was a covenant and associated blessings as well as a kingdom. But all of these were but copies and shadows of the reality that God had always intended to be revealed in Jesus. To liken the future kingdom of God too closely to the OT Davidic kingdom is to give too much credence to what was a copy or a shadow of the kingdom to come. The hope of Israel is no longer to be seen and understood as a vamped-up version of the OT Davidic kingdom. We have hope of a better kingdom, a heavenly kingdom, a city of God’s making. It will surely not involve repeating all the features of the OT covenant – literal temple, priests, animal sacrifices, a holy city and holy land. Nowhere in Hebrews, (or in the rest of the NT) does the writer encourage his readers to think that any such thing was part of the new hope in Christ. It is setting too much store by what are seen as copies and shadows in Hebrews, to want them to resurface in the future.

God has no obligation, (has He?), to set up again what was essentially a Jewish kingdom with all its worship paraphernalia, when He was always, the writer to the Hebrews believes, intending something so much better to be accomplished by his son Jesus, and what comes with Jesus, is better than what came with prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua, Melchizedek, Abraham etc.

The Christian hope is better than the Law, has a better covenant, better sacrifices and looks forward to a better country, a better city, a better resurrected life all of which is not narrowly focussed on the Jews as God’s people, or on a particular land or city. but on God’s people from all nations, united into one body in Christ.

Did the wavering Hebrews respond to this urgent message? I can only hope so!

Les Boddy

Better in Hebrews (GNB) *Kreisson*

1:4 The Son was made **greater (better)** than the angels, just as the name that God gave him is greater than theirs.

6:9 But even if we speak like this, dear friends, we feel sure about you. We know that you have the **better blessings** that belong to your salvation.

7:7 There is no doubt that the one who blesses is **greater** than the one who is blessed.

7:19 For the Law of Moses could not make anything perfect. And now a **better hope** has been provided through which we come near to God.

7:22 This difference, then, also makes Jesus the guarantee of a **better covenant**.

8:6 But now, Jesus has been given priestly work which is superior to theirs, just as the **covenant** which he arranged between God and his people is a **better** one, because it is based on promises of **better** things.

9:23 Those things, which are copies of the heavenly originals, had to be purified in that way. But the heavenly things themselves require much **better sacrifices**.

10:34 You shared the sufferings of prisoners, and when all your belongings were seized, you endured your loss gladly, because you knew that you still possessed something much **better**, which would last forever

11:16 Instead, it was a **better country** they longed for, **the heavenly country**. And so God is not ashamed for them to call him their God, because he has prepared **a city** for them.

11:35 Through faith women received their dead relatives raised back to life. Others, refusing to accept freedom, died under torture in order to be raised to a **better life**.

11:40 because God had decided on an even **better plan** for us. His **purpose** was that only in company with us would they be made perfect.

12:24 You have come to Jesus, who arranged **the new covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood that promises **much better things** than does the blood of Abel.

NB 13 out of 19 in NT.

Others: 1 Cor 7:9; 11:17; 12:31; Phi 1:23; 1Pet 3:17; 2Pet 2:21.

The Dogmatist's Creed

Believe as I believe – no more, no less;
That I am right, and no one else, confess;
Feel as I feel, think only as I think,
Eat what I eat, and drink but what I drink,
Look as I look: do always as I do.
And then, and only then,
I'll fellowship with you.

That I am right, and always right, I know,
Because my own convictions tell me so;
And to be right is simply this: to be
Entirely, and in all respects, like me.
To deviate a hair's breadth, or begin
To question, and to doubt,
Or hesitate, is sin.

I reverence the Bible, if it be
Translated first and then explained by me.
By churchly laws and customs I abide,
If they with my opinions coincide.
All creeds and doctrines I concede divine
Excepting those, of course,
Which disagree with mine.

Let sink the drowning, if he will not swim
Upon the plank that I throw out to him;
Let starve the hungry, if he will not eat
My kind and quantity of bread and meat;
Let freeze the naked, if he will not be
Clothed in such garments
As are cut for me.

'Twere better that the sick should die than live,
Unless they take the medicine I give.
'Twere better sinners perish than refuse
To be conformed to my peculiar views.
'Twere better that the world stand still, than move
In any other way
Than that which I approve.

Christian at Work

Sent by Ian McHaffie.
Appeared in
The Christadelphian *Fraternal Visitor*,
February 1898, page 35.

Faith and commitment

Personal faith

In terms of classical theology, one may distinguish between 'faith by which one believes,' and 'the faith which one believes.' The former entails 'my faith' as a personal response (the clear reality that God cares for us, answers our prayers and we can trust Him in times of trouble). Jesus carried over into his teachings the Old Testament concept of faith as confidence and trust in God who can do all things (Mark 9:23). I see faith as a passion and a dynamic incitement or stimulus which promotes a particular (Christian) lifestyle. Nowadays my faith directs me to understand Jesus through a set of timeless *spiritual principles*.

I don't see any problem with personal faith but there are many problems attached to 'the faith of the church' or of the Bible, relating to a 'bundle of church doctrines' delivered to the saints and to be kept inviolate (1 Tim 4:1; 6:20-21). This involved the transition from the man Jesus who spoke of faith, for example, in a way quite consonant with Old Testament belief in Yahweh, to Christianity involving a rigid set of beliefs. It is a matter of distinguishing between reasonable and unreasonable faith.

Corporate faith

While I am comfortable with personal faith, I've become wary of the importance of 'certainty' in faith to the detriment of other values such as rationality and tolerance. All the writers of scripture do not sing from the same hymn sheet. There is no unified vision within the canon and the ideological diversity is irreducible (one only has to glance through books like *Christendom Astray* or *Wrested Scriptures* to realize the chimera of doctrinal truth or certainty).

Genesis chapters 1-3 give us an account of human beginnings. It is seriously at odds with the story as told by scientific investigation. Many will claim that the scientists have simply got it wrong but many Christadelphians accept the part that evolution has made in the origin of humans. It is now pretty clear that reason provides a perfectly valid tool to help us to understand the text in a realistic fashion through systematic philosophical reflection and

scientific investigation. Using reason to understand scripture is bound to promote tension, because we are effectively seeking the best way to coordinate the cultural logic of both the Old and New Testament writings with the cultural logic of our own time. For me, and countless others, it is unreasonable to read early Genesis literally.

Talking animals and humans living beyond 900 years does not strike me as real history. Trying to read early Genesis without reason is like walking wearing a blindfold. This practical principle may well hold true for the rest of scripture and must prove fatal in the quest for doctrinal certainty.

The story of early Genesis is describing a symbolic world. The writer of 1 Timothy (almost certainly not Paul according to a consensus of scholars) accepts this symbolic world as *real history* when he gives us some rather dubious teaching about women in the ecclesia. He writes: 'Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith...' (1 Tim. 2:11-15).

This is one of the passages in the letter that could hardly have come from the pen of Paul. The assertion that women will be saved through bearing children clashes flagrantly with Paul's profound conviction that all human beings are saved only by virtue of the death of Christ. The lame exoneration of Adam also sits oddly in conjunction with Paul's portrayal in Romans (5:12-21) of Adam as the source of sin and typological representative of sinful humanity. The overall sense of the text is inescapable; women (or perhaps wives) are to be silent and submissive and to bear children. According to this writer that is what good order in the church requires, which again, as scholars regularly point out, is somewhat at odds with the teaching of genuine Paul.

Based on a flawed understanding of the symbolic world of early Genesis, the writer of 1 Timothy's scandalous judgment promotes the religious degradation of women. Both Paul (in Romans 5) and this writer fail to distinguish between a *logos* (Greek – historical account) and a *mythos* (legendary account 'dealing with supernatural beings, ancestors or heroes that serves as a fundamental type in the worldview of a people, explaining aspects of the natural world, customs, or ideals of society'). *Mythos* is a literary device (not reality or an inerrant account of what actually happened) which can promote timeless and relevant principles, but the instruction concerning women in the church isn't one of them. These two writers give us *conflicting teaching* based on their personal reading of the *mythos* of Adam and Eve. This and many other examples highlight the weakness (and at times irrelevance) of a belief-centred faith based on *mythos*. Problems and discrepancies in the text are often overlooked within an interpretive community because of its desire to find corporate agreement and unity.

It's good to have choice

Our ecclesia has been using a residential facility in Wales over the last few years for devotional weekends. It is a 'Christian Centre' which, according to its website is administered by an independent 'non-denominational' charitable trust. They have now told us that we are no longer welcome because of our doctrinal position relating to the nature of Christ. Due to a doctrinal difference we receive a slap in the face, an act very much outside of the remit of spirituality.

Why can't there be agreement on the biblical presentation of the nature of Christ? The answer is simple. The writers of the New Testament don't agree with each other on this 'big ticket' issue. Each writer has a view of Jesus ('Christology') of one sort or another, but some are minimal (as in James), others unbelievably high (as in John), and most are somewhere in between. The synoptics think in ways more reflective of the historical Jesus. John (very much in the *mythos* mode) is the one who most of all escalates Christology (as in the words of Thomas in 20:28 and of course the various references to the pre-existence of Christ).

Resolving doctrinal issues (we have space to consider only a few) involves a great deal of evangelical arm-wrestling and getting into a text-trading contest which I deem to be unspiritual and unnecessary and has led to various splits in our community. It seems impossible to generalize about 'what the Bible means', or even what a particular text means. It means different things to different people at different times. The threat of chaos is never far from the surface in the quest for doctrinal certainty.

Irenaeus (c. 180 C.E.) was very keen for all Christians to believe the same things. Tertullian agreed with Irenaeus in denouncing all who deviated from the majority consensus as 'heretics'. Both fathers of the church insisted that what characterizes the true church is unanimity – agreement in doctrine and morals. A heretic is one who deviates from the consensus, and as Tertullian pointed out, the Greek word translated 'heresy' (*haireisis*) literally means *choice*; thus a heretic is one who makes a 'choice.' He insisted that to make choices is evil, since choice destroys group unity.

In order to stamp out heresy, he maintained, church leaders must not allow people to ask questions, for it is

'questions that make people heretics'. Tertullian wanted to stop such questions and impose on all believers the same 'rule of faith,' or creed.

The true Christian, Tertullian declared, simply determines to 'know nothing...at variance with the truth of faith.' When the 'heretics' object saying that Christians must discuss what the scriptures really mean, Tertullian maintained that such debate made the orthodox position look weak.

A feature of the New Testament I have long noticed is the sheer amount of polemic and venom reserved for opponents, sometimes described as false prophets or Judaisers. In the letter to Titus the reader is instructed that heretics 'must be silenced...They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work' (1;11&16). The writer contradicts himself in Chapter 3 when, wearing a spiritual hat, he exhorts his readers 'to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy towards all people.' Invective against heretics is sustained over a number of verses in Jude and 2 Peter and there is the angry outburst in Galatians 5:12 where Paul wishes that 'those who unsettle you would castrate themselves.' Charming! We may well conclude that such vindictiveness is outside the domain of spirituality.

Summing up

Orthodoxy used to mean 'right' or 'correct' worship but after the Reformation it began to mean 'right beliefs;' so faith began to mean 'believing the right things.' *Insisting* on a rigid set of beliefs is disputatious with a latent vindictiveness which, allegedly, for some, will mean 'They will be paid back with suffering' (2 Peter 2:13).

Having a belief-centred faith is just one way of being a Christian. What excites me is a spiritual, transformation-centred way of being a Christian which accepts that orthopraxy or 'right *practice*', is more *relevant*. In the letter of James doctrine is pushed into the background and he maintains that we define our beliefs by *what we do*. Even the doctrinally deficient Rahab was credited with faith that resulted in a work.

James wants to move people to activity. He notes those who claim to have faith but fail to give food or clothing to persons in need. He is critical of those who separate faith from such works and who believe simply in the oneness of God (2:19), a tenet of Judaism (Deut 6:4). In his blunt style he describes the uncontroversial practical nature of faith in the here and now. For me then, the best definition I have found for faith (*pistis*) is 'commitment.' Faith (within *logos* thinking) is a matter of practical insight and active commitment.

Within the model of spirituality I am proposing there is a requirement to be *tolerant* of the beliefs of others. We are all, in reality, subjective thinkers therefore we should accept that there are different ways of following Jesus that will be sacred and valid for each individual, and so we may reflect that it is all a matter of 'where you're coming from.' Spirituality, in my view, makes an effort to be objective and will ask critical but genuinely relevant questions about our own beliefs and practices in order to improve and mature. People are entitled to hold on to their beliefs of course, but establishing creedal *barriers* is unreasonable and gets in the way of spirituality. Many just want to read the Bible devotionally while others, like me, wish to read it critically so that it becomes more relevant in practice. I would like to see our community show more flexibility and attach much less reliance with regard to a set of beliefs, and work on models of inclusive spirituality that will celebrate diversity. This flexibility involves 'choice,' something the church fathers were afraid of, but their insistence on strict orthodoxy directly resulted in the later Spanish Inquisition and other horrors.

Keith Lowe

Notes

1 Does faith need to defy knowledge or outrage reason? Why (using reason on this occasion) does our community en bloc believe that the Devil and demon possession (as clearly described in the NT) is mythos and therefore unbelievable? We must all accept, however, that the relationship between reason/knowledge and belief is rather complex. When reason appears to have become too dominant then faith may lapse into a kind of irrationalism which is termed 'fideism' – which means turning one's back on reason altogether.

2 Logos (Greek); reasoned, logical or scientific thought. Ancient Greek philosophers used the word to denote the pragmatic, accurate mode of thought that was distinct from mythos.

3 In the case of Genesis, the sanctity of marriage (2:23-24) and the then novel idea of a day of rest (2:2-3) both of which are timeless principles.

4 Tertullian quotes taken from *The Origin of Satan* Elaine Pagels p.163-165

5 Judaism and Islam have remained religions of practice. They emphasize orthopraxy – 'right practice' rather than 'right teaching.'

6 I was passing an ecclesia recently which was advertising the following Sunday night lecture: 'Ignore what the prophets say at your peril.' Make of that what you will. Organizing a Macmillan Coffee Morning (in aid of cancer care) would be more likely to result in members of the public entering our halls.

An Appreciation and Comments on: 'Spirituality' (E.129)

Thanks are due to Keith Lowe for his thought provoking article. I find myself in agreement with a malority of the views expressed and would suggest that they are worthy of serious consideration in a Christadelphian context. Keith's first sub-heading, *The problem of strict reliance on a set of beliefs*, and the following quotation portraying religion as being, for some, an activity 'where it is considered noble to pretend to be certain about things no human could possibly be certain about', must be a familiar experience for many of us.

The paragraph goes on: 'Within religion we may be obliged to accept the teachings, rules and limitations of a particular faith in order to find group acceptance. This breeds separation from other Christians with an exclusive mantra such as "we have the Truth and you don't". . .' Here again, how familiar this is to us! Also, I wonder how many members, when experiencing problems or doubts have felt constrained to keep their heads below the parapet in order to avoid possible group non-acceptance? On page 34 Keith posed a related question: 'Will those of us who wish to read the Bible in a spiritual way (without necessarily conforming to a strict orthodox set of beliefs) find acceptance?' Like him, I have doubts!

In this context it is interesting to note words of Dr. John Thomas (*Elpis Israel*, 1849, p177)*: O that men could be induced now to devote themselves to the study of the scriptures without regard to articles, creeds, confessions, and traditions! These things are mere rubbish; monuments of the presumption and folly of former generations indoctrinated with the wisdom from beneath. If a Berean spirit could be infused into them; if they could be persuaded to 'search the scriptures daily' for the truth as for hid treasure; they would soon leave their spiritual guides alone in all their glory of mysticism and patristic lore; and rejoice in the liberty of that truth which alone can make men 'free indeed.'

Cyril Marsters

*To be found on pp 198 & 199 of the 14th Edition—Revised and published in 1958. **Editor.**

If you wish to be disappointed look at others;
if you wish to be disheartened, look at yourself;
if you wish to be encouraged, look to Jesus.
(Anon)

The Hope of Israel

The OT character whose name is most frequently mentioned in the NT is Abraham. Significantly, 'Jesus Christ' is introduced in its opening words as 'the son of David, the son of Abraham'. No greater emphasis, therefore, could have been placed on the Jewishness of Jesus than to trace his lineage back in this way to Abraham, the very founder of the Jewish race.

Yet there lies the irony which was to make the gospel so unacceptable to Jews as a people. They knew that the promised Christ would be a descendant of David and thus, as a descendant also of Abraham, a Jew like themselves. But such was their preoccupation with both their own and their Messiah's ethnic identity that they failed to see what Matthew was careful from the outset of his story to stress - that the 'son' promised to David, and the-'son' promised to Abraham were to be realized to be one and the same person. They happily accepted the fact that in the case of God's promise to David the term 'seed' predicted the eventual coming of a specific individual (II Sam 7:12-13; John 7:42; Matt. 22:42); but what they failed entirely to grasp was that this was true also of God's promise of a 'seed' to Abraham. With the exception of a minority of rabbis, they unquestioningly assumed that the 'seed' in this latter case denoted an entire nation – none other than their own. They failed to disentangle the two quite separate strands in God's promises to Abraham, of whom they were so proud to be the physical descendants.

John the Baptist was confronted with the mentality which resulted from this lack of discernment when, to prepare the Jews for the imminent coming of their Messiah, he 'preached the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel' (Acts 13:24). To the most influential among them – the Pharisees and Sadducees – his message was uncompromising: 'Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, "We have Abraham to our father."' They who, as leaders, should have been the most discerning, were clearly entertaining the fallacy that as Abraham's lineal descendants their birth, as such, put them in a right relationship to God.

To shatter their complacency John solemnly announced, ‘God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.’

We can easily fail to realize the enormity of the shock which these words would administer to John’s audience. They would grasp immediately that he was not stating the obvious truism that, if God chose to exercise His limitless creative power, He could turn the rocks around them into living human beings. Their problem was to see how such human beings could also be ‘children unto Abraham’. The scandal of John’s words lay in the suggestion that men and women could thus be regarded as the progeny of Abraham despite the total absence in their case of genetic connexion with him. It was their own distinctive birth which was of concern to them, not the re-birth which John was calling on them to undergo. So they ‘rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him’ (Matt, 3:7-9; Luke 7:30).

Their response to John the Baptist was also to be their response to Jesus. In the synagogue at Nazareth, when Jesus went there early in his Ministry to read a prophecy by Isaiah, and to apply it to himself, all went well until he, like John before him, had an unpalatable lesson to teach them from their own Scriptures. It, too, outraged their dearest Jewish susceptibilities so that they ‘thrust him out of the city’ and would have done worse had they been able. He gave them the chastening reminder that no Jewish widow had had a son restored to life by Elijah, and no Jewish leper had been healed by Elisha, but that in contrast it was a non-Jew who in each case had the benefit of the exercise of divine power. They saw Christ’s words, like John’s, to be an affront to their complacent assumption that God’s favour should be confined to them as the physical descendants of Abraham (Luke 4:16-29).

It is this obsession with the assumed benefit of his birth of Jewish parents which explains the reluctance of Nicodemus also – earnest seeker after truth though he was – to be born anew. He held the treasured conviction that to have been born of Jewish parents gave him an acceptable standing before God; or, if his circumcision meant that it alone did not suffice, that the atonement available to him in the ordinances of the Law of Moses would make good its inadequacy.

Both cherished fallacies were exposed by Jesus. Not only was the notion of being born again via his mother’s womb an absurdity: it was, besides, an utterly futile one. For, as was pointed out to him, ‘that which is born of flesh is flesh’. Such a birth, even if it were a possibility, would still end in death: flesh is intrinsically incapable of transcending its own limitations. Only ‘that which is born of the spirit’ has the capabilities of ‘spirit’. That is why Jesus stated firmly to Nicodemus, ‘Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.’

And, as for the trust which Nicodemus placed in the Law of Moses, he was reminded by Jesus that when sinners were dying of serpent bites during the wilderness journey, no sacrifice prescribed by the Law itself was adequate to rescue them from their fate. A special procedure – one altogether outside and distinct from the official sacrificial system itself – had, on God’s instructions to be followed. That is, the Law in symbol acknowledged its own inadequacy to save men and women from death. It thus pointed to the need of Nicodemus – and, with it, that of every other member of his race – to be saved from death by a sacrifice which the Law was incapable of providing. That need could be met only by the lifting up of the Son of man himself (John 3:1-15; 8:28; 12:32-34).

Tragically, it would be because of the total unacceptability of his message that the Jews would themselves have Jesus thus ‘lifted up’ (John 12:32-34). Their conception of ‘the hope of Israel’ was racial and earthbound. So their expectations of the Messiah were correspondingly mundane. They were prepared to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ only if he would be an earthly king, found a political kingdom there and then in the Land promised to Abraham and – as they thought – to them as his true and only ‘seed’; and meet their material needs by providing them with ‘the meat that perisheth’ (John 6:15-27). They knew from the marvellous things which he had done that he had the necessary power at his disposal. So why, they wondered, if he was indeed their Messiah, did he not use it in the way they had always expected? Even some of his own disciples nursed to the end the fond hope ‘that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel’ (Luke 24:21). And the Eleven, with their faith in Jesus restored by his resurrection appearances to them, were keen to know whether the time had at last come for him ‘to restore again the kingdom to Israel’, and had to be reminded that there were more important matters than the satisfaction of their curiosity on this score which should be of concern to them (Acts 1:6-8).

If such was the preoccupation of even close followers of Jesus with mundane aspects of the promises made to Abraham, it is small wonder that these were the sole aspects which were of concern to those who opposed him. ‘Show us a sign’, was their constant clamour. A ‘sign’ of quite a different order from the one which they were demanding of him would indeed be given. It would be the sign of the prophet Jonah. Like the prophet he would die;

but, again like the prophet, he would come to life again the third day (Matt. 12:38-40; 16:1-4) .

Such was the meaninglessness of this ‘sign’ to the critics of Jesus that they made their own contribution to it by having him put to death. That did not alter the saving power of that death, however, so that in due course Paul – who had once just as fervently had the conception of ‘the hope of Israel’ which was theirs – could write: ‘The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God’ (I Cor. 1:22-24).

Here was the secret of the means by which ‘that which is born of the flesh’ could become ‘that which is born of the spirit’, and transcend the limitations of those promises to Abraham which concerned only one race of men and purely earthly, time-bound blessings. Here was the source of a dual blessing. On the one hand it would not be confined to those whose relationship to Abraham was by the accident of birth, a purely ethnic one: Gentiles, as well as Jews, could be ‘children of Abraham’ of the kind which John the Baptist had in mind. And, on the other hand, it would bring the blessing of a life beyond this life. The hope which the opponents of Jesus had was the hope of political liberation; but that which had been offered to men in Christ was ‘the hope of salvation’ (I Thess. 5:8; Rom. 4:9-12), and thus of resurrection. For this reason, when beset by Jewish opponents, Paul insisted that it was for ‘the hope and resurrection of the dead’ that he was called in question (Acts 23:6). Among the dead whom he had in mind were the ‘fathers’ themselves (Acts 24:14-15), so that he could declare before Agrippa, ‘Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers’, and immediately ask, ‘Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?’ (Acts 26:6-8).

Obliged after his trial before Agrippa to appeal unto Caesar, Paul came finally to Rome. There he met the chief of the Jews, stating, ‘for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain’. On a later day, when many came to hear what he had to say by way of amplification of that simple statement, ‘he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets.’ Some were convinced by him; others were not. To the latter he announced what they, Jews of all people, were refusing; and, like John the Baptist, he told them that there were those who were not Jews who would gladly receive the salvation made available to them in Christ: ‘Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.’

Small wonder that after they left Paul the Jews ‘had great reasoning among themselves’ (Acts 28:17-29). Sad, too, would Paul be to see those who disagreed with him depart, for, as he had written to the believers here at Rome, long before, ‘Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved’ (Rom. 10:1). But, as he knew, it would be only a minority – a remnant – of Jews, who would embrace the true ‘hope of Israel’ while awaiting the day when ‘there shall come out of Sion the Deliverer’ who ‘shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob’ (Rom. 11:26). Meantime, these, being ‘Christ’s’, together with their Gentile brethren who have likewise ‘put on Christ’, constitute the true ‘seed’ of Abraham through being invited by Christ to share his inheritance with him (Gal. 3:26-29). It is they who today are what Paul called ‘the Israel of God’ on whom he invoked the peace and the mercy of God (Gal. 6:16).

Fred Barling

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Myrrh

(All quotations from NASB)

Ask about the gifts of the magi at the birth of Jesus, and most people will name gold, frankincense and myrrh: gold symbolising tried faith, frankincense prayer, and myrrh death and mourning. Myrrh, together with aloes, was taken by Nicodemus when he helped Joseph of Arimathea to place Jesus’ body in the tomb, hence its association with death. But is myrrh actually linked with death?

Myrrh itself is a resin produced in the same way as frankincense, i.e. cuts are made in the bark of appropriate trees and the sap is collected as it oozes out. When dried it is sold as small lumps or a powder, or dissolved as a liquid. It is valuable and its price has even been greater than gold, weight for weight.

Under the Law of Moses, myrrh was the predominant perfume in the holy anointing oil used in the tabernacle: Take also for yourself the finest of spices: of **flowing myrrh** five hundred shekels, and of fragrant cinnamon half as much, two hundred and fifty, and of fragrant cane two hundred and fifty, and of cassia five hundred, according

to the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil a hin. You shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil. (Exodus 30:23-25)

In the diaspora, a secular use of myrrh was when virgins were prepared to attend King Ahasuerus:

Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women – for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with **oil of myrrh** and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women (Esther 2:12).

So far there is little support for myrrh as a token of death or mourning: in fact the opposite. But it is in the **Song of Solomon** that myrrh comes into its own:

1:13 My beloved is to me a pouch of **myrrh** which lies all night between my breasts.

3:6-7 What is this coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with **myrrh** and frankincense, with all scented powders of the merchant? Behold, it is the traveling couch of Solomon;

4:5-7 Your two breasts are like two fawns, Twins of a gazelle Which feed among the lilies. Until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of **myrrh** and to the hill of frankincense. You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you.

4:12-14 A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a rock garden locked, a spring sealed up. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, henna with nard plants, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense, **myrrh** and aloes, along with all the finest spices.

5:1 I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my **myrrh** along with my balsam. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk. Eat, friends; drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers.

5:5-6 I arose to open to my beloved; and my hands dripped with **myrrh**, and my fingers with liquid **myrrh**, on the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and had gone!

5:10-16 My beloved is dazzling and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is like gold, pure gold; His locks are like clusters of dates and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, and reposed in their setting. His cheeks are like a bed of balsam, banks of sweet-scented herbs; his lips are lilies dripping with liquid **myrrh**. His hands are rods of gold set with beryl; his abdomen is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of alabaster set on pedestals of pure gold; his appearance is like Lebanon choice as the cedars. His mouth is full of sweetness and he is wholly desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

All this background goes against myrrh as symbolising death or mourning. So how does myrrh come by its reputation? It stems from the single link with the anointing of the body of Jesus when he was taken down from the cross. But we know that the crucifixion was not death and defeat for Jesus. Sin had been destroyed!

Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. (John 12:31)

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, (Hebrews 2:14)

The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. (1John 3:8)

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1Corinthians 15:54-57)

There is no need to mourn over the crucifixion. Jesus was triumphant. It was not death, it was life. Jesus, through his crucifixion, had brought in the new creation. Myrrh was part of the anointing perfume because it was a time for joy. The crucifixion is a time for gladness and appreciation of what Jesus did for us.

Let us forget any link of myrrh with death and mourning. Let us link myrrh with newness of life, and the joy of the new spiritual creation.

Roy Boyd

Salus Mundi

*I saw a stable, low and very bare,
A little child in a manger.
The oxen knew Him, had Him in their care,
To men He was a stranger.*

*The safety of the world was lying there,
And the world's danger.*

Mary Coleridge (1861-1907)

Genesis – the seedbed of the Bible.¹ **Review**

The book of Genesis is indeed the seedbed of the Bible – ‘seed’ being the operative word – think of Adam, Eve, the serpent, Noah, Abraham and his sons – as well as plants, trees and birds. The Hebrew *zera* appears 57 times in the book. On p.161 of this issue of the *Testimony* it is well-stated that: ‘In a marvel of brevity and meaning, Genesis 1 sets the scene for this book the Bible’ and ‘sets the scene for the arena of God’s purposes.’ Genesis is the prelude to the rest of the Bible. It paves the way for the gospel of salvation. It shows us as sinners, astray, estranged from God, fit only to die after a life of toil. Hence our need for salvation in Christ.

At first sight this Special Issue is an impressive, detailed, well-researched, comprehensive treatment of a whole range of vital issues. It contains a series of character studies; relevant archaeological findings with photographic illustrations; studies of trees in the Bible; of Faith and Works in relation to Abraham, and others. Unfortunately there are some disappointing omissions and a failure to consider or take account of certain important points of view.

It is appreciated that a primary aim of the publishers was to establish the divine inspiration of scripture and its relevance and importance for us today. With this the present writer wholly concurs. We recognise the holy scriptures (for Paul the Old Testament) as ‘sacred writings which are able to make (us) wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’ (2 Tim 3.15. Bible quotations are from the ESV). It does not follow, however, that everything in Genesis has to be interpreted totally literally.

What also needs to be realised is that scripture had a relevance and message for the first readers. For Genesis the aim was to establish the nation of Israel as God’s special people. The objective of the first chapter of that book was to establish their God as the one and only divine being contra the welter of gods worshipped by the nations by which they were surrounded. Surprisingly, there is no mention of the emphasis on monotheism in chapter one. In a world where sun, moon, stars and many animals were worshipped as gods, the fact that the sun and moon are not given their usual Hebrew names that would have identified them with *Shamash* the sun god or *Yarih* the moon god was at the time of immense significance². All things that exist were created by the One God who is Lord and ruler of all. There is no other.

A cardinal conviction referred to repeatedly, and the subject of one main article, is that Genesis is ‘A book in which Jesus and the apostles believed’ (p 236) that draws attention to 110 quotations from and allusions to Genesis in the New Testament, with the implication that, to follow Jesus and the apostles, a true Christian must also have faith in Genesis. However, a word of caution seems appropriate. What are we to make of Jesus basing a parable on the contemporary Jewish belief that after death we may be carried either to Abraham’s side or to Hades (Luke 16:12-31) or on the behaviour of demons (Luke 11:24-26)? And what of the references in Jude’s epistle to the non-biblical apocryphal works, *Assumption of Moses* (v 9) and *Enoch* (v 14); or the words of Paul, quoting two of their own poets to the pagan philosophers at Athens, about ‘the God who made the world’ – ‘we are indeed his offspring’, ‘in him we live and move and have our being’ – the ‘his’ and ‘him’ here referring to the Greek god Zeus (Acts 17.27-28)!?

A further point regarding our reading of the Word of God is that many of the precise directions and commands had a specific relevance to a particular contemporary situation. For us it is important to recognise the principles involved and not necessarily their literal detail. First Century Jews were taught to keep the Law of Moses with great rigor. Gaining God’s approval depended on precise attention to the detail of keeping those commands. In Christ, however, salvation depends on faith not works. As Paul put it ‘The commandments...are summed up in this word “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”. Love does no wrong to a neighbour therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.’ (Rom 13:8-10) As an example of how practical instructions can change with circumstances we may compare the dietary restrictions sent out in Acts 15:29 with the warning to avoid those who would impose such restrictions in 1 Tim 4:1-4. The kiss of greeting (1 Th 5:26), lifting of hands in prayer (1 Tim 2.6) and the requirement that overseers and deacons must be married (1 Tim 3.2,12) are seldom observed today.

Another surprise is that evolution is viewed only as an atheist construct, invented to do away with belief in God

(this was not Darwin's view). The possibility that evolution may have been God's method of creation is mentioned only to be dismissed. Geological evidence of earth's immense age is taken to indicate a gap between verses 1 and 2 of chapter 1. Verse 1: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth' was followed after an interval by the creative activity of the Days of Creation. This was John Thomas's view³ but there is no geological evidence for such a gap and the suggestion takes no account of Ex 20:11: 'In six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, which would appear to place the whole of creation within the six days. Notably, one contributor suggests that one day, the seventh, may not yet have ended (p 165) – How literal is that? Days of a thousand years or of any other long period do not cover the situation if only because the sequence of created things does not tally with the geological evidence it is intended to explain. According to Genesis, land plants were created on Day 3 and sea creatures on Day 5. In the geological record fish preceded the appearance of land plants. A figurative view of the Days, either of revelation or of dramatic presentation, seems much more likely than the literal reading.

An important facet of this subject, as with many aspects of biblical understanding, is to read it against the background of then contemporary ideas and practices. Paul at Athens, surrounded by Greek idolatry is mentioned (p 161). It also applies to the monotheistic emphasis mentioned above. It is also true of the Bible and science as well as gender issues. The Bible generally assumes the scientific perceptions of its day and certainly not those of modern science. Thus, we read of heaven being rolled up like a scroll of parchment and stars falling from the sky like leaves or figs from a tree (Isa 34:3) and 'insects that go on all fours' (Lev 11:20-23)! These are far from our modern understanding. Yet we can learn of God by studying his handiwork: 'The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork' (Psa 19:1). 'For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.' (Rom 1.20). We cannot therefore think of a God who sets out to dupe the ungodly with false evidence of his non-existence in the things he has made. On the contrary we gaze at his creation in wonder.

It is a fact that today, many scientists who are also Bible-believing Christians believe that the Creator God made use of slowly progressive developmental processes, termed 'evolution', as his creative method. The geological evidence, as well as recent DNA findings, is unassailable⁴ – to dismiss it makes biblical belief impossible for many people today. Because God can do anything and could have created all things in a moment of time, and did not need many millions of years to accomplish his purpose, does not prove what he actually did. The marvels of his creation fill us with wonder whatever his timing or methods. The word *bara* used of God's creative activity in Genesis appears also in Isa 43:35 of the creation of the people of Israel – far from an instantaneous process! If Bible believers can see evolution as God's creative method then the ground is taken from under the atheists' feet. Very truly, we read in this Special Issue: 'The point is that we are simply not told the details of creation, but only enough to believe that God is in charge and has all power to accomplish his plans' (p 169) . Amen.

It is interesting that Whitcomb and Morris, in their seminal work *The Genesis Flood*⁵, in attempting to show that all the geological strata in evidence today were produced by one great worldwide flood, that of Noah, found it necessary to re-interpret the biblical genealogies so that Creation took place about 10,000 BC. The one mile depth of strata on view at the Grand Canyon in Arizona had to be all water laid deposits from that great event. Unfortunately for them, there are among the strata, at least two that are plainly derived from wind-blown sand – they cannot possibly have been water laid. Another finding that has carried great weight with the present writer is that the desert area of parts of Texas and New Mexico are underlain by a huge fossilised coral reef, well known as forming in many places in the sea today.⁶

The consideration of Genesis and Gender (pp 170-3) begins with a discussion of man being made in the likeness of God and given to rule the earth. What then are the roles of male and female in this context? In the original Hebrew *adam* (*ha adamah*) is not a proper name but a collective term for a member of the human race.⁷ Thus ch 5:1b-2: 'When God created man (*adam*), he made him in the likeness of God. Male (*zakar*) and female (*neqebah*) he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man (*adam*) when they were created.' So also 1:26-27: Then God said, 'Let us make man (*adam*) in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man (*adam*) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male (*zakar*) and female (*neqebah*) he created them.'

Thus it is clear that both male and female were created in the image of God. The subordinate position of women in relation to men resulted from the Fall (3:16) and is evidently done away in Christ, in whom we are all one (Gal 3:28). Much could be said about how Jesus treated women as well as the roles of some in the early church. The Twelve had to be men because women would not have gained a hearing in the Jewish world of the time. In other circumstances, Jesus used women to spread his message (John 4:27-42; Mk 15:40-41; Lk 23:55) and Paul approved of sisters praying

and prophesying in the assembly (1 Cor 11:5-13). Studies of the situation of women in the Greco-Roman world of the time greatly illuminate New Testament comments and instructions.^{8,9}

What is undisputed is that:

In Adam we are all sinners, astray from God and therefore mortal (Rom 5:12, 18-19).

By faith we are accounted righteous, as was Abraham (Rom 4:2-3).

When baptised into Christ we are Abraham's seed and heirs of God's promises (Gal 3:26-29).

Those who are in Christ will be raised from death by him when he returns (1 Cor 15:20-22).

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Notes

1 Testimony. For the study and defence of the holy Scripture. Special Issue. Vol 83 No 983. May-June 2013.

Genesis the seedbed of the Bible.

2 Gordon J Wenham: *Word Biblical Commentary. Genesis 1-15*

3 John Thomas: *Elpis Israel* Pt 1, ch 1

4 Graeme Finlay: *Gods Books Genetics and Genesis*

5 John C Whitcomb & Henry M Morris: *The Genesis Flood. The Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications*

6 Dan Wonderly: *God's Time-Records in Ancient Sediments*

7 Wilfred Lambert: *Creation. A Christadelphian Study.*

8 Averil & Ian McHaffie: *All One in Christ Jesus. Bible Teaching on the Work of Men and Women in Christ's Service*

9 Bruce W Winter: *After Paul left Corinth. The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change*

Bob Burr

Looking forward to the Kingdom of God: our motivation

The Christadelphian community is, above all, distinguished by its vision of God's plan to turn the whole earth into his Kingdom, with personal entry to it by resurrection for those who have died 'in faith', as believers, over the centuries.

As I grew up in the first half of the twentieth century, the Kingdom was seen by my young mind as the key to life (particularly after my baptism at the age of thirteen). After my baptism, when I transgressed family values, I was reminded by my parents: 'You are in the truth now, and you will have to answer for your behaviour'. It was many years before I really learned that we cannot 'earn' salvation by 'being good'.

The positive effect of my early education about the Kingdom of God was to see the world around me as temporary and the Kingdom, in the words of a pamphlet of those days, as 'a good time coming'. I was encouraged to envision the Kingdom as a good time and an eternal life to be awarded for good behaviour.

Articles in magazines and lectures to the public, stressed the benefits of the Kingdom with emphasis on the banishing of sorrow and poverty, and the arrival, at least for the faithful, of a time of prosperity and happiness. Lectures on the Kingdom that I heard in those days were largely catalogues of these good things to come, with sin and death ultimately destroyed.

The community tended to look at and preach the Kingdom from a personal perspective of advantages to come. Robert Roberts imagined this person benefitting Kingdom in the 1885 Christadelphian magazine in an article on the 'Final Consolation'. It was largely about how wonderful life would be for each of us if we were faithful servants of God.

A God-centred Kingdom

But more mature reflection on scripture paints the picture with a more God-centred concept. God had desired a race of people whom he could regard as partners in the stewardship of the earth. The Kingdom was for the manifestation of God's glory, rather than the giving of joy to some members of the human race, though this would be a significant by-product. As Tom Wright expresses it in his book *Surprised by Hope* and other writings, God decided to create a family of friends who should share God's values. The initially created partnership failed: a fresh start was made with Abraham, through him 'all nations of the earth would ultimately be blessed'. Abraham's descendants – the nation of

Israel – were to be the source of this blessing to the rest of earth’s inhabitants. Israel were to be a favoured nation whose mission was to teach the rest of mankind. But they failed too. So God sent his Son, of one heart and mind with himself, to take over the role that Israel had failed to fulfil. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God was inaugurated, though its complete fulfilment lay in the future.

Right through the Old Testament, and on into the New, this hope was continually set out by God as his unchanging purpose. It was expressed by many prophets as representing his ‘unfailing love’.

Many passages foreseeing the Kingdom come to mind. A small sample:

Isaiah 11: They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 2: Many peoples will go and say, let us go to the mountain of the Lord that he may teach us his ways and we will walk in his paths.

Jeremiah 31: I shall set my law within them, writing it in their hearts; I shall be their God, and they will be my people... They will all know me, says the Lord.

Ezekiel 36: I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.

Psalms – Many refer to the conversion of the nations.

God’s ‘unfailing love’ would include the discipline of Israel and mankind. It was not all milk and honey, but God never reneged on his purpose, which was a matter of God’s self-expression, not that of man.

More than a super welfare state

In contrast with all this, my childhood picture lacked the depth of scripture teaching on the Kingdom, and was more like a picture of a super welfare state than of the reign of God being fully established. When the community was formed in Victorian days, times were hard, and it is understandable that pictures of human prosperity in the Kingdom appealed to many people. And so the hope of many believers was limited in its vision, but understandable. We need to view it from the angle of ‘God manifestation’ rather than ‘human happiness’ as such. God is the centre of the Kingdom of God.

When we contemplate such a Kingdom we are soon up against the limitations of human thought. For example, if God intends to put the world to rights and to do it by nurturing a new attitude in the minds of human beings, there is an enormous task ahead. In my teens and twenties, I thought God would achieve this major change by brute force – coercion – compelling people to obey him. I was moved by passages which foresaw the believers using their immortal energy to carry out the judgements of God, to ‘wash their feet in the blood of the wicked’, filling the earth with terror and destruction to drive people to submission. Such conversion by violence might be embraced by elements in the Islamic religion, but Jesus, as in the Sermon on the Mount, taught otherwise, and early Christianity relied on the irresistible power of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. This cross/resurrection teaching about Jesus will be offered by the saints (immortalised believers) and people will be taught to take up the cross and follow Jesus. These teachings to the human race will be the essence of the ‘reign’ of the saints. A new concept of rulership and governance will be exercised. It is looking forward to such activity that should lie at the heart of a believer’s present vision of the Kingdom. The majority of the human race is largely ignorant of this gospel. The good news of Jesus does not dwell in their hearts by faith, though even psalms and prophets had spoken of the ultimate conversion of the nations.

The conversion of the Nations

If God’s plan of putting the world to rights is to succeed, it will require the conversion (repentance) of millions, and even billions of people, over which the saints will live and reign with Christ, as we read in the book of Revelation (for a thousand years the passage says, but perhaps the thousand years of this reign means simply a very long time).

Many humans will, no doubt, reject the offer of God’s ‘unfailing love’ and will not enter into the eternal life of the Kingdom of God, but many more, from all generations of all human history, have never really had a chance of hearing or understanding the gospel. Peter tells us (2 Peter 1:9) that it is God’s will that none should be lost but that all should come to repentance. This, and similar passages, mean that more people will ultimately be saved than we, as a community, have believed. Peter also (1 Peter, 3:12) exhorts us to ‘look forward to the coming of the day of God and hasten its coming’.

Our hope is to spend our immortalised energy in being the agents of God to bring about the transformation of the earth and its peoples. We should be preparing for that day now. As Peter again expresses it: ‘But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, a people claimed by God for his own, to proclaim the glorious deeds of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’(1Peter 2:9).

This work of proclamation starts now and is one way in which the path to the Kingdom of God is prepared. Our motivation is described in 2 Peter 1:10,11: ‘Do your utmost to establish that God has called and chosen you... and there will be a rich provision for your entry into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.’

Alfred Ward

Assyriology and the Study of the Old Testament

This is the title of an inaugural lecture given in 1968 at the University of Cardiff by Professor H. W. F. Saggs.¹ is a small publication, but in its 27 pages we find new insights in that part of Old Testament history given to us by the prophet Isaiah, in particular the relations between Sennacherib and Hezekiah.

Assyriology is the study of the peoples and lands in the Fertile Crescent from c.3000 BC to the time of Alexander the Great (336-323). It is a very specialised branch of learning dating from the middle of the nineteenth century when non-Biblical creation and flood stories were discovered, and cuneiform – wedge-shaped writing on clay tablets – was being deciphered. first, the function of Assyriology was believed to not only shed light on the Old Testament, or even to ‘prove’ its truth, as some Christadelphian lectures have sought to show. was not long in coming, so that by the start of the twentieth century ‘most of the major stories of the Old Testament, (especially creation and flood) and some of the New, came to be explained in the light of Babylonian mythological motifs.’²

In the late 20th century we find a reaction to this Pan-Babylonian Hypothesis and recognition that ‘Assyriology is the examination of a whole culture, to be studied for its own sake.’³ , a ‘spin-off’ from the translation of clay tablets has often been the illumination and elucidation of Old Testament records. When the Assyrian and biblical records are compared, they are found to agree with astonishing precision. Frederick Kenyon went so far as to say, ‘the progress of archaeological research will be found to constitute a steady march in the direction of establishing the essential trustworthiness of the Bible narrative.’⁴ example, the confirmation that Hezekiah ‘made the pool and the conduit (s shaped and 1749 feet in length) and brought water into the city (of Jerusalem)’ – II Kings 20:20 – was brought to light in 1880 when an inscription, written in Hebrew script, was found describing the story of the boring through from either end.

The period of Assyrian domination was between 745 and 627 BC. Yet while the northern kingdom of Israel fell in 722, Judah was one of the few states that remained nominally independent, even though tribute was paid. Early in his reign, Hezekiah had declared his loyalty to Assyria by paying tribute (II K 18:14-15). However, it was after the death of the Assyrian king Sargon II in 705, and when Sennacherib came to power, that there was a general revolt throughout the empire. Isaiah chapter 18 describes the visit from envoys from Ethiopia who wanted to form an alliance against Assyria. Sennacherib also refers to Hezekiah who ‘called (for help) upon the kings of Egypt (and) the bowmen, the chariots and the cavalry of the king of Ethiopia.’⁵ Hezekiah joined in the revolt. Isaiah condemned this policy (Isa 22).

A pivotal point in the history of the kingdom of Judah was the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians. The account, which has been popularised by Lord Byron’s poem *The Destruction of Sennacherib* is found in II Kings 18:13-19:37 and a parallel, with slight variations, in Isa chapters 36 and 37. Of all the Assyrian monarchs Sennacherib (705-681) played the most prominent role in the Hebrew Bible. Whether he waged two campaigns against Judah is debatable. Professor Saggs writes ‘it is unnecessary to postulate, as some Old Testament scholars have done on the basis of the Biblical account, two distinct sieges of Jerusalem by Sennacherib at different periods.’⁶ example, W. F. Albright believed that the first attack in 701 was bought off by Hezekiah paying tribute and that a second attack occurred between 689 and 686 BC. However, in his own account of a single operation, Sennacherib claims to have ‘shut up Hezekiah, the Judean, in his royal city like a bird in a cage.’ But, it is important to note that Sennacherib does not claim an actual capture of Jerusalem nor does our Bible state this. It was Lachish, along with 45 other strong walled cities, which he took in 701.⁷

A careful reading of Isaiah chapters 36 and 37 tells how, in 701 BC, the Assyrian Rabshakeh - i.e. chief cupbearer - is sent by Sennacherib from Lachish in order to persuade Hezekiah to capitulate. A similar strategy was used in a siege of Babylon by two Assyrian generals. Sennacherib may be said to have besieged Jerusalem, there is no record in the Bible that he actually captured it. [‘In fact, it was not conducted by the main Assyrian army commanded by the king, but by a subsidiary force under two high-ranking officers ... the main army being kept in reserve.’]⁸ He heard a rumour, returned to his own land where he was later assassinated (by two of his sons) in 681 BC as recorded in Is 37:7 and also in a Babylonian Chronicle.

John Stephenson (NZ)

Notes

1 by the University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1969

- 2 Saggs p 12.
- 3 ibid p 14.
- 4 *The Bible & Archaeology* Harrap, London p 30.
- 5 From the Prism of Sennacherib in *Ancient Near East Texts*
ed J. B Pritchard Vol I Princeton University Press, Berkley 1958 p 199.
- 6 Saggs p 18.
- 7 As described in the Taylor Prism in the British Museum.
- 8 Saggs p 17.

The Good and the Bad

Sixty-five years ago I entered primary school to commence my formal education. , every Friday morning I find myself back in the same classroom assisting with the reading and writing programme for the new entrants. My Primer One teacher used to write on the blackboard the words to learn for the lesson. Blackboards are no longer used, so now cards are pinned to the wall to assist in spelling.

early in our education two words, which we learn, are ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ These adjectives are to do with behaviour, the former applying to what is acceptable, the latter to what is not. From childhood, we have to learn to ‘refuse the evil’ and ‘choose the good’ (Isa 7:15). At first glance this seems to be the idea behind the well-known phrase ‘to know good and evil’ in Genesis, which is found in the prohibition of eating from a particular tree in the Garden of Eden. Of the various interpretations of the phrase I tend to agree with G A F Knight that it means ‘to know the whole sweep of knowledge as if from the positive to the negative pole of its totality.’¹

we follow Robert Robert’s Bible reading companion, then we commence each year by reading Genesis chapter one. In my Hebrew grammar the first reading exercise was the extract from Genesis 1:1-4 which includes the phrase that ‘God saw the light, that it was good’. This refrain concerning goodness occurs six more times in this chapter and the idea of goodness hundreds more times in the rest of the Old Testament. Associated with the meaning of the word are the ideas of something being pleasing, agreeable or fitting. ‘The word ‘good’ is not to be understood in terms of morality. [‘Righteous’ is the term that would be used in this connection]. Rather it speaks of purpose, of the divine activity. For ‘good’ in Hebrew can often mean ‘good for.’’²

At its simplest level, the word ‘bad’ has the idea of being harmful. There are three Hebrew words, which fit into this category. Firstly, *ra’* is bad in the sense that something is not good, such as bad fruit (Jer 24:2) or something that is harmful like an evil day which causes violence to come (Amos 6:3). In our recent English versions the word used is often translated ‘evil’ rather than ‘bad.’ This can be seen when we compare II Sa 14:17 which speaks of the discernment between ‘good and bad’ (KJV) or between ‘good and evil’ (NRSV).

The second word *rasha’* is derived from a verb which means ‘to rebel’ rather than ‘to transgress’ and is a general term for ‘wicked’ or ‘criminal’ as in Ex 2:13. Unlike *ra’* this word is always used in a moral sense, and in the plural it is used of ‘the adversaries of God’ (Ps 3:7).

’asham conveys the idea of guilt, or the state of being ashamed, which should be experienced as the result of wickedness. the reference is to sacrifice, modern translations use the term ‘guilt offering’ rather than ‘trespass offering’ used by the King James translators: see Lev 5:14 – 6:7.

John Stephenson (NZ)

References

- 1 *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament*, SCM,, 1959, p 126.
- 2 G.A.F. Knight, *Theology in Pictures*, Handsel Press,, 1981, p 8.

Re-reading Romans in context

by **Graham Jackman**

(Pp. 257, pbk, ISBN 978-1-291-34213-0.
Available from lulu.com at £5.80 + p&p.)

A Review

The powerful and vibrant messages that we derive from most of Paul’s letters are the result of the fact that he is

writing to people he knows and of whose situations he is personally aware, sometimes from current reports. And we also have some acquaintance with them through the book of Acts. They are live, dynamic and relevant. But for many scholars the letter to the Romans does not fulfil this description. It has been considered to be a preliminary introduction by Paul himself to the community in Rome, setting out his basic belief in justification by faith as the foundation of his doctrine, preparatory to his anticipated visit to Rome. To some this presents a problem in view of his obvious familiarity with many in Rome as exemplified in chapter 16.

In response to this theory, Graham's book, a truly scholarly, analytical study, fully documented and refreshingly presented, is a most welcome answer to this problem, as he proves most convincingly that Paul is dealing with an excessively live issue within the Roman community, of relations between the Jewish and Gentile Christians – a vital issue still relevant and important today. He challenges his readers by questioning whether God has been unfaithful to His covenant by which He selected the Jews as His chosen people by now accepting the Gentiles. But he shows that from the beginning the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:3) had included blessing to all peoples. So God's righteousness, defined as His faithfulness to the covenant, is fully endorsed.

From there Paul demonstrates that all people have sinned, both Jew and Gentile, and all are in need of salvation. So redemption in Christ through faith, repentance, forgiveness and baptism is available for all regardless of race, sex or status, as he has argued specifically to the Galatians.

Then Paul shows that the observance of the Law, regarded as the established claim of the Jew to his exclusive status, had become grossly abused by them, not only through disobedience but in turning its true, inner meaning into observance of external rituals. It therefore had ceased to be the true access to God, as the Law had been given to prepare the way for the deeper relationship with the Lord through the life of Jesus and the work of the Spirit, as foretold in Jeremiah 31:31 and Ezekiel 36:26, the new covenant available to all. Romans chapter 7 expresses powerfully the inability of the Law to bring salvation as it sits in judgement upon shortcomings, whereas the Spirit, the very breath of God through Jesus, enables, assists and gradually transforms the believer, as Paul so movingly portrays in chapter 8, culminating in a true song of triumph. And it is available to all, as it is the free gift of God which is the true translation of *charis* - grace, also etymologically connected with thankfulness and joy, which we can only receive if our hearts and minds are open, as Paul says, 'unveiled'. This is the state of the Christian in Christ, already but not yet, awaiting the ultimate consummation.

In chapters 9 and 10 Paul reveals his deep concern for his own people who have rejected the gospel. So he demonstrates, by frequent references and quotations from the Old Testament, the proof of God's continuing love for them and encourages the Christian Jews to see the Gospel of Christ in their own Scriptures. He asserts the fact that God has not rejected Israel and he puts before them, in chapter 11, the vision of Israel's ultimate restoration under the imagery of the olive tree, where the Gentiles are warned against boasting against the Jews who may ultimately be grafted back into their own olive tree. And this is the ultimate evidence of God's faithfulness.

Graham further argues that the specific and detailed advice for Christian living in the later chapters is again designed for, and appropriate to, the problems in Rome and draws the attention of the recipients to the application to practical Christian living in the Roman context. First of all he encourages them to engage in social contact, breaking down barriers and sharing fellowship together. Then still further, he exhorts them to humility, mutual respect for differences and, above all, love for others, the quality of life which he has already said (5:5) is the gift of God through the Spirit. His advice to submit to authorities and laws would seem to advocate living peaceably both within and outside the community, for love is the fulfilling of the Law. These injunctions are singularly appropriate, as Graham points out, to the tensions and situations arising from the Jewish/Christian community and supremely relevant to their different customs and habits such as their observance of special days and food laws. Again, Paul's tactful and sensitive advice for sympathetic handling of differences is eminently appropriate for this clearly divided community. His concluding greetings in chapter 16, to members of the different house groups, is a warm and loving attempt to bridge the rift between them and seek to unite them in Christ. Again, the supreme exhortation is the love, the gift of the Spirit in the heart of the Christian in the New Age in Christ.

We owe a deep debt of gratitude to Brother Graham for this inspiring insight into the mind of Paul in building up the community of the Lord.

His chapter 9, relating the lessons of Romans to our own day, shows that the conflict between law and grace is still relevant where there is emphasis upon works and sin and diffidence to accept God's gift of the Spirit into our lives, which demands a humble acknowledgement of need and a recognition that we are now in the New Age in Christ, since his triumph on the cross and the fulfilment of the past. Also Paul's wise advice against sectarianism, commending

ways of creating harmony, mutual respect and fellowship, has a clearly valid application to the present community.

Paul's own stance of impartiality, counselling brotherly fellowship, remains the golden rule, then and now.

Appendix A. The review of the history of the church in Rome in the first century provides a useful background to our study of the New Testament.

Appendix B. The exposition of Hermeneutics reveals the importance of understanding the context and the sources of what we read to find the inner meaning – the essential truth, the unhidden, revealed reality – the true meaning of *aletheia* = truth, which is ultimately our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sheila Harris

**The Higgs Boson
(by a non-Scientist)**

I was thrilled to read in *The Times* about the Higgs Boson,
that it is a discovery
'that particles acquire mass by interacting with an all-pervading field
that is spread throughout the universe.'
Is this not the very Spirit of God, the very breath that creates,
motivates and gives life – the unseen power of the Lord?

Sheila Harris

*Give me the love that leads the way,
The faith that nothing can dismay,
The hope no disappointments tire,
The passion that will burn like fire.
Let me not sink to be a clod;
Make me thy fuel, Flame of God.*

Amy Carmichael

Water for the Thirsty

As a child I was fascinated by the ornate Victorian water fountains that have been a feature of many cities, towns, parks and even villages since the mid 19th century. To this day I still search for them, so you may want to know why I enjoy looking at them and like them so much. My only explanation is that in the town where I was born and brought up we had some fine examples (and some monstrosities too!) and I passed by several of them as I went into town, to school and to visit friends. One of them appears on the front cover of this magazine. I loved the intricate carvings, the engraved figures and plants, the dates and the inscriptions. One of my favourites had a small metal bowl chained to the wall which could be lifted and filled for dogs! I was also very aware of how precious a commodity water is and that the inscriptions on these fountains echoed words from the Bible

The history of these fountains is fascinating too, but unfortunately I am only able to touch on it here. The water in the 19th century here in England, particularly in the big cities like London, was filthy and unfit to drink. There was

much illness caused by contaminated water, especially cholera. The poor were the most afflicted. Day to day life for the ordinary working person was physical, hard and long. Drinks were needed to keep going. There was no available safe water, tea and coffee were very expensive, beer was cheap and plentiful. So, not just the men, but women and children too, slaked their thirst with ale! Thus there was no encouragement for the thirsty to remain sober and this resulted in much drunkenness. So several bodies of public reformers, the temperance societies, churches, philanthropists, among them Queen Victoria herself and Prince Albert, set about to change things declaring that it was the right of the people to have fresh safe water. In 1859 they, together with some MPs, founded 'the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association' whose aim it was to ensure 'perfect purity and coldness of water for public consumption'. Some of these fountains were built in memory of people or as gifts to the poor. Many showed the Queen's head and lots had Bible verses engraved on them like 'Water for the Thirsty' or 'Whoever drinks this water will never be thirsty again'.

Water! An ordinary everyday familiar thing, usually taken for granted by us and going unnoticed until suddenly it is needed and it is not there! Or when it is there, too much of it, and disaster strikes either outdoors or in! We, and the world we live in, are nothing without water. Although three-quarters of the Earth's surface is covered with water, 98 percent is salt water and not fit for consumption. A human can survive for a month or more without eating food, but only a week or so without drinking water. I understand that the human body is more than 60 percent water, blood is 92 percent water, the brain and muscles are 75 percent water, and bones are about 22 percent water. Clearly, if there was no water we could not exist. Our bodies cannot function without water. So we can see that water is a most important, significant and amazing part of God's creation, completely necessary for our life on earth. It is God given and sustained by him. As I write the rain is pouring down!

The Psalmist says: 'You placed the ocean over the earth like a robe and the water covered the mountains. When you rebuked the waters they fled; they rushed away when they heard your shout of command.' (104:6-7) Isaiah 40:12 asks whether anyone can measure the ocean by handfuls, and verse 15 says that to the Lord the nations are nothing, no more than a drop of water. From this we learn that God exercises sovereignty over the water. God controls the natural processes of precipitation and evaporation as well as all the bodies of water on our earth: the rivers, the lakes, the seas and the oceans. For our well-being he sends rain on the lands and he waters the fields (Job 5:10). He makes sure his creation is provided with water but Deut 11:14 suggests that his provision is subject to obedience.

Although we always think of water as a blessing and a gift from our Heavenly Father, it is interesting to reflect on the fact that it can be a punishment for mankind too. In the case of Noah too much water produced the flood and all but eight of mankind perished because of wickedness. Many of the great acts of God in the history of his dealings with mankind have involved water. Too little water results in drought, a very serious and sad state which we see in many hot countries of the world and we weep for the people and their young families dying. Elijah had to deal with drought and we remember his anguish over the cloudless sky.

There are so many metaphorical uses of the word water in the Bible and I have found these interesting and have enjoyed looking at them. Examples abound in both the Old Testament and in the New.

Old Testament

In the book of Joshua water is used as a metaphor for fear. When Joshua sent men from Jericho to spy out the land of Ai, they returned saying there was no need to send a big army to attack as it was not a large city so about 3000 men were sent. But they were forced to retreat and were pursued by the soldiers of Ai who killed some of the Israelites and those fleeing lost their courage and were very afraid. The AV says that the hearts of the Israelite soldiers melted and became like water (Joshua 7:5).

Water is also used to signify death. You will remember that King David was missing his son Absalom who fled after the murder of Amnon. (2 Sam 13:34) Joab, trying to help in a sad situation, sent the wise woman of Tekoa to speak to the king. In the middle of her story, planned to elicit his sympathy, she says, 'We will all die; we are like water spilt on the ground, which can't be gathered again.' (2 Sam 14:14) Both fear and death feature in the Psalmist's lament, 'the danger of death was all around me, the waves of destruction rolled over me' or, as the AV puts it, 'floods of ungodly men made me afraid' (Ps18:4). In 22:14, the Psalmist cries desperately for help in these words: 'My strength is gone, gone like water spilt on the ground.'

'This', says Zophar in the book of Job, 'is how Almighty God punishes wicked, violent men...Terror will strike like a sudden flood'. (27:13&20) Water in the form of streams is used by Job to describe deceit. How bitter he sounds when he says, 'But you, my friends, you deceive me like streams that go dry when no rain comes'(6:15). In 15:16 Eliphaz says to Job, 'And man drinks evil as if it were water'. So water is used metaphorically here for sin and evil.

On a much happier note there are many examples of water used for positive and lovely things.

God speaks of himself: Jeremiah 2:13 ‘They have turned away from me, the spring of fresh water.’

The Power of God: Isaiah 59: 17ff The Lord is preparing to rescue his people ‘he will wear justice like a coat of armour and victory like a helmet. He will clothe himself with the strong desire to put things right and to punish and avenge the wrongs that people suffer...from east to west everyone will fear him and his great power. He will come like a rushing river, like a strong wind’.

God’s presence: Psalm 72 tells us that as well as ruling with justice and righteousness, rescuing the poor and neglected and defeating the oppressors, ‘he shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth’.

The knowledge of God: Isaiah 11: 9 The land will be as full of knowledge of the Lord as the seas are full of water.

God’s voice: In Ezekiel 43:2 we are told that God’s voice is like the roar of the sea.

The Spirit: Isaiah 44:3 The Lord says I will give water to the thirsty land and make streams flow on the dry ground. I will pour out my spirit on your children and my blessing on your descendants.

Salvation and Joy Isaiah 12:3 As fresh water brings joy to the thirsty so God’s people rejoice when he saves them.

Peace Isaiah 48:18 (AV) ‘O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.’

Blessings Isaiah 58:11 God tells the people that if they put an end to oppression, contempt and evil words, then he will guide and bless them and the blessings will be like a garden that has plenty of water, like a spring of water which never runs dry.

Justice and righteousness Amos 5:24 Let justice flow like a stream and righteousness like a river that never goes dry.

God’s people: Jer 31:12 God’s people, set free, singing for joy on Mount Zion will be like a well-watered garden.

Good news: Prov 25:25 Hearing good news from a distant land is like a drink of cold water when you are dry and thirsty.

Faithfulness in marriage: Prov 5:15 (AV) ‘Drink waters out of thine own cistern and running waters out of thine own well.’ (GNB) ‘Be faithful to your own wife and give your love to her alone.’

New Testament

In John’s gospel, in chapter 3, water is used metaphorically for birth. Nicodemus, the Pharisee, came to Jesus at night and was puzzled at Jesus’ words: ‘No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again.’ ‘How can a grown man be born again?’ he asked. ‘No one’, replied Jesus, ‘can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’

In the next chapter of the same gospel, Jesus once again uses water in a metaphorical sense, this time as eternal life. Jesus arrived in a town named Sychar in Samaria where, tired by his journey, he sat down at the well and encountered the woman who had come to draw water. In the course of their conversation Jesus said to her, ‘Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water and give him eternal life’ (John 4:13,14).

Jesus was sitting at the top of the well that was believed to have been first dug out by Jacob, later to be called Israel. When Jesus offered the woman life-giving water she responded with: ‘You don’t claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?’ (John 4:12) Isn’t that precisely the point that Jesus was making and that John wanted his readers to appreciate? Jesus was sitting on a well that in a sense stood for the Old Covenant; its water could quench thirst in this world but could not give the life eternal that he was offering. In John 7:37 Jesus says: ‘Whoever is thirsty should come to me and drink...Whoever believes in me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his heart.’ Jesus said this about the Spirit which those who believed in him were going to receive. This meeting with the woman took place at the sixth hour (4:6) that is at noon. The only other time that the sixth hour is mentioned in John is in 19:14, when Jesus was taken out to be crucified. It was on the cross that Jesus opened up the way for mankind to have their thirst for God quenched. It was there at Calvary that the New Covenant was sealed. Water and Spirit were, of course, to become a regular part of the beginning of Christian discipleship, as Peter made clear at Pentecost: ‘Each one of you must turn away from his sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God’s gift, the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).

And so, in conclusion, as I remember the water fountains of my childhood, my mind turns to another fountain, the Fountain of Life. In the book of Revelation water is life: ‘The angel also showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal and coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb and flowing down the middle of the city’s street.’ (Rev 22:1) Was John thinking, I wonder, of the Psalmist’s words: ‘There is a river that brings joy to the city of

God'(46:4)?

It is also a gift. 'Come whoever is thirsty; accept the water of life as a gift, whoever wants it.' (22:17). Just as the parched worker, or the dust-dry traveller of the 19th century, eagerly sought to quench his thirst at ornate fountains by the roadside, so let us eagerly accept the gift that has been offered to us.

Mavis Boddy

*The proud hilltops let the rain run off;
the lowly valleys are richly watered.*

(Augustine)

**'The Serpent in the Garden of Eden' –
A Response to Roy Boyd's article.**

In his interesting and thought provoking article in the last issue, E129, Roy Boyd made a number of claims that may require further examination. Roy bases his analysis of Genesis 3 on a literal interpretation, in order to contend with certain evangelicals, who envisage the serpent as motivated by an outside evil power (the Devil). He puts forward the thesis that the serpent, commonly identified as a sinister creature, was in reality, a very good creature, who played a necessary and vital role in fulfilling a perfect, pre-ordained project, that had all been masterminded by God. Roy posits the view that the serpent was 'acting under God's influence and power.' It therefore, on this understanding, was an obedient and successful, Holy Spirit empowered servant of Almighty God. Furthermore, Roy claims that those who dispute this analysis of the serpent, may be in possible danger of committing an unforgiveable sin – blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Roy believes that the serpent played a key role in activating God's preferred perfect will, because it placed Adam and Eve upon a very necessary spiritual education course. Roy wrote: 'He [God] knew that the only way for a spiritual creation to be developed was for men and women to learn the meaning of choice and the results of disobedience.' His view here actually represents a common notion that one finds within certain sectors of present day Judaism. This Jewish notion views the events in Eden as a kind of 'blessing', where Mankind takes full advantage of a 'golden opportunity' provided by the serpent, in order to make 'a leap upwards' into a divinely orchestrated world, specially designed for Mankind's spiritual advancement. The view that the events in Eden actually represented a catastrophic physical, and moral 'Fall downwards' for Mankind, is often derided as an erroneous Christian idea.

One early church scholar, however, held a similar view to Roy. Irenaeus (c.130-200 CE) believed that Adam and Eve were created morally immature, and that God fully intended them to transgress, in order that they could benefit from their mistakes, and thus learn moral virtues, such as patience, and the ability to repent. By so doing, they could hopefully 'grow up' through the adversity to become spiritually mature human beings. Irenaeus believed that Mankind's experience of evil, and its effects, including physical weakness, sickness and death, were always part of God's most perfect original plan, because these provided the necessary, and unavoidable conditions for a human spiritual maturation process. This whole idea is technically known as 'soul-making theodicy'; and it obviously contains some elements of truth – we are, where we are and, by the grace of God, we have to make the best of it! But soul-making may not represent the whole truth, and it is not immune to serious criticisms. It effectively seems to deny free will for our first parents. Roy's comments include: 'God is in charge of everything...God had planned everything from the start of His creation. He knew that the only way for a spiritual creation to be developed was for men and women to learn the meaning of choice and the results of disobedience...God's purpose is never disrupted: it is always sure and steadfast...God used His spirit, His power, to create the world, the Garden of Eden and to mastermind the events there.'

If God was 'masterminding' all the events in Eden, then how could Eve have had any genuine free will, to resist the serpent's lies and half-truths? The serpent, Roy alleges, was effectively inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit and God's perfect will for Mankind's blessings necessitated the success of the inspired serpent's mission. Indeed, Roy implies that if Eve had been able to successfully resist the serpent's advice, then she would actually have been resisting God's perfect will for Mankind, and consequently she would have fallen outside of the perfect will of God. This view seems to imply that God's omniscience and omnipotence were not able to accommodate a factor of genuine free will, within human beings.

But if human beings were created with genuine free-will, then God must have been willing to take a more flexible approach, in response to the genuinely freely chosen decisions of Adam and Eve. This sort of idea is ably stated by Paul Wasson, in his booklet *God's Will and Human Freedom* on pages 14 and 15, where he says:

Only if [human] freedom were an illusion, could God know the future with precision. Put simply, if God has limited His omnipotence, so that we are free in our actions, then logically He must also limit His omniscience, not in the sense that the future is unknown to Him, but in the sense that He can see every possible future that could arise out of the present, yet leaves us free to choose which it will be. He could, of course have created a world in which everything was predictable, but He has chosen instead to create a world in which His creatures are free, and therefore, within certain limits, unpredictable.

Paul Wasson then goes on to state that God is like a perfect Chess grandmaster, who is always going to eventually win, regardless of what His opponent(s) may do. God's ultimate perfect will, to eventually entirely populate the earth (and universe) with righteous beings, will *never* be thwarted. God will definitely bring it to pass. *But* because God has given His higher creatures the gift of *genuine free will*, God may have decided to temporarily limit His omnipotence and omniscience. And as a result, God's perfect *end plan* can be *delayed* by any recalcitrance in His higher creatures – but it can never be ultimately thwarted.

But Roy's views also throw up other problems. Why would an effectively Holy Spirit inspired serpent, blatantly contradict what God had told Adam and Eve? God had declared that disobedience would result in death, but the serpent blatantly contradicted this, and furthermore, cast God in the role of an untrustworthy liar, who was jealous of human beings. Moreover, if the serpent was divinely inspired, and had successfully fulfilled God's mission, then why was it punished and cursed? Why was it not instead, praised, for apparently being an obedient servant of God? Surely the fact that it *was* punished, and cursed, suggests that the serpent did bear some kind of personal moral responsibility? Also, if Adam's actions in Eden merely entailed the implementation of God's most perfect will, then why does the Apostle Paul see Adam's behaviour in such a negative light? In Romans chapter 5, Paul states that Adam's actions were responsible for the power of Sin entering into the world, with the result that human beings are now born into a state of 'condemnation' (a word which represents an adverse legal judgement), mortality and physical frailty. The way Roy sets up his argument, seems to make God the Author of sin, which of course cannot be right.

Furthermore, the divine reaction to the effects of Adam's behaviour, is one of anger and outrage! Jesus was the Logos, or mind of God, expressed in human form (John 1:1; Phil. 2:6). Jesus' divine reaction to 'Sin', is to ultimately attribute it to an 'enemy', later identified as 'the devil'. (Compare Matt. 13:28 with 13:39). Jesus' reaction to human suffering is one of 'anger', because once again, Jesus ultimately ascribes it to the work of Satan.

See for example Mark 1:41; Luke 13:16 and John 11:33. Jesus' divine reactions therefore, effectively demonstrate that Adam's behaviour, which resulted in sin, suffering and death, is neither to be evaluated positively, nor is it to be seen as God's most perfect will for Mankind.

In criticising certain fundamentalist Evangelicals (who believe that the serpent in Eden was somehow influenced by the Devil), Roy may not perhaps be giving sufficient attention to an important Biblical principle, highlighted by Keith Lowe (*Faith – no reason to be hurtful* in E125, page23-24). This is the principle of sublation. Sublation is evident within the Bible itself and occurs when newer Biblical revelation reinterprets older Biblical ideas, so as to transform and then transcend them. The obvious examples are the treatments, by both Jesus, and the Apostle Paul, of the Old Testament Law. These led to such a radical transcendent reinterpretation, that much of the Law now becomes obsolete for Christians. The Law is revealed to be not 'an end', in itself – but merely a means to a higher end. Much of the Old Testament revelation (contained within 'old wineskins'; Mark 2:22), can be seen from a higher, revelatory perspective (provided by Christ, and the New Testament), as 'only an outline' (Weymouth), or an unclear image, of things to come. (Heb. 10:1)

In the light of the New Testament revelation, it does appear that one of the reasons for God creating Man, was to provide a means for the education of certain Angels (cf. Eph. 3:10). Christ's victory on the cross is presented as having a cosmic scope, which reconciles things, both on earth and in the supernatural world (Col. 1:20). This seems to result in some sort of judgement, upon certain kinds of angels (1 Cor. 6:1; Col. 2:15; Matt. 25:46) – the full details of which, are not fully revealed, partly perhaps because of the limitations of human faculties (2 Cor.12:4; 1 Cor. 13:12). The only proper response to this kind of revelation, may perhaps be an attitude of 'reverent

agnosticism.’ (See Paul Wasson’s article *Fallen Angels* in E101)

Paul Wasson, and quite rightly in my opinion, admits that it is a possibility that the New Testament writers may have believed in ‘angelic powers of evil’. And if this is the case, then the issue of fallen Angels (which is a concept that would include ‘the Devil’ or ‘the Satan’) is a subject which has undergone *sublation*, within the pages of the New Testament. Consider carefully what George McHaffie wrote in *Christadelphia Redivivus* on pages 26-27:

‘With regard to the Devil, our [Christadelphian] contention that the Bible teaches this to be flesh or human nature ‘in its various manifestations’ will simply not match up to Eph. 6:11,12 : “..stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood..but ...spiritual wickedness in high places.” The repeated references to the devil, the power of demons, and their being exorcised without any statement that there is no devil, or even an ‘as is supposed’ in reference to a demon, would carry conviction to most people that the Bible writers believed in the devil and demons. Supposing they did: would they have written any differently? Yet it seems beyond question that the phenomena once thought to be the work of demons etc., are more rationally explicable on other grounds. The only explanation of all this seems to be...that the Bible contains references to contemporary beliefs on many things incidental to the main intention of revelation. It would make our [Christadelphian] witness much more frank if we could acknowledge this primitive element, rather than endeavour to build up a case to show that it is not actually in the Bible at all. This carries with it, also, the implication that if anyone, out of conviction, believes in the devil and demons, he is nevertheless acceptable to God providing his behaviour is otherwise Christian.’

In the light of the above, it is possible that the material concerning the serpent in Genesis 3 may also have undergone sublation within the pages of the New Testament. The Apostle Paul’s comment at Romans 16:20, strongly suggests some link in his mind, between the Genesis 3 serpent and Satan. Note also the fairly close juxtaposition of the Genesis serpent and Satan, in 2 Cor. 11:3-14. Paul’s mention here, of Satan masquerading as an ‘Angel of Light’, echoes a contemporary first century CE Jewish tradition (found in *The Life of Adam and Eve* and *The Apocalypse of Moses*) that there was a link between the Devil and the serpent in Genesis 3. Jesus too seems to allude to a link between the Devil and the Genesis serpent, at John 8:44. Furthermore, Jesus links Satan with serpents at Luke 10:18-19. The link between the Devil and the serpent in Eden (the ancient serpent) is then made explicit in the final book of the Bible (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). The first extant evidence we have, of a link between the serpent in Eden and an evil angel, occurs in 1 Enoch 69:6 (possibly third century BCE). This idea seems reiterated in *The Wisdom of Solomon* (second century BCE), at 2:23-24: ‘..God formed man to be imperishable...But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it.’

Conclusions.

A very profound view expressed by Wilfred Lambert, was that proper Biblical exegesis must start with the question of what the Bible material may have originally meant to its first human authors. Only once we have honestly tried to establish this, can we then proceed to try and ascertain what that same Biblical material may now mean to us in a more modern age. Whereas the original author of Genesis 3 may well have believed that the tempting of Eve was produced only by an animal serpent, this may not be the end of the matter (as it is for the Jews). When the incident is viewed in the light of the New Testament revelation, then sublation may be evident. Therefore, whereas it may be legitimate for Christadelphians to now de-mythologise parts of the New Testament, other Bible students from other traditions, may actually, at times, be more faithful to some of the original ideas, of both Jesus and the New Testament writers. Edward Whittaker and C.S. Crawford illustrate this vitally important principle, when they write :

As it is known that Jesus had a limitation of knowledge during the days of His flesh (as a first century CE Jew), we cannot be sure that He was given a divine insight into the true causes of the conditions that were being commonly attributed to demons.

(*The Problem of Demons* in the Testimony Magazine, March, 1965)

If this was the case with ‘demons’, then this same basic principle would surely also hold true, with respect to Jesus’ conception of ‘the Devil’.

Tony Cox

Response from Roy Boyd

My thanks go to Tony Cox for his comments on my article. The way I wrote it laid myself open to such comments as his. However, we should bear in mind that God uses the whole of scripture to teach us spiritual lessons. Starting with creation and continuing with the events in the Garden of Eden, through Noah, Abraham and the Sinaitic covenant, the basis is laid for us to learn about the climax of His purpose, perfection in His son Jesus Christ.

‘For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our **learning**, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.’ (Rom 15:4 KJV).

'I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these *things*.' (Isa 45:7 KJV).
The account set in the Garden of Eden is part of God's plan of salvation involving Adam and Eve, the serpent being an essential player in the unfolding divine purpose.

Roy Boyd

When you are reading a book in a dark room,
and find it difficult,
you take it to a window to get more light.
So take your Bible to Christ.
(Robert Murray M'Cheyne)

The Funny Side of Life

Answering machine message:

'I am not available right now, but thank you for caring enough to call. I am making some changes in my life. Please leave a message after the beep. If I do not return your call, you are one of the changes.'

Aspire to inspire before you expire.

God made man before woman so as to give him time to think of an answer for her first question.

My wife and I had words, but I didn't get to use mine.

Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting.

The irony of life is that, by the time you're old enough to know your way around, you're not going anywhere.

I was always taught to respect my elders, but it keeps getting harder to find one.

Every morning is the dawn of a new error.

All the world's a stage and most of us are desperately unrehearsed.

Wife: Darling, do you love me just because I inherited a fortune from my father?

Husband: Of course not, darling! I would love you regardless of who left you the money.

Half Full or Half Empty? Dear Optimist, Pessimist and Realist,
While you guys were busy arguing about the glass of water, I drank it.
Signed, The Opportunist

Frustration is trying to find your glasses without your glasses.

The man who smiles when things go wrong has thought of someone he can blame it on.

I was thinking about how people seem to read the Bible a whole lot more as they get older. Then it dawned on me: they were cramming for their finals.

(Thanks to John Stephenson (NZ) for some of the above.)
