

1 Disappointment

I am sure that some of the following situations will be all too familiar to most of the readers of this magazine. Maybe they will be mainly associated with childhood but they are also very much a part of adult life too.

It is Christmas time and you have been looking forward to your special 'big' present. You have let it be known that this is what you would like for at least ... well, since last January! Christmas morning arrives and, when you frantically tear through the wrapping paper, it is not the gift, although lovingly chosen for you, you longed for.

You have planned most meticulously and with great anticipation your annual holiday, maybe a trip abroad. An airline strike leaves you stranded in an airport with nowhere to go.

Then there is the special event in your life. As a child it could be a family outing, as an adult it may be your wedding. All you want is a fine day and warm sunshine. The first thing you hear when you wake up in the morning is the rain throwing itself against your window.

Or, was it the poor examination result after you had put so much effort into your revision? Maybe it was the house sale that fell through, the job you didn't get or the friend who let you down.

How did you feel about these things happening to you? What emotions come to mind? Have I triggered off some feeling that has been lying dormant inside you for years and you are getting a bit anxious about it now? One word sums up all these situations and that word is disappointment. And what is disappointment? It is being let down, non-fulfilment of hopes and aspirations, something that does not come up to expectations, non-completion of something, being unsuccessful, failure, falling short of a goal. All these things lead to sadness, vexation, discontent, dissatisfaction, regret and the feeling of being discouraged and despondent.

Disappointment is the failure to meet expectations, hopes, desires and standards. The origin of the word, I understand, comes from as long ago as the 15th century, originally meaning to remove from office, to dis-appoint, presumably because the chap in the job did not come up to scratch, so he was got rid of and no doubt he felt he was a failure and had not only let other people down but himself as well. He probably had strong feelings of regret and sadness at what had happened. In 2 Peter 3:17, where the early Christians were being urged not to listen to false teachings, it says, 'Be on your guard then, so that you will not be led away by the errors of lawless people and fall from your safe position.' In other words, don't be dis-appointed.

However depressing this may seem to us, disappointment has been around for an awful long time and will be with us for some time to come. It is ever present with us. We use the word a lot in everyday life. We may say that we have been disappointed in, say, a car we have bought, an item of clothing, a domestic appliance, or a film or theatre performance. We talk about being bitterly disappointed in something or other and in people too. It is quite a strong feeling. I'm sure many of you would share my feelings of sadness and horror if a teacher at school, or especially my parents, said they were disappointed in me. On occasions as a teacher I had to tell pupils that they had not come up to my expectations. Mostly they took this well, not, I'm afraid, like the present younger generation who seem not to take kindly even to constructive criticism, but might well respond with 'Am I bovvered?'

It isn't always that we are disappointed in others. We are often disappointed in ourselves. Lots of people still try to make New Year's resolutions. Those who do are often annoyed with themselves when they fail to keep them. We are continually promising ourselves that we will do something and we fail miserably. In those heartfelt words of the general confession of the Church of England, We have left undone those things which we ought to have done and done those things we ought not to have done and there is no health in us.

This is how the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins felt about himself when he wrote this poem:

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
With thee; But, sir, so what I plead is just.

Why do sinners' ways prosper? And why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?
Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me? O the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes
Now, leaved how thick! Laced they are again
With fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them. Birds build—but not I build; No, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou Lord of life, send my roots rain.

Based on Jeremiah 12:1-3, Hopkins expresses his almost total despair, his disappointment at his failure and sense of impotence in the face of evil. He is saved by the faint hope that even now he may be able to grow if God will send his roots rain.

Disappointment has been around for a long, long time and is part of life's rich pattern. Are disappointments there in our lives for a purpose? Are they good for our souls? Are they instrumental in building character, making us strong and prepared for all eventualities? Have they ever harmed us? What do they do? I'm not sure I can answer any of these questions but I can share a few thoughts from other people with you.

Some unknown writer said: 'Disappointments are his, ie, God's appointments.'

Frederick W Faber, the famous hymn writer, said 'There are no disappointments to those whose wills are buried in the will of God.'

Theodore Parker wrote 'Disappointment is often the salt of life.'

John Newton wrote 'There is many a thing which the world calls disappointment, but there is no such word in the dictionary of faith. What to others are disappointments are to believers intimations of the way of God.'

Maybe those quotations have helped a little to answer my questions.

I began to think a little about all the people we read of in our Bible, a vast and rich account of the lives of hundreds of colourful characters. Did they suffer disappointment in any form? Well, I wish I hadn't started! It is full of those who failed, let others down and became discouraged and their stories are all there to help us on our journey through life.

How did God feel when he pronounced his judgement on Adam and Eve when they disobeyed his simple command? How did he feel when he had to punish them? What thoughts did he have when he cast them out of the garden? In Genesis 6, how sad it was when the Lord saw how wicked everyone on earth had become and was sorry that he had made them and was filled with regret. Was there not a tinge of disappointment? What about Jacob? The word disappointment is not mentioned in Genesis but what disappointment that poor young man must have felt when after waiting and working hard for seven years he got the wrong woman!

I then thought about Moses. How let down he must have felt after he had rescued the Israelites from harsh slavery in Egypt only for them to grumble constantly about their life in the wilderness. What were his feelings when he returned from the mount to see the people of Israel worshipping the golden calf? The text says he was furious with the people and, of course, with Aaron. Surely there was disappointment too. I'm sure there are many more examples of disappointment in Moses' life, not forgetting the fact that he did not enter the Promised Land after all his efforts.

I think too of Hannah and her disappointment at not having a child and then that child Samuel as a man being terribly upset, displeased and disappointed at the people demanding a king.

I feel absolutely certain that there were many times when David was sad and disgusted at his failure. Think of the times he let both himself and others down. Quite a few times we read that his conscience troubled him and he must have felt that he had let himself down. How disappointed he would have been to learn that he was not going to build the temple, and how dreadful he must have felt when Nathan came to show him how dreadfully he had sinned. In Psalm 51 he recognizes his faults and regrets them.

What about the prophets? There were certainly times when Elijah was disappointed. Others like Isaiah and Jeremiah had their frustrations and regrets too. Throughout the history of Israel we can feel so strongly the distress and disappointment that God experienced as his people let him down time after time by worshipping other gods and breaking their covenant with him.

Coming to the New Testament and to Jesus, there must have been disappointment in the heart of the rich young man who wanted to know how he could inherit eternal life. He went away sad and downcast, as he had many possessions and he was reluctant to give them up. Were Martha and Mary disappointed that Jesus did not get to their beloved brother in time? 'If you had been here, Lord...' The disciples had failed Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane by falling asleep. They must have been disenchanted and upset when Jesus' plans did not quite match what they had in mind. 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' Do you remember, in John 14, when Philip asks, 'Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need,' how Jesus replied? It was almost with a sigh of exasperation and surely disappointment. 'Have I been such a long time with you and yet you do not know me, Philip?' And what about Judas? He had been with Jesus, shared in his life, a trusted and valued friend and comrade. He had witnessed the miracles and knew that Jesus was the Messiah. But things went horribly wrong. Why did he betray Jesus? The theologian, Tom Wright, suggests that one of the reasons may have been that it was nothing to do with money, which seemed to be often uppermost in his mind, but more an angry disappointment at the fact that Jesus, having caused such a stir in Jerusalem, was now talking about his death instead of planning the great moment when he would take over and become king. He, Judas, was expecting to be his right hand man.

Peter denied Jesus. Tired and frightened he swore, 'I don't know the man.' When the cock crowed, Peter remembered Jesus' words. He went outside and wept bitterly. It was the last straw. He had failed to walk on water, he had made a bit of a fool of himself on several occasions and had been hurt and humiliated when Jesus had called him Satan. He had failed to understand what Jesus had told him. He had done his best in the garden but it hadn't really been good enough. He had let Jesus down by not defending him and then, when he did, by cutting off the ear of Malchus, it was all wrong and now he had denied his Lord. Disappointed in himself or what?

There is one thing quite clear throughout the whole of our Bible and that is that God will not let us down. Others will and might, but not our Father. Politicians and world leaders do so all the time. We read in almost every newspaper of disappointing world affairs but we read on almost every page of Scripture that God is steadfast, always the same, forgiving and merciful and he will never abandon us or let us down in spite of our waywardness. One writer describes it as his unwearying constancy. 'He who calls you will do it because he is faithful', 2 Thess 5:24. And, of course, this includes God's son, our Saviour, who will always be faithful and true to us. 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and tomorrow', who promised us that he would be with us always and before his death on the cross told the disciples that their sorrow and disappointment would be turned to joy. He would not leave them comfortless. We are told, in the second letter to Timothy, that even if we are not faithful he remains faithful.

In Romans chapter 5 we read, 'Now that we have been put right with God through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He has brought us by faith into this experience of God's grace, in which we now live. And so we boast of the hope we have of sharing God's glory! We also boast of our troubles because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance brings God's approval and his approval creates hope. This hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us.'

Again in Romans, Paul says that the people were seeking a law that would put them right with God and did not find one. And why not? Because they did not depend on faith, but on what they did, so they stumbled. This stumbling stone is what the Scripture speaks of: 'Look I place in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make people fall but whoever believes in him will not be disappointed.' Later on, in chapter 10, Paul says: 'For it is by our faith that we are put right with God; it is by our confession that we are saved. The Scripture says, "whoever believes in him will not be disappointed."'"

In Peter's first letter there is the reference to the valuable stone, the living stone, Jesus, which God is placing as a cornerstone in Zion and whoever believes in him will never be disappointed.

Throughout the NT we are assured again and again that God keeps his promises. 'We must trust ourselves completely to our creator who always keeps his promise', 1 Peter 4:19. 'The Lord is not slow concerning his promise,' 2 Peter 3:9. 'Let us hold on firmly to the hope we profess, because we can trust God to keep his promise,' Hebrews 10:23.

In the letter to the Hebrews, God, we are told, has offered the promise that we may receive the rest that he has spoken about. His people in the desert were stubborn and he said that they would never receive the rest he could have given them. We have been offered that rest! We have heard the good news. We have responded to it. Let us take care then not to fail to receive that promised rest. Let us not disappoint God by not accepting his promises with faith, love and gratitude. Let us remember that he didn't disappoint us when he brought his son back to life.

The lovely words of Katharina von Schlegel's hymn say it all.

Be still, my soul: the hour is hastening on
When we shall be for ever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgotten, love's pure joy restored.
Be still my soul: when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

Mavis Boddy

Greek Gems

13 The Greek verb 'to obey' is **hypakouo** which really means 'to hear from below'. This implies 'to listen to someone from above'.

On the outside of the magnificent 12th century cathedral of Chartres near Paris, are poised life-sized statues of prophets, apostles etc. and along the row of patriarchs is one unique figure. All the other statues are looking straight forward, but there is one looking up to heaven listening to God. The mediaeval sculptor had recognised the uniqueness of Abraham. God's voice had gone out into the world from the beginning of creation, but men had not heeded, except Noah. But Abraham listened, was receptive and obeyed, even to the command to sacrifice his son. This was the man through whom God could fulfil His purpose. He was, as Paul declared, 'the father of the faithful', the man who recognised the voice of God. This was why God chose Israel as the people through whom to reveal Himself, as He did through Moses, David, the prophets and the faithful who remained true to Him and listened to His word.

How good are we at listening to the voice of God speaking to us now through the Word, through others, through answers to prayer, through moments of illumination, through opportunities and spontaneous thoughts which guide and lead us along the path of life? All we need is the

faith to believe that God is there in our Lord, responding, answering and showing us the way, if we have our hearts and minds open and listening. What is the Lord saying to me today?

14 Word Throughout last year we were constantly being reminded of the words of the Bible in the celebrations of the 400th anniversary of the King James Version. But what do we mean by ‘word’? We usually think of it as something written or spoken, as in French ‘la parole’ is clearly related to the verb to speak e.g. ‘Parlez-vous francais?’. But is that what it really means? The Greek ‘logos’ gives a different view. It is related to logic, Biology, Geology etc. etc. Clearly these are not essentially spoken but express the understanding of thought, life, and the land. It is the explanation of the reasoning behind the theory - the basic meaning behind the word. So essentially a word is an expression of a concept, co-ordinated in the mind from an idea or sense perception which is formed into a word to be spoken or written with the purpose of communicating the idea. The word is therefore a symbol of a thought but expressed in a form intelligible to the reader or listener and so in his or her language.

So the words of Scripture are symbolic expressions of the mind of God, conveyed through language to the reader. So in reading the Bible we must look beneath the surface to the fundamental thought that lies beneath, which is the real meaning of truth, but also recognise that this was conveyed through the medium of words which were relevant and intelligible to the recipients. Therefore we must look not only for the inner meaning but also recognise to whom it was first addressed. Hence the importance of reading the Bible in the context of history, society and personality. For example, all Paul’s letters are written to different people with different messages as appropriate to them, and the Old Testament is addressed to Israel in the vicissitudes of their history. But underneath there lies the golden thread of God’s purpose.

Sheila Harris

Treasurer and Subscriptions Secretary for *The Endeavour Magazine*

After over 15 years of voluntary service, Ruth would like to retire. We thank her for the invaluable work she has done in keeping the venture financially viable and for dealing so efficiently with subscriptions and distribution. So the Committee is looking for someone to fill the above post and the work involved is detailed below:

- 1). Keeping the financial records and producing the annual accounts.
- 2). Producing an agenda for the AGM and the minutes.
- 3). Arranging for printing of the magazine in May and November.
- 4). Mailing the magazine in June and December.
- 5). Keeping a database of subscribers, at present kept in Excel.
- 6). Reminders for payment for the current year are sent out with the June issue with an option to pay for two years. A second reminder is sent with the December issue to those who have not paid. Anyone who is willing to volunteer should contact (Mrs) Ruth Marsters for more information. Tel. 01366 500030 email. end@marstersvoice.co.uk

Prophecy and Prophets in the Old Testament

That section of the Hebrew Bible known as the Latter Prophets – writing or canonical prophets – may be divided into the three major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and twelve minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). Note the omission of Lamentations and Daniel. While this comprises approximately 27% of the Old Testament (262 out of 970 pages) this does not mean that this section of the Old Testament has only minor impor-

tance. These fifteen books rivet our attention. No doubt each one of us has our favourite prophet for, although all the prophets had a twofold message of repentance and future salvation, each prophet's message always bore the personality through whom it came. For example, how different were Amos and Hosea.

'We may say that the Old Testament is dominated by the prophetic testimony, the teaching of those men who left a permanent mark not only on the religion of Israel, but especially on the Old Testament, in the course of two hundred and fifty years of the greatest catastrophes and the most miraculous deliverances, between 750 and 500.'¹ In view of the comment that 'no nation in all history has ever possessed a succession of guides and interpreters such as Israel knew'² it should be instructive to review some of the evidence found in the Old Testament.

Isaiah, who received his call in the last year of the life of Uzziah (740-739 BC), was not the first in a long line of prophets. The first occurrence of the word 'prophet' is found in Gen 20:7 where Abimelek, king of Gerar, recognizes Abraham as a prophet (*nabi*), or a person who stands in a special relationship with God. We don't usually think of Abraham as a prophet nor even Moses, yet it was by a prophet of the Lord, Moses, that Israel was led out of Egypt (Hos 12:13). Aaron was prophet to Moses (Ex 7:1). That Aaron functioned as a spokesman for Moses leads us to consider the meaning of the word 'prophet.' 'The prophet claimed to be the mouthpiece of God, and his utterance was commonly introduced by the words "Thus saith Jehovah" or terminated with the words "Oracle of Jehovah."³

That there were varieties of prophet in Israel is quite certain. The term 'man of God' is often used of a prophet, especially in the book of Kings, and also in the book of Samuel. Turning to I Sam 9:3-10 we come to the story of Saul's search for his father's lost asses. Perhaps not many of us recall this story. However, I well remember the days in 1964 when I read this unusual tale, from a Hebrew Bible, in a university lecture room and I can picture our lecturer not only explaining the grammar but also expounding the importance of verse 9: ['Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, "Come, let us go to the seer"; for he who is now called a prophet (*nabi*) was formerly called a seer (*ro'eh*).'] Notice that in our English translation, verse 9 is enclosed in brackets, because this is an explanatory sentence, an interpolation – which should be inserted after v 11 – written by a scribe to describe an archaic term.

'Every prophet was conscious of a vocation, and this is the first fundamental characteristic of true prophecy.'⁴ The word *nabi* means one who calls or is called. It comes from a verb which means 'to prophesy', while the word *ro'eh* is an active participle from a verb meaning to see, and is applied to one who sees what is hidden from the eyes of an ordinary person. The other Hebrew word which we can find in a concordance is *chozeh*, from a different verb 'to see' and may be translated either prophet or seer. First used in II Sa 24:11 the term is applied to Gad, David's seer.

Deut 18: 9-22 gives a description of the place occupied by the prophets in Israel and commences by denouncing the abominable practices of surrounding nations, which 'practice divination, tell fortunes or interpret omens, practice sorcery or have a charmer, or a medium or a wizard or a necromancer.' Divination was a form of communication with the higher powers, the Babylonians being masters of the art of seeking signs in the heavenly bodies (astrology) and in the inspection of the livers of sacrificed animals (hepatoscopy). On my last visit to the British Museum I saw the clay model of a sheep's liver used in divination.⁵ Necromancy is communication with spirits of the dead; the most noted instance being Saul's visit to the woman at Endor which seems to be an unusual event in view of the fact that at one time Saul prophesied along with a band of prophets so that 'it became a proverb "is Saul among the prophets?"' (I Sa 10:12).

We are so used to reading the books of the prophets that we forget that not all the prophets wrote down their messages, for Jeremiah seems to be the only prophet who had a secretary. It is very probable that the message would have been spoken first and then recorded. 'All would agree that the prophets did not normally use the written word as a medium of communication; and most would agree that oral tradition played some part in the preservation and transmission of the material of which the prophetic books are

composed.’⁶ Isa chapters 40 to 55 may prove the exception to the rule. ‘The spoken word was from early times held to have divine authority and when a prophet or his disciples committed his teaching to writing (Isa 8:16; Jer 36) a similar authority would be attached to the written word.’⁷

As we read any of the prophetic books we become aware of three types of material: the actual prophetic utterance which is usually couched in poetic form, narratives about the prophet hopefully with dates, and narratives about the prophet’s experiences. The life situation (sitz im leben) of a specific place or setting is of considerable importance as we seek to understand any prophecy.

Hence, dating the various parts of the prophetic books is an important exercise as we seek to understand the prophetic message for politics and religion were intimately related. For example, Amos prophesied (c 750) during the reign of Jeroboam when, while there was a time of great material prosperity in Israel, there was a great difference between the wealth of the rich and the poverty of the needy. The Assyrians began their rise to supremacy at this time. Hosea was also prophesying at the same time (c 745), denouncing the northern kingdom before the fall of Samaria.

The prophetic message recorded in our Bible had religious, social, and political significance, not only for the time when a prophecy was given, but also for some time in the future. ‘In New Testament times (the prophets) appear to have been regarded in Christian circles as primarily men who foretold the advent and the work of Christ.’⁸ With this we would agree, for the prophet Isaiah certainly foretold the advent of Jesus, whom he depicted as Immanuel, the Suffering Servant, the Branch or Shoot and the Prince of Peace. ‘In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son’ (Heb1:1-2a).

Since the time of Dr Thomas there has been, in my opinion, undue emphasis concerned with speculation on future political events. ‘In later times there have been Christian circles which regarded (prophets) as primarily men who foretold the details of human history to the end of time...There is nothing specifically Christian of this type of study of the prophets, whose only merit is that it provides a hobby for long evenings.’⁹

John Stephenson (NZ)

Notes

- 1 Th. C. Vriezen *An outline of Old Testament Theology* Blackwell 1958 p 40.
- 2 George F. Knight *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament* SCM Press 1959 p 315.
- 3 H. H. Rowley *The Growth of the Old Testament* Hutchinson 1958 p 81.
- 4 H. H. Rowley *The Servant of the Lord* Lutterworth 1952 p 112.
- 5 *Through the British Museum with the Bible* 2004 p 33.
- 6 G. W. Anderson *Studies in Theology* James Clark 1945 p 94.
- 7 *Ibid* p 14.
- 8 H. H. Rowley *The Rediscovery of the Old Testament* Lutterworth 1952 p 94.
- 9 *Ibid* p 94.

New Booklet

GENESIS:don't take it literally.

David Brown, scientist and engineer, MA, PhD, FInstP, FICHEM.

A5 booklet of 32 pages.

Available from the editor for £2 inc p&p.

This booklet tackles the vexed issue of the relation between Science and the Bible. David regrets that too often they are presented to the public as being poles apart, a view that is promoted forcefully by some atheists and fundamentalists alike. In particular, the early chapters of Genesis have sadly become a battleground between atheists and Christians, but also between Christians themselves. He argues that the Bible encourages curiosity about the world we live in and so encourages the scientific enterprise and maintains that there is really no need for Science and Christianity to be at loggerheads.

He takes a careful look at the structure and aims of the Genesis story and concludes that the Bible itself suggests that the early chapters of Genesis should not be taken literally. It follows that evolution is in no way excluded as the likely method used by God to bring the living world as we know it into being, and that the 'two books' – of God's word and God's works – speak in harmony.

Editor

Gehenna not a Refuse Dump

(This article by *Wilfred Lambert* first appeared in E85, May 1991)

The mortality of man has always been a point in our teaching. It involves giving Scriptural definitions of the human 'soul' and Scriptural exposition of 'heaven' and 'hell' as they relate to the destiny of man. From a scholarly standpoint much of this is not controversial. Scholars who go to the Biblical books with an open mind to find out the meanings of words agree that the Hebrew 'soul' (*nefesh*) of man is indeed mortal and bears no relationship to the immortal soul of Platonic teachings and of the medieval church. With 'hell' the problems are superficially greater because of the occurrence of Biblical passages speaking of a fiery place reserved for the punishment of the wicked, and it is these that are the concern of the present article. As is well understood among us, this is a metaphorical use of the name of a spot just outside the walls of Jerusalem. In general our traditional understanding is correct, save for one particular, to which attention will be drawn.

The spot in question is a valley to the south of Jerusalem called 'the valley of the son of Hinnom' in Old Testament topographical contexts, see Joshua 15:8, 18:16; Jeremiah 19:2 and 6. In Hebrew this is *Gē' ben Hinnōm* and Hinnom is a personal name which presumably belonged to a Canaanite in the land before the Israelite conquest, only surviving in the name of the valley. Most likely 'son of Hinnom' is an ancient scribal misinterpretation for 'sons of Hinnom'. In the spelling conventions of standard Hebrew manuscripts *bn* (pronounced *ben*) is 'son of' and *bny* (pronounced *bnē*) 'sons of'. Once in the Hebrew Bible (II Kings 23:10) the standard Hebrew text offers *bny* in this name, '(valley of) the sons (of Hinnom)', but a marginal note of medieval origin directs readers to pronounce the singular *ben*. In the times of the earliest surviving Hebrew manuscripts scribes took liberties in adding or omitting the consonant signs used to indicate vowels, such as *y* for *ē*, and the Dead Sea Scroll copies of Biblical books differ from the standard later Hebrew manuscripts in hundreds of such cases. Thus one is justified in choosing the alternative which gives the better sense. 'The valley of the sons of Hinnom' is better because the Israelites followed earlier local tradition in having the rule that land belonged to a family and generally could not be sold or otherwise disposed of except by descent within the family. This is shown in Naboth's refusal to part with his vineyard at Ahab's insistence. The Hebrew 'son' includes of course 'grandson', 'great-grandson' etc. Thus 'valley of the sons of Hinnom' implies that it was the ancestral property of this family. The alternative 'son of Hinnom' would imply that it belonged to one particular son of a Mr Hinnom, who, for some reason, was not referred to by his own name. This is less probable. Used as a place name, the phrase was later abbreviated to 'Valley of Hinnom', as in Nehemiah 11:30, and the Aramaic form of this, Gehenna, occurs in the New Testament, where it is rendered 'hell' in the English Authorised Version.

In the Old Testament this phrase always refers to the actual valley, but in the New Testament it is always a figure for the place of punishment of the wicked: Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33;

Mark 9:43,45,47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6. In two of the occurrences in Matthew, 5:22 and 18:9, and in the one in Mark, it is referred to as fiery, and it is in this connection that wrong information is often given. It is often asserted that the valley at Jerusalem served as a refuse dump, and that fires were kept burning there to consume rubbish, from which the fiery character of the New Testament Gehenna derives.

There is nothing in the Bible to support this, nor indeed in other contemporary documents, nor in all the extensive earlier Rabbinic literature, which often depended on traditions going back to Biblical times. The earliest known occurrence of this idea appears in a commentary on the Psalms by David Kimchi, a Rabbinic Bible scholar who lived in Provence in the south of France c. 1160-1235 AD. In commenting on 'the land of the living' in Psalm 27:13 he writes on Gehenna:

'...it is a place on the earth adjacent to Jerusalem. It is an obnoxious place where impure things and corpses were thrown, and where there was a constant fire to burn up the impure things and the bones of the corpses. Accordingly the place where the wicked will be judged is metaphorically called Gehenna.'

The extremely late date of this idea renders it very uncertain, and it must also be noted that a place for burning human bodies is not what is usually meant by 'refuse dump' or any other such phrase.

There is in fact another explanation of the burning attributed to Gehenna in the New Testament, which is firmly established in the Old. Five passages: (II Kings 23:10; II Chronicles 28:3, 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31-32, 32:35) refer to the valley of the Son(s) of Hinnom, and to Topheth, a particular spot within it, as the place where human sacrifice to the pagan god Molech took place. Children were 'burnt' or 'passed through the fire' in rites performed there. There has been much scholarly discussion about these practices, but the recent book of John Day, *Moloch: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (Cambridge, 1989) offers strong evidence that the Old Testament statements are to be taken at face value. Human children were burnt to death to honour Molech in this valley. This ritual burning, then, is the background of the imagery used in the New Testament for the place where the wicked will be destroyed.

One other passage needs consideration. Isaiah 66:24, in a picture of the future destruction of the wicked, says, 'their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched.' Gehenna is not named in the context, but in Mark 9:43-47 the phrases from Isaiah are quoted alongside the name of Gehenna. In the context of Isaiah the words do not describe sacrifices to Molech. Fuel was not abundant in pre-exilic Israel and a permanently burning fire would have consumed vast quantities of wood. Nor is there any reliable evidence that God-fearing Israel maintained a permanently burning facility for the disposal of unclean human corpses. The cost of fuel and the Sabbath laws would together have proved insurmountable obstacles. The passage in Isaiah is looking forward to the future, and though Gehenna is not named, the words do anticipate the New Testament use of the concept of Gehenna. The words are not describing exactly what happened in the Valley outside the walls of Jerusalem, but use the burning there as a basis for imagery in the prophetic vision of final destruction of the wicked.

Thus traditional Christadelphian teaching is basically correct, but in one detail it has been misled by late Rabbinic speculation.

Wilfred Lambert

The Identity of Satan

The subject of the devil and Satan is one area of Biblical teaching which often presents us with a problem of interpretation. In the New Testament this being is pictured as the tempter and deceiver of men, the instigator of human sin and the enemy of God. Our community usually interprets this to mean that 'the devil' and 'Satan' are symbolic of the evil that resides in the human heart: 'Every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lusts and enticed' (James 1:14). In this way we arrive at the 'true' meaning of Scripture by substituting the phrase 'human nature in its opposition to God' whenever we read the name Satan or the devil. I have heard Sunday evening speakers tell us that if we want to know what the devil looks like, just look in the mirror. This interpretation however, hardly does justice to the many passages

which seem to describe Satan as something more than a symbol of individual human nature, as when Jesus declared: 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven' (Luke 10:18). That is just one passage that does not fit such an interpretation.

The fact is that Scripture never describes Satan in terms that suggest a symbol of the inner impulses of his victims; he is always described as an influence upon them from outside. When Jesus was confronted by a woman who was afflicted by a 'spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together and could in no wise lift herself up', he described her as one 'whom Satan bound' (Luke 13:16, ESV). She is described as the victim of a malign power outside herself. On this occasion Satan is held responsible for what we call 'natural evil' rather than moral evil. In Luke 22:3 'Satan entered into Judas'. Later in the same chapter Jesus said to Peter, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he may sift you like wheat: but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail' (Luke 22:31,32). Again, Satan was an influence working on Peter and the other Apostles from outside. The ministry of Jesus is described in terms of a conflict between two rival kingdoms, God's and Satan's: 'If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Matthew 12:28).

So how are we to understand Satan in the light of these passages? All temptation has two elements: that which tempts us from outside, and the voice within which urges us to succumb to it. The voice within is not Satan. That is part of us. Satan is the embodiment of what stands outside us. He is, I would suggest, a symbol of the collective personality of the world, something that transcends the individual. It is bigger than us. We all contribute to the vitality of this power when we act under its influence, and draw something from it when we act against God's will, but as individuals it is outside of us.

Where does this malevolent power reside? I am indebted here to a book called *The Significance of Satan* by Trevor Ling¹. He points out that the writings of John alternately picture the enemy as the 'evil one' and sometimes as 'the world'; that is, the world of men organized outside the will of God. In I John 2:13 we read: 'You have overcome *the evil one*', but in 5:4 'This is the victory that has overcome *the world* – our faith'. Sometimes the two are combined: 'The whole world lies in the power of the evil one' (I John 5:19). 'Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out' (John 12:31).

The 'Ruler of this world' is not supernatural, a 'personal devil', standing over against the world, and separate from it nor is it simply a symbol of something that lurks in the heart of the individual, it is, rather, the focal point of all the evil that pervades the world; the spirit of self-sufficiency that makes it hostile to God. We find similar expressions in the letters of Paul: 'The spirit of the world' (I Corinthians 2:12), the God of this world (II Corinthians 4:4), 'The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience' (Ephesians 2:2).

Perhaps a useful analogy is that of a football crowd or a political demonstration that has got out of hand. Individuals are drawn along by a kind of herd instinct to do things that they would not do on their own. They are gripped by a collective madness. Another analogy might be the spirit of evil that gripped certain totalitarian states in the last century and which inspired law-abiding individuals to become concentration camp guards and commit acts of unspeakable cruelty. They were in the grip of a collective evil that transcended the individual.

From the perspective of the New Testament the whole world is in the grip of such a power, turning it against God and inspiring it to wickedness. Scripture however, does not demonize the world itself. The inhabitants of the world are the object of God's love and are capable of hearing the Gospel and of being redeemed. The evil motivation within the world constitutes the devil. It is the self-deification of mankind, everything that usurps the place of God. This comes out in the words ascribed to the devil in Luke 4 when he tempted Jesus. Sometimes we are told that 'the devil' was the 'human side' of Jesus' nature. But look at Luke's record of how the tempter introduced the second temptation: 'To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will' (Luke 4:6). Whoever was speaking to him claims to have dominion over the whole world and was offering to share it with

Jesus on condition that he ‘worshipped him’. He must have been something more than the personal inclinations of Jesus or the ‘human side’ of his nature. His words make no sense according to that interpretation. It is interesting to note where these words are drawn from. The devil is quoting what was said to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:17 and 32: ‘The Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will’. (A similar passage is found in Jeremiah 27:5). So Satan was usurping the prerogative of God in claiming dominion over the world and giving it to whom he chooses.

Every time the voice of temptation came to Jesus it took up the title that was heard at his baptism: ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’ (Luke 3:22). The purpose of the temptation was to settle the questions – How should the Son of God conduct himself? What sort of kingdom was he to found? and, How was he to attract men into it? And so the voice of temptation said ‘If you are the Son of God ...’ and then proposes three ways of conducting his ministry each of which appealed to worldly nationalism. Jesus had in his mind a clear idea of the kind of Messiah the Jews wanted: a leader who would feed them miraculously, demonstrate his power through the miracles of showmanship and transform Israel into a powerful nation. In his mind therefore, he conducted a dialogue with this symbol of worldly power. Before him was the choice: either to go the way of the world, specifically to fulfill Jewish expectations of kingship, or to do the opposite and go against the grain of the world order and thus make Satan his enemy, even though such a choice would mean a struggle to the death. From then on therefore, his ministry is described as a conflict between two rival kingdoms.

It is clear that Jesus regarded the figure of Satan as the focal point of all the evil and disorder in the world. His saying in Mark 3 that ‘No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man’ (Mark 3:27) tells us that Satan is the one who must be fought before all other evils can be vanquished. Jesus alone had the authority to ‘bind the strong man’, to enter his house, plunder his goods and release his captives. His healing of the sick and his exorcism of demons were but isolated skirmishes in the great battle that would lead to the defeat of Satan. The analogy has sometimes been used of a war in which the decisive battle has already been fought and won, but the enemy, although mortally wounded, is still in a position to snipe at his victors and inflict casualties upon them. Yet his defeat is already secured, so that Jesus could declare, even before his crucifixion: ‘Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out’ (John 12:31).

The strategy of Jesus was not to fight against those who were under Satan’s sway, but, paradoxically, to submit to their malice and in doing so turned upside down all worldly standards of kingship, greatness and authority. For a while it must have seemed to all who witnessed it that he was defeated and that his death was a negation of all that he stood for. But, though Satan did his worst through those over whom he ruled, God vindicated His Son by raising him from the dead. His apparent defeat was in fact his victory, his obedience unto death was the dethronement of the devil and his resurrection was conclusive evidence that victory lay in his hands: ‘Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil’ (Hebrews 2:14).

Paul Wasson

1 Trevor Ling, *The Significance of Satan*, SPCK, 1961, pp. 114.

A Traveller’s Tale (2)

When Pharaoh heard that Moses had killed an Egyptian he sought to have Moses killed. ‘But Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in the land of Midian’ (Ex 2:15). No, Moses was not ‘flying blind’ — he *knew* where to go! Midian was a descendant of Abraham through the patriarch’s second wife Keturah (Gen 25:2) and the land of Midian lay south of Edom and east of the Gulf of Aqaba.

The most direct route would be to cut diagonally across the Sinai Peninsula, right through the heart of what he later described as ‘that great and terrible wilderness’, devoid of water and food. Distance – a good 200 miles.

Or perhaps he kept to the north of the peninsula, at first (travelling fast to throw off possible pursuit) through the wilderness of Shur, then bore to the right, coming down, down, to the head of the gulf. Distance – over 200 miles. If he took what was later to become the Exodus route, round the south of the peninsula, – 300 miles!

After Moses had spent 40 uneventful years in Midian, God called him to return to Egypt and lead Israel from slavery to the Promised Land. Now 80 years old, he made the return journey with his wife Zipporah and their young son. Still lying ahead of him a longer, more exacting and more eventful journey, which he would undertake but not complete.

Michael Craddock

Is There Virtue in Poverty?

Money, money, money

Give me money in a rich man’s world.’

Thus run the words of a popular Abba song which aptly capture the cultural mantra of the developed world. This is the very antithesis of the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus told those who lived in poverty: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.’ He admonished those who were well-off: ‘But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort’ (Luke 6:20 and 24). This radical teaching is even more shocking than we initially imagine. The Greek word for ‘poor’ is not *penēs* (one who may have owned a slave but had to go out to work), but *ptōchos* (one who crouches and hides, blighted by a poverty-stricken condition – Vine). Matthew’s ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ seems more agreeable but according to some scholars it almost certainly does not refer to well-to-do people who are nevertheless spiritually poor, but to people whose material poverty has broken their spirit.¹

The economics of the Kingdom became the subject of a lengthy discourse in Luke 12. Jesus was unwilling to arbitrate in the case of the man who wanted his brother to share his inheritance. Jesus said to the one losing out; ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of one’s possessions’ (v15). The Lord further exhorted his disciples: ‘And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried ... Sell your possessions and give to the needy.’ Evidently Jesus was not just making this radical demand on that rich young seeker after eternal life (Mark 10:17-31) who, we recall, was invited to give all his money to the poor and then to join the ranks of Jesus’ itinerant disciples. The man ambled away grieving for he had many possessions. This was a predictable response to which Jesus concluded that it was easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom.²

Jesus is very adamant about this principle. He instructs us, in words that can scarcely be misunderstood: ‘anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has (Greek ‘possessions’) cannot be my disciple’ (Luke 14:33). Thus Jesus praised the widow who cast into the offering box the last of her copper coins (Luke 21). She had ‘contributed ... out of her poverty ... all she had to live on.’ He has looked closely at human nature and noted that we are prone to greed with all its subtle temptations. We enjoy having an abundance of goods, but if we have less than a perceived minimum level of basic *necessities* we may conclude that life is not worth living.

What would we make of a member of our community who sold and gave away everything he or she had, and who then went around preaching in urban centres clothed rather shabbily like a modern John the Baptist? Or, look round your ecclesia and estimate the combined value of the entire estates of all its members. I had a go at this exercise in my own ecclesia and came up with a figure of between seven and ten million pounds. Depending on the answers you come up with to these two questions, I suggest we have chosen to ignore the teaching of Jesus on wealth avoidance.

Bill and Melinda Gates formed the Gates Foundation which aims (on a global scale) to enhance health care and address extreme poverty. On the last count they have given approximately 28 billion dollars to this charity. They have publicly made a pledge to eventually donate 95% of their entire (and considerable) wealth. Wow! This is very close to the 100% asked by Jesus of the rich young ruler. Bill Gates, in an interview with David Frost in 1995, was asked if he believed in the Sermon on the Mount. He said: 'I don't. I'm not somebody who goes to church on a regular basis. The specific elements of Christianity are not something I'm a huge believer in. There's a lot of merit in the moral aspects of religion. I think it can have a very, very positive impact ... I think religious principles are quite valid.'

I heard an exhortation last year in which a brother referred to the giving of this charitable couple. He noted that they had given away an incredible amount but that their motivation was wrong. He claimed that their charity 'didn't count' because it was done outside our belief system. Hmmm! So here's an issue that should provoke a lot of debate. I don't think we should offer criticism of such generous people whatever their motives. I rather think we should applaud them.³ What do you think?

All things in common

The Essenes, contemporary with Jesus, were a monastic, ascetic, puritanical group, many of whom withdrew to form their own communities in the wilderness. They chose a communal life in which all property, goods, money and wages were given to a central treasury for the use of all their members. They took their meals of simple food together. Most were engaged in agricultural work but some in trades.

After Pentecost the new ecclesia at Jerusalem took on a distinctive form of fellowship (similar to the Essenes): 'All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need' (Acts 2:42-47).

Acts 4 provides further details of this fellowship: 'Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart ... and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common ... and great grace was upon them all, for there was not a needy person among them; for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need' (Acts 4:32-35). This community's practice of distributing goods to meet the needs of the poor was a response of obedience to the teaching of Jesus. Influenced by the original apostles who were closest to Jesus, this early community followed the teaching of their Lord and gave up everything in order to demonstrate their understanding of spiritual poverty.

Jesus tells us that we cannot be his disciples unless we renounce all that we own. In AD 285 Anthony decided that this is what he must do. Taking these words quite literally, Anthony gave away some of the family estate to his neighbours, sold the remaining property, donated the funds thus raised to the poor. He was noted for being one of the first Christian ascetics to attempt living in the desert proper, completely cut off from civilization. Though Anthony himself did not organize or create a monastery, a community grew around him based on his example of living an ascetic, holy and isolated life.

In modern times the Bruderhof Communities live according to a literal understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. They follow the example of the early Church in Jerusalem and share all things in common. Members of this community do not hold private property, and no member 'receives a salary or has a bank account. Income from all businesses is pooled and used for the care of all members and for various communal outreach efforts.'⁴

The 200,000 strong Protestant group known as the Amish also closely follow the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Community is at the heart of their life and faith and individualism is avoided. Members lovingly help one another and do not claim state benefit or use insurance but rely on community support instead. They would take a dim view of an Amish man insuring his barn (and its contents). This would undermine the mutual dependence of the Amish, not only by making him less dependent on the community, but also by subverting the beliefs that sustain this dependence.⁵

If the trumpet gives an unclear sound, who will get ready for battle?

Some groups and individuals have chosen to follow literally the teaching of Jesus whilst many of us have ignored it. The particular question of voluntary poverty illustrates the general problem for faith and practice. It is the problem of lack of a coherent message, a trumpet giving an unclear sound. Qoheleth, in Ecclesiastes, informs us that: 'Everyone to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, is to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil – *this is the gift of God*' (5:19).⁶ The writer of Proverbs instructs his readers: 'Honour the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine' (3:9-10).⁷

The writer of the first letter to Timothy has a different approach to wealth. 'As for the rich in this present age, charge them ... to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share ...' (1 Tim 6:17-18). This is a different message to the one from Jesus. In his second letter to the Corinthians (chapter 8), Paul uses a number of arguments to persuade them to give 'generously to a collection for 'the relief of the saints' in Judea. There is no reference to the teaching of Jesus on voluntary poverty or to 'laying up treasures in heaven.'

Voluntary poverty is one of a number of Jesus' hyperbolic demands, none of which should be taken seriously. None of us is likely to tear out an eye if it offends or (during the Second World War) to have prayed for an arch enemy such as Adolph Hitler. When Jesus asked the rich young ruler to give away all his possessions he did so in a certain context – 'if you would be perfect' (Matthew 19:21). When Zacchaeus told Jesus 'Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor,' a delighted Jesus told him, 'Today, salvation has come to this house.' 100% voluntary poverty was asked of one but 50% was sufficient to bring salvation to the other.⁸

If we, like Anthony, gave away all that we own we should surely be expected to give 100% in all other aspects of discipleship. We should give 100% effort in sin avoidance and commitment to and attendance at the meeting. To be 'perfect' we would surely need to be celibate like Jesus, and be a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. It seems much easier to accept that the teaching of Jesus was cocooned within a symbolic theological world – to give guidance but not to be taken literally.

Paul gives his interpretation of spiritual poverty – *koinōnia* (a fair balance).

Augustine came up with a useful maxim – 'virtue is in the middle.' Paul appears to have followed this wisdom as he interprets the teaching of Jesus about 'spiritual poverty' for a later and different setting. He uses the Greek word *koinōnia* to give us his understanding of 'practical sharing.' The Church at Jerusalem was characterized not by renunciation of wealth but by generous sharing of possessions. Barclay⁹ illustrates the meaning of *koinōnia* by showing how the Greeks used it in relation to marriage. 'Two people enter into marriage in order to have 'koinōnia of life', that is to say, to live together a life in which everything is shared.'

Paul is not operating in rural Galilee, but in the Greco-Roman world among some relatively affluent people. He required his converts to use their wealth and possessions in a spiritual way. On the first day of the week they are to 'put something aside and store it up, *as he may prosper*.' At least one member of an ecclesia needed to use their house as a place for meeting and worshipping together. He exhorts his converts to look to the needs of less fortunate brethren and sisters and to give generously so 'that there might be equality.' So he writes to the Corinthians: 'And here is my judgment about what is best for you

in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality (a fair balance). At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need.’ The goal is equality, as it is written: ‘The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little’ (2 Cor. 8:10-15).

The teaching of Jesus on voluntary poverty is subject to critical concern. Does it make sense? Amazingly, Paul recognizes that the words of Jesus are not universally relevant and incontrovertible.¹⁰ He does acknowledge that wealth gained and used selfishly is antithetical to serving Christ. When given the right hand of *koinōnia* (fellowship) by senior apostles Paul records; ‘all they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, *the very thing I was eager to do*’ (Gal 2:9).¹¹

True poverty is perhaps a spiritual and willed choice of letting go of anything that is unnecessary in our lives. Like Paul we must learn that spiritual disposition - the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength’ (Phil. 4:12-13). We should, ideally, be ready to let go of our riches, no matter how large or small, when those who are hungry, thirsty, naked and unjustly persecuted knock on our door. It is a spiritual contentment which is not increased by wealth or decreased by the loss of it.

If we continue to cultivate this spiritual disposition of *koinōnia* then our devotions will attain a meaningful climax at the Lord’s table as we contemplate his vicarious sacrifice. As Paul wrote: ‘I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a sharing (*koinōnia*) in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a sharing (*koinōnia*) in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all *share* the one loaf’ (1 Cor. 10:15-17).

Keith Lowe

Notes

1 Davies and Allison, *The Gospel according to Matthew vol. 1*, pp 442-45.

2 Note the condemnation of the rich in the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21) and in the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). In both, hoarding wealth is seen as a serious fault and a cause for eternal torment. Poverty is perhaps rated as one of the top virtues in the Gospels. Jesus preached the glad tidings to the poor (Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:22), and in his teaching as well as his parables the poor are the chief guests invited to the great banquets (Luke 14:13; 14:15-24). Note also Luke 6:30. Luke, in his presentation of the Gospel, shows particular interest in this theme.

3 Though not mentioned as being a Christian, the Good Samaritan proved to be a better neighbour than the priest and Levite who practised the ‘true’ religion.

4 Wikipedia on the Bruderhof (German: place of brothers) Communities. The group has recently changed its name to Church Communities International. There is a link on the Wikipedia site to ex-Bruderhof members who are critical of the group’s current leadership.

5 They don’t go to law as this is deemed as confrontational. They are largely self-sufficient, growing crops and vegetables and rearing cattle.

6 We recall how God blessed Abraham. His servant told Laban: ‘The Lord has blessed my master and he has given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and male servants, and female servants, and camels and donkeys’ (Gen. 24:35). See also Gen. 31:9. Hezekiah and Amaziah were given ‘very great possessions’ by God (2 Chron 25:9,13 and 32:27-29).

7 ‘The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honour and life’ (22:4). See also 13:21-22 but note 28:20. Psalm 37:25-26 tells us that the righteous and their children will not be ‘beggars’ for bread. In Deuteronomy 20:14 the taking (and enjoyment) of plunder is divinely sanctioned.

8 One scholar (Luke Johnson) suggests that ‘possessions’ in Luke and Acts serve as a literary device. They are used as symbols of response to God; so the unbidden generosity of Zacchaeus was a sign of re-

penitance and faith whereas the reverse was true in the case of the rich young man and of Ananias and Sapphira.

9 *NT Words*, p. 173.

10 And if it is true of the sayings of Jesus then it's true of all the various contributors of scripture. Nothing need be of universal significance or incontrovertible so confirming the philosophy of relativism. This suggests that no ideas or beliefs are universally true but that all are, instead, 'relative,' i.e. their validity depends on the circumstances in which they are applied. Think of sisters obliged to wear head coverings and to keep silent in the 21st Century.

11 The writer to the Hebrews exhorts his readers: 'And do not forget to do good and to share (koinōnia) with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased' (13:16). Note 1 John 3:17-18 and 2 Cor. 9:13.

Money may be the husk of many things, but not the kernel.
It brings you food, but not appetite;
medicine, but not health;
acquaintance, but not friends;
servants, but not loyalty;
days of joy, but not peace or happiness.

Henrik Ibsen

Genealogy – Some Thoughts

For the past year I have been a member of the New Zealand Genealogical Society. What really motivated me to compile a genealogy? It was not the necessity to establish the legal right to an inheritance, nor was it the need to establish a social position through a relationship to the nobility of England. Note the need to provide proof of 'racial' purity in Nehemiah 7 where we find a 'genealogical record' of those who re-settled Jerusalem. What I was required to do more than seven years ago was to provide proof that I had English ancestry by producing a copy of my mother's English birth certificate so that my New Zealand son would be granted a permit to work in Birmingham. My interest in my family history was thus spurred by a desire to trace the lives of my ancestors in Warwickshire, especially their Christadelphian roots.

My heritage lies not only in the Midlands, but also is found in Yorkshire. In 2005, Les and Mavis Boddy took me to Atwick, a little village in the East Riding, to visit the grave of my great-great-grandfather John Stephenson who died in 1880. Further research on the Stephenson line has not led to any important ancestral position in the past, but to the discovery that the Stephensons, agricultural labourers, have always had a strong religious faith; the Anglican Prayer Book sits in my bookcase. The amount of time spent on research has been considerable, satisfying often, yet also frustrating sometimes due to the omission of names (particularly female), variant spellings and duplicate names, but the time spent has not been futile.

It is obvious that the study of genealogy is not a recent phenomenon, for this has occupied the minds of people for more than two thousand years. We are told to 'avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile' (Titus 3:9). Perhaps Paul is here referring to fanciful interpretations of the Old Testament genealogies, for a comparison of such lists as seen in Genesis, I Chronicles and other books of the Old Testament shows that there are discrepancies between them. 'What is important is not the accuracy of these lists – for that would be difficult to maintain in some cases. What matters is why the lists are there at all. It is because they reveal a view of history that is unique to Israel in the ancient world. 'These lists of 'begats' are actually declaring that history is to be understood as a progression along a human line through the centuries... Man in his generations is the vehicle of the divine purpose which keeps pressing towards a goal.'¹ It is not my intention to reconcile any differences, but rather to examine some features of them.

We may wonder about the source data of a Biblical genealogy. While not all modern scholars believe the data to be reliable, the consensus until c 1870 was that ‘we have every reason to ascribe them in their earliest form to public records, the most reliable source possible.’²

Genealogy is the expression of the descent of a person or persons from an ancestor or ancestors. When we come to lists of names in our readings from the Bible we tend to skip through them, stumble over the pronunciation of the Hebrew words and give little thought to why they are recorded. Generally this does not apply to the book of Genesis, for we are well familiar with the names.

Thus, we read in chapter 5 of Genesis, ‘*This is the book of the generations of Adam.*’ For those who wish to analyze this list, it is important to note that from Creation to the Flood the Massoretic Text has 1,656 years, the Samaritan Pentateuch 1,307 years and the Septuagint 2,242 years. Remembering that there were no chapter divisions in the early Hebrew Scriptures and that books as we know them did not exist when the original Scriptures were written, it is probably better to translate the Hebrew word *sepher* ‘book’ as ‘scroll’. Hence, it has been suggested³ that the formula ‘these are the generations’ (*toledoth*) which occurs many times in Genesis would mark the beginning of a new scroll or section of a scroll:

- 5:1-32 the generations of Adam
- 6:9-10 the generations of Noah
- 10:1-32 the generations of the sons of Noah
- 11:10-26 the generations of Shem
- 11:27-32 the generations of Terah
- 25:12-15 the generations of Ishmael
- 25:19-24 the generations of Isaac
- 36:1-5 the generations of Esau
- 37:2-3 the generations of Jacob

The most comprehensive genealogy in the Old Testament is found in the first nine chapters of I Chronicles. Chronicles are registers of events in order of time, and it is not surprising to discover that the Hebrew title of this book is literally ‘the words of the days’ or the events of the times. As we know, the two books of Chronicles give us details of the reigns of David and Solomon together with the history of the southern kingdom of Judah. Although we would classify the literary type (i.e. genre) of Chronicles as history, these two books actually belong to that part of the Hebrew Scriptures known as the Writings.

An example of a genealogy which exhibits depth can be seen in I Chron 3:10: ‘*The son of Solomon was Rehoboam, Abijah his son, Asa his son, Jehoshaphat his son, Joram his son, Ahaziah his son, Joash his son, Amaziah his son, Jotham his son, Ahaz his son, Hezekiah his son, Manasseh his son, Amon his son, Josiah his son.*’ Of necessity, a genealogy must show at least two generations, and if it displays depth alone, as above, it is termed linear. If it proceeds from parent to child it is termed descending, while if it proceeds from child to parent it is termed ascending.

A genealogy may also depict breadth as in I Chron 2:1 ‘*These are the sons of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.*’ This most well known family line is the list of the twelve tribes of Israel. Yet, when we compare other lists found in Chronicles and Genesis we find discrepancies. We also see that the order of sons varies chronologically, geographically, or according to the mother. We may wonder where are the daughters?

It is not without reason that the first book of the New Testament commences by giving a genealogical record (*genesis*) of Jesus Christ. This Greek word is the equivalent of the Hebrew word *toledoth*, which occurs, as we have seen, in the Genesis genealogies. The most notable descending linear genealogy is *the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ*, which is found in Matt 1:1-17. This line demonstrates the legitimacy of Jesus in connection with his family. Jesus is son of David (a title for the messianic deliverer who

would assume the throne of David) who was son of Abraham (through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed).

In our study of Biblical genealogies we do not expect accuracy by modern methods. Thus, in my family history, I have been searching for date and place of birth, of marriage and of death. We look in vain for all these details in the Bible. Yet, there is a structure in the Biblical genealogies. For example, what is notable is that Matthew lists three groups of fourteen names. Many theories of an apocalyptic nature have been suggested as to the reason for the use of the numbers 3 x 14 or 6 x 7. The idea that appeals to me is that the three historical pivotal eras in the genealogy relate to Abraham, David and the exile.

Another genealogy is found in Luke 3:23-38. A number of differences may be noted. Firstly, whereas Matthew wrote mainly for Jews, Luke's audience was universal. Secondly, Matthew gives us a descending genealogy (as seen by the repetition of the word *begat*) while Luke's is ascending (as seen by repetition of *son of*). Thirdly, the number of generations is different: between David and Zerubbabel, Matthew has fifteen whereas Luke has twenty-one, between Zerubbabel and Joseph, Matthew has nine while Luke has seventeen. This is not a serious problem when it is remembered that the number of generations can vary from one family line to another and that names may be missing.

Lists, which serve to demonstrate the legitimacy of an individual, may show not only blood relationships but also religious ones. For example, the genealogy of I Chr 5:27-41 [6:1-15] is the most extensive of the High Priestly line to be found in the Old Testament. The list of the kings of Edom is found in I Chr 1:43-51a while that of the Edomite chiefs is found in I Chr 1: 51b-54. The keeping of lists of names was not restricted to Israel. At the beginning of the reign of an Assyrian king a royal official (the *limmu*) was appointed to preside over the New Year festival in the capital, and each year a new *limmu* was appointed. Assyrian records exist for every year between 892 BC and 648 BC. One of the most useful lists for those who study the Ancient Near East is that published by the British Museum: *Chronicles of the Chaldaean Kings (626-556 BC)* produced by D J Wiseman, Professor of Assyriology at the University of London.

A segmented genealogy displays breadth as well as depth. This is the type of genealogy that has been the focus of my family research finding details of my mother's uncles, aunts and cousins in Leamington, Charlcoate, Henley-in-Arden and other Warwickshire towns. As I have been constructing an ascending list the main problem has been ascertaining the maiden name of my female ancestors. This has meant obtaining details on marriage certificates and/or banns. In the Bible we do not find such written records, although an Aramaic marriage contract written on papyrus has been found in Egypt.⁴

We recall in Gen 29 the story of the betrothal of Jacob to Rachel, the seven years of service, and then the wedding to Leah instead of to Rachel. It may be noted that the Hebrew word concerned with betrothal has the idea of paying a price by the prospective bridegroom to his prospective father-in-law. Betrothal in Biblical times united the 'bridal couple' as husband and wife for all purposes even though they were not living together. Against this background, we remember the laws found in Deut 22:13-23:9, which outline the rules concerning marriage. Perhaps the most well known marriage is that related by Matthew (1:18) who tells us that Mary was 'betrothed' to Jacob before Jesus was born.

An interesting feature of my own family history is that there are records of my great-grandmother (Fanny Smith, a Christadelphian in Rowington) being widowed (upon the death of her farmer husband Edward Hawkes, also a Christadelphian) with three children and then marrying Reuben Benbrook, another Christadelphian (who was not her brother-in-law but her gamekeeper). Edward Hawkes' line has terminated with no surviving descendants, but the Benbrook line is continuing to grow with my having forty cousins. The continuation of the family line was important in Old Testament times and thus in Deut 15:5-10 we are given details of provision for the remarriage of a widow – termed levirate⁵ marriage – whereby a childless widow is married to her brother-in-law. This had the effect of maintaining the family line and ensuring that the property of the deceased remained in the family. The Sadducees questioned Jesus about the consequences of the levirate law (Mat 22:23-33) and from Jesus' reply we gain a glimpse of the married state during the resurrection.

Among the nouns describing the members of a family that we use are son, daughter, father, mother, brother, sister, cousin. It is instructive to look at two terms that are used in the Old and New Testaments; the masculine nouns 'son' and 'brother' because in the Hebrew family, descent is reckoned through the male line with the son being regarded as second in importance to the father. Hence, in studying family history, we find in the Old Testament that the word 'son' (Aramaic *bar*, Hebrew *ben*) occurs more often than the word 'daughter' (Hebrew *bath*). While 'daughter' may define a female child, and 'son' is the term for a male child, it may be noted that the English translation *children of Israel* is literally *sons of Israel*. This applies both in the Old Testament (Gen 50:25) and the New Testament (Matt 27:9).

Finally, it is useful to see how the Greek word for brothers (*adelphoi*) is translated in the English Standard Version in view of the fact that many Christadelphians mistakenly use the term 'brethren and sisters' either in their written or in their oral communications, when it is more correct to say 'brothers and sisters' or 'brethren.' I am grateful to Ian and Averill McHaffie for drawing my attention to the Greek usage. Let the translators of the English Standard Version have the last word, as they note in the preface to their translation. 'In the area of gender language, the goal of the ESV is to render literally what is in the original ... the English word 'brothers' (translating the Greek word *adelphoi*) is retained as an important familial form of address between fellow Jews and fellow Christians in the first century. A recurring note is included to indicate that the term 'brothers' (*adelphoi*) was often used in Greek to refer to both men and women.' In this latter case the translators use the term 'brethren.'

John Stephenson (NZ)

Notes

- 1 G. A. F. Knight, *Theology in Pictures*, Handsel Press, Edinburgh, 1981 pp 65-66.
- 2 H. Ewald, *History of Israel*, Longmans, London, 1869, p 263.
- 3 J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftorahs – Genesis*, OUP, 1940 p 42.
- 4 See *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, IVP, Leicester 1994 Part 2 p 956
- 5 The Latin word *levir* is a husband's brother.

Review: *Evolution or Design?* David M Pearce, CALS, 2011

One of the most damaging features of some current thought for contemporary Christianity is the supposed battle between science and faith. The 'new atheists' and the Christian fundamentalists have this in common, that they both want to impose on people a choice between science and belief, between evolution and God. The consequences are clear. Scientifically literate people are deterred from belief and Christians mistake opposition to biology teaching for defence of the faith. What is of more concern is that young people, brought up in a Christian environment but educated in science as they go through school and college, easily draw the conclusion that Biblically-based belief is untenable and turn away either from scientific endeavour or from Christianity entirely. Therein lies the real tragedy and the reason why, despite sometimes fierce opposition, it remains vital to present the Bible and the evidence of the natural world as complementary, as 'two books', to use an old metaphor, the book of God's words and the book of God's works, together in harmony.

Unfortunately, David Pearce's *Evolution or Design?* falls into the 'evolution or God?' trap. He follows in a long line of authors asking his readers to reject evolution – that is, to reject the overwhelming scientific consensus – in favour of special creation. In essence, his is an argument from incredulity, presenting a series of remarkable features of the natural world and saying in effect: 'Look at these astonishing things in nature. They couldn't possibly have evolved, could they? So they must have been created by God.' Pearce certainly chooses some fascinating examples: the venomous Black Mamba snake, the buoyancy mechanism of the sperm whale, the migratory Monarch butterfly and the structure of the egg. The message though is the same throughout: 'this couldn't have evolved, so God did it.'

The problem is, of course, that much that at first seems inexplicable, except by miracle, sooner or later finds an explanation – just as there is now an understanding of the origins of disease and recovery from illness which might have seemed to be ‘acts of God’ to previous generations. Features in nature that seem ‘irreducibly complex’, to use a term beloved of the intelligent design lobby, turn out not to be anything of the kind. And God is in retreat, pushed back into the gaps, the last-resort explanation for things beyond our current comprehension. Moreover, since Scripture explicitly commends the natural world and its study as providing evidence of God (Psalm 19:1; Psalm 111:2; Romans 1:20), we get dangerously close to accusing Him of filling the world with misleading evidence.

In fairness to Pearce, he makes his case clearly, writing in simple – indeed, at times simplistic – language, as if with an audience of early-teens in mind. That may excuse some of the slip-ups – the assertion for example that ‘exceptions have been found to Darwin’s rules’ (p 4), which gives the erroneous impression that evolution has been falsified, or the confusion between evolution and abiogenesis (the origin of life from non-living matter) – while the statement that human beings have 46 pairs of chromosomes (p 7, in fact we have 23) is simply careless. But to suggest that it isn’t possible to test evolutionary theory about the relationships between living things, or to state that ‘If an alternative explanation seems to us more credible, we are perfectly at liberty to champion that cause, because nobody can **prove** anything’ (p 5) is absurd, while to go on to say ‘The study of the origins of life is not true science...It is guesswork.’ (p 5) is verging on the offensive. Science usually proceeds by gradual refinement, not by throwing out one well-supported theory and replacing it by another. Further, Pearce claims that genetic studies have ‘completely changed’ the relationships between species deduced from morphological studies (p 5). This is just plain wrong, and it’s difficult to see how Pearce could have come to this conclusion if he’d done even a little reading on the subject.

Thankfully, Pearce does not rehearse in this booklet the argument that Genesis has to be read as teaching that the world is 6000 years old or that Adam lived at about that time in history – though he does betray a naively literal view in stating that God ‘took the dust of the earth, built it into man, and then breathed into the inert body the breath of life’(p10). As both Bob Burr¹ and this reviewer² have shown elsewhere, there’s plenty of **Biblical** evidence for a non-literal reading of the early chapters of Genesis, quite apart from scientific considerations. The booklet falls into the common error of implying that believers all took Genesis as literal history until Darwin came along: on the contrary, writers as early as Origen in the third century AD and Augustine early in the fifth advocated a figurative reading. Such a reading isn’t then merely a reaction to evolution, but a sound and logical approach to the text.

Pearce laments that Darwinism has ‘left people thinking that there is an impassable gulf between science and religion’ (p 4), but doesn’t seem to realise that his own argument perpetuates that false impression. His readers deserve better than this: a faith that insists on special creation of each species or ‘kind’ and rejects the fundamentals of biological science is a faith that will all too likely founder. Those who want to take the Bible seriously really need to get beyond the sterile arguments between the atheists and the Biblical literalists. Viewed correctly, evolution – or gradual creation, if you prefer to avoid the contentious ‘e’ word – is simply the mechanism by which the natural world came into being, a mechanism under the sovereignty of God, and a way of bringing about a goal purposed by the will of the Almighty. We don’t have to fight science, argue against the overwhelming evidence, or be embarrassed and defensive. Science – evolutionary biology included – is a fascinating and invaluable way by which, like the author of Psalm 111, we can search out the works of the Lord and take pleasure therein.

David Brown

Further reading

1 Bob Burr, *The Creation-Evolution Controversy*, Endeavour 126, December 2011, p. 25-28

2 David Brown, *Genesis: don’t take it literally* (2011), available from davidbrown.solihull@gmail.com

John H Walton (2009)
162 pages plus 30 pages of FAQs, notes and index.
\$9.62 at amazon.com.

John H. Walton is professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, Wheaton IL. He previously spent 20 years as a professor at the Moody Bible Institute. His research has explored the cultural and intellectual landscape of the ancient near east in relation to the Old Testament, especially Genesis. He has read the ancient near eastern writings and paid attention to the sorts of issues and questions that were of interest to people in those days, what sorts of questions they cared about the answers to, and therefore what writers, including Biblical writers, would have likely written about.

Based on these studies, Dr. Walton has presented a literal reading of Genesis chapter one which presents no conflict with science. He argues that we have been misled particularly by the English translation of the Hebrew *bārā*. We read it as ‘created’ or ‘made’ in the material and physical sense. Dr. Walton argues that this is wrong. He analyzes the use of the word throughout the Old Testament and claims it most often conveys the creation of the function for something. If so, then reading Genesis chapter one in terms of creating and assigning functions becomes the literal reading of the text. Genesis One has been ‘lost’ to us because we don’t ask the question the author answered. Instead we think it answers questions about the origins of material things and species that the author was not even writing about.

His main thesis is that in the ancient near east people cared about how the world functioned, how it was organized and who set it up that way. They did not have any interest in how the natural, material world had been brought into being. So he proposes that Genesis chapter one is not at all about creating the material world. Rather it is about how and why the world functions the way it does. The Genesis answer is because God set it up that way, for us human beings. Some brief examples: day one describes how the daily cycle of light and dark, day and night, that give structure to our lives, is from God; day two, expressed in terms of how ancient people understood the world to be structured, is about establishing the weather system that brings us rain (fresh water and crops); day three is about God’s provision of the dry land on which we live, the seas on which we sail, and the crops which we eat. Day six is not about God bringing into existence the beasts and man, but about giving them functions. Man is assigned the roles in God’s world of procreation, of stewardship of the nature and the environment, and most importantly of bearing God’s image.

So Genesis chapter one is not science and it is not history. It is theology. It is praise. Its origin may even be as a worship service. II Chronicles 5, 6, and 7 are a description of the dedication of Solomon’s temple. Solomon’s prayer during the dedication focused on an enumeration of how the temple was to function in the life of Israel. Then (II Chron. 7:1-3) the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. God is now in His home. God is resting. Similarly in Genesis chapter one, after setting up how the world will function for mankind, God rests. No one knows, but perhaps the 7-morning/7-evening text of Genesis chapter one was once a text used for praise and worship of God in His temple – the whole of the world. Interestingly, the dedication of Solomon’s temple lasted seven days (II Chron. 7:9)

This is a book with the potential, if we can manage to dispose of the habit of seeing things as we have always seen them, and to read and think anew, to end the creation vs. evolution debate that has gone on for some 150 years. What a relief that would be (and has been within my own mind)! Genesis chapter one is about one topic, evolutionary science is about another topic. Just as a cookbook and an auto repair book do not conflict with each other, so Genesis chapter one and evolutionary history and science do not conflict with each other.

Jim Bahr

For Your Library

***Engaging Biblical Authority: perspectives on the Bible as Scripture 2007*, edited by William P Brown; Westminster John Knox Press, USA.**

This book, edited by William P Brown and containing contributions from 17 other Biblical scholars, is helpful in thinking through what we really mean when we say that the Scriptures are inspired. Fundamentalists believe that divine inspiration means that the Bible in all its parts is without error, except those occurring through transcription or translation. This exception involves the recognition that none of us has in any case seen a Bible which, by this definition, could be inerrant; we are very dependent on learned scholars for translations and dealing with obscure passages. However, the authors of this book go beyond this limitation and show that there are diversities in moral interpretations in the Bible, as well as variations in the detail of eye-witness accounts. They nevertheless adopt a conservative stance in wishing to preserve a sense of the Bible being the source of our knowledge of God and his ways, maintaining reverence for the revelation of God expressed in various ways by the original human authors

Creeds which assert that there is no error in the Bible, which is wholly from God in all its parts, are not accepted in this book, which sees the Bible as a sourcebook rather than a textbook – a library from which we gather a variety of perspectives and insights that enable us to engage with God, even if not every statement represents an absolute truth. The book encourages us to engage in dialogue with the inspired authors of the Bible to arrive at an understanding, within limits, of what God wants us to know of Him. This means that we are not expected all to come to the same conclusions about what is being said, but we will find common ground on which to worship Him and be aware of His presence in the Lord Jesus Christ and our lives. We are advised in this book that we will have to address ambiguity and share fellowship in the love of God, humbly recognising that there is much that we do not understand with finality, this side of the consummation of the Kingdom of God.

Opening challenge

The book begins with a challenging introduction by the Editor. He sees the authority of the Bible as lying within its ‘life-shaping’ power - its formative influence. He has chosen the 17 contributions as resources for help in receiving this life-shaping power. While the authors do not subscribe to the view that every verse, every sentence, every word had come direct from God, they do not belittle the Bible as witnessing to the Word of God.

Brown begins by asking what we mean by authority and seeing it as lying beyond the purview of scientific and historical enquiry; it does not deal with every scientific or historical issue. He and his contributors regard the Bible’s authority as connoting a provocative power that elicits a response and in so doing shapes the conduct and, indeed, the identity of the reader or reading community. In the words of 2 Tim.3.15-17, the Bible is able to equip us for every good work, by its witness to the hand of God and the self-giving of Jesus.

This is functional or formative authority. Scripture is defined in terms of what it can DO for the community of faith, having capacity to edify and sustain, to teach and equip people for the life of faith. The Bible does not demand blind submission. It is authoritative, rather than authoritarian, but more than just a friendly persuader; it mediates God’s living presence.

William Brown sees the Bible as a complex work, which is not a systematic collection of definitions and diagnoses, complete with a helpful index of the topics. It is full of historical narrative and stories, personal reflections and specific letters along with songs of praise and protest. It is an anthology rather than a compendium of dissertations; it is a mixture of historical, literary and theological writings, many of them having originated in oral form. There are many voices, some harmonious, some dissonant, unlike the monolithic presentations in the Koran and the book of Mormon. It reflects centuries of communal struggle and controversy. It has to be interpreted, often reformulating ideas for new generations and contexts. Its elements do not in their original settings have an overarching framework, though God is always the focus and, eventually, Jesus becomes the basic point of unitive thinking in it all.

Diverse views

Marc Zvi Brettler, a Jewish contributor, indicates what he considers diverse and even contradictory traditions being juxtaposed in the Bible. Some texts are evidently more important than others (as Robert Roberts seemed to think when he put down the New Testament for two readings a year in the Bible Companion). As it is a sourcebook no texts are to be ignored. Whatever their nature, they may have something to tell us about the times and the settings in which the writings were brought together.

Michael Joseph Brown brings out how experience has to be wedded to what we are reading to gain the full impact. 'The Master is here and calleth for thee.' The Bible may also be seen as the means by which we take hold of the Apostolic witness so that it becomes current for us. We need to read it so that on the hundredth reading we may yet hear something afresh. An example he gives of this is to suggest that Jesus was actually quite upset by seeing the widow give her mite. He saw the leaders devouring a widow's house by getting her to feel that she ought to give what she could not and should not afford. It was an act of oppression by them, as he sees it. M J Brown describes the Bible as an instrument by which we come to experience God. It is not a reference manual and it seeks to enable us to hear the Word behind the words.

Katie G. Cannon draws out of Scripture the continuing theme of God's disclosure of himself as the divine liberator from sin and oppression of the members of the believing community. God frees, empowers and heals those who enter into covenant relationship with him. The Bible mirrors the essence of our humanness as men, women and children. God purposes not only to put things aright among the nations but to abolish in Jesus Christ the stumbling blocks and hindrances to the well-being of all creation.

Carlos F Cardosa Orlandi writes from a Latin American perspective. He is puzzled by the fact that there are both blessings and cursings on people who were aliens to Israel and, in some circumstances, could be held in slavery. Nevertheless the Bible overwhelms his life; it is a partner he cannot do without. (An emotion I can echo when I am puzzled by aspects of Scripture. I need the Scriptures, whatever I fail to understand and when I find them seeming to lack consistency I have only to turn to an epistle or gospel to know that there is a firm foundation here.) Carlos speaks of how the Jews objected to Jesus at Nazareth and elsewhere because he included the marginalised. The scriptures keep him awake at night because they challenge him to duties with humankind that he may be neglecting. Such headaches actually help growth. Whatever difficulties we may find, the Scriptures shine light upon our path.

Agreeing to disagree

Ellen F Davis says that critical study of the Bible is a matter of grappling with its inexhaustible complexity. We have to work hard at interpreting the Bible with humility, love and patience. She finds powerful the reference in Deut 30:12-14 to the word not being far away in heaven or across the seas but near us and able to dwell within us. Yet there is no finality about our interpretations. We have to receive the Spirit as God's good gift as a means of opening our minds and being changed by them. This does not mean that we have to relinquish the right to disagree with some of what we encounter – the Bible writers disagree among themselves. For example they give a varied picture about the love of God shown to the undeserving and on other occasions blinding fury, such as the command to destroy a whole population of men, women and children. (Is their rendering of the story being affected by prejudices being derived from the universal culture of the times?) In our reading we have to be guided by the whole tenor of the Bible.

Disagreement will inevitably arise within the community of faith. We then need to slow down our reflective study; we can read too much too quickly and miss the subtlety of the text. Even when we disagree, 'yet we persist in mutual love and cooperation. We should still continue in daily prayer and listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit'. There are no easy rules for interpretation if we would see 'wondrous things' out of God's law.

The vehicle of God's work

Terence E Freithem declares that the authority of the Bible is established by its usage. It points beyond itself to God. It is the vehicle of God's work amongst us. Even though the writers are finite and therefore sinful, they still carry to us what God wants us to discover, though we shall have to use discretion, recognising that some matters are more significant than others. There are weightier matters in Scripture as well as less important.

He points out that what we bring to Scripture affects what we see in the text. (This is true of all reading of any literature. Our own experience affects what we gain from the author, so that two people actually read the same text differently.) Many texts will have several meanings and we need to be open to them all. By interacting with what each other perceives we shall better discern what God wants to say to us in our times and conditions.

The author's last paragraph neatly sums up his concept and that of many of the other authors: 'Bible reading is a dynamic process in and through which the Holy Spirit can open up new possibilities of meaning that move beyond those with which we may be familiar. The openness in the text itself will foster more new insights, give more room for the play of the imagination, encourage deeper conversation, and provide more avenues through which the Word of God can address people in ever more diverse communities. By being freed from the search for a single meaning, the Bible is enhanced, the various avenues in and through which the Spirit can work are diversified, and the spoken word can reach deeply into a much greater number of life situations.'

Or again: 'God provides knowledge of himself for no other reason than that, thereby, we may be brought into union with him; therefore Scripture as a mediation of that knowledge is also directed strictly to that end.' Inspiration of Scripture 'can be conceived as descent of the Spirit to make prophets and apostles, into persons enabled to speak, and then write, for God.' This definition makes no claim for inerrancy; the speakers are still seen as human, but then they are enabled to go beyond merely human thought, though not eliminate it. Robert Jenson shows how the very controversies which drew forth many of these writings were the key to the enhancement of what was revealed'

Scripture in the Church

Luke Timothy Johnson writes of the role of the church in receiving Scripture as in some sense authoritative but criticises his own (Roman Catholic) church for a tendency to fundamentalism and reluctance to openly re-examine its traditions to ensure that they still mediate the will of God for people today. 'The authority of the Bible for and in the church is less a matter of dictation from on high, than of conversation in context.' He also stresses the way in which the New Testament re-interprets the Old Testament through the lens of Christ and the need to recognise continuities between the Old Testament and the New. He closes his chapter with an appeal to us to benefit from the fact that Scripture does not speak clearly and finally on many issues which concern us; its non-straightforward approach can actually enrich our understanding as we wrestle with it and can yield growth in the 'mind of Christ'. He emphasises the need to take note of the deepest wisdom of the whole text of Scripture rather than 'cherry-pick' verses as proof texts.

Serene Jones speaks of seeing everything in Scripture, as Calvin proposed, through the spectacles of Christ. Thus, in the midst of life, 'Jesus is being constantly born, living, confronting sin, being nailed to the cross, and resurrected to life eternal with God.'

Sarah Lancaster encourages a questioning attitude about the actual words of Scripture. 'Without such an honest exchange, the Bible will not be able to draw us into the perspectives it wants to share and thus come alive for us.' Jacqueline Lapsley draws attention to how the Spirit through our reading and interpretation of the Bible can 'change the way we see God, ourselves and the rest of the world.' Several of the authors encourage us to do this communally without any intellectual dishonesty arising out of fear. We are exhorted to avoid explaining away difficulties in the text in a way that does not really face up to them.

Living and active word

Frank Matera has an eloquent concluding paragraph to his essay: ‘The authority of the Bible is not found in the words themselves, but in the reality to which they witness – the Word of God. In and through the human words of Scripture, we encounter the authoritative Word of God. It is to THIS word to which the Bible testifies. It is THIS Word that endows the Bible with authority.’

Dean McBride Jr makes much of Hebrew 4:12 which declares that the word of God is living and active. In other words it is not inert, factual description, but does things – has living effects. Our study should be directed towards reaping this harvest: The words are not to be reduced to ‘a fossilised replacement for the living God’ or be permitted to allow ‘ecclesial interests to exercise unbridled tyranny over their interpretation.’ There is a danger of encasing texts in ‘shells of hermeneutical and doctrinal certitude’ and we ‘need to be on guard against making idols of the Scriptures themselves.’ The voice of the transcendent God may be heard through biblical texts only because and to the extent that they address us ‘in the language of human beings.’... ‘These many and various witnesses and traditions have been shaped by human minds, in specific contexts and for particular purposes, and they are formulated in conventional, sometimes flawed patterns of human thought and language.’

This view may help us to understand the more violent and vengeful references in Scripture. Nevertheless, the author sees Scripture as providing a picture of God which commands our respect for the coherence of the unified deity. Peter Ochs adds to this the thought that there is no life without relationship with God, by way of his spoken word in Scripture, and no receiving of this word except as wounded. We have to recognise the wounds and the work of the living God to mend the wounds. We should not look hastily for cures ourselves.

The danger of despising other readers

Allen Verhey discusses some of the problems inherent in reading scripture. There is first of all a lack of familiarity with the text which in former days could often be taken for granted. But beyond ignorance, there is prejudice which leads to judging others with different interpretations from ourselves as ‘sinners’, and to defend ourselves as the ‘righteous’, instead of as humble partners in discovery.

‘In reading scripture, discernment is the ability to recognise the plot of the story, to see the wholeness of scripture and to order the interpretation of any part toward the whole.’ Each disciple’s dialogue with Scripture and with the believing community needs to realise that ‘the real truth is beyond each partial argument and exceeds each partial understanding,’ as Seung Ai Yang puts it. He also comments that the human languages employed are like a finger pointing to God, using human words which are not the precise words of the ineffable God.

All the authors of this book see Scripture as having an authority which offers nourishment which can transform the individual, community and society. They recognise truth in Yang’s words: ‘The authority of the Bible should not function as a coercive or compelling power that oppresses the reader and undermines their dignity. One should not understand biblical authority to consist of unilateral or legalistic commands that threaten violent sanction or punishment. Nor is the Bible’s authority to be grounded in logical necessity as in a mathematical formula ... Rather it is a reflection of God’s love for us. God is love and is continually creative, for the love of God continually creates love and life in others.’

The ultimate message of this book is that as we read Scripture we should let it be the instrument whereby we welcome this love into our lives.

Alfred Ward

A Prayer

Dear Lord,

You have sent me into this world to preach your gospel. So often the problems of the world seem so complex and intricate that your word strikes me as embarrassingly simple. Sometimes I feel tongue-tied in the company of people over the world's social and economic problems.

But you, O Lord, said 'Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.' I realize that I have to be informed and aware as fully as possible of the many problems facing the world. But what really counts is that all this information, knowledge and insight allows me to speak your truthful word more clearly and unambiguously.

Give me the wisdom to think clearly, to speak fearlessly and act boldly in your name. Give me the courage to display the dove in a world so full of serpents.

Michael Craddock

**Review: *Twenty Essays in a Search for Truth*
Alan Fowler *Pbk 168 pp.***

This book, Alan's swansong, written in a refreshingly, lively, readable style, fully documented from the Biblical text and richly supported by evidence, presents a comprehensive interpretation of how to read the Bible in harmonious accord with scientific theories and recognition of the various genres of literature of which it is composed, history, narrative, poetry, allegory etc. It covers a wide range of subjects which have often provoked dispute, but Alan shows the need for them to be openly presented and discussed.

First of all he challenges a belief in a literal six day creation by asserting that creation and evolution are not contradictory. He supports this by detailed reference to leading scientific exponents. He further argues that death in the world did not result from Adam's sin and then became inherent in man, as it already existed. Starting from the Garden of Eden he supports his argument for the devil and Satan as a personification of opposition to the authority of God, by a wide variety of quotations from Genesis to Revelation.

His comments on the Sabbath and the Law of Moses in comparison with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount bring out the fundamental point that, although the Law given to Israel was designed for their historical setting, it contains the essential principles endorsed by Jesus who changed them from negative to positive. He concludes from an examination of the varied uses of the Greek *psyche*, meaning breath or life, that it essentially means a person or soul, capable of being included in the Book of Life. He shows that the work of God in us is to transform us from naturally selfish creatures into the likeness to Christ by bearing the Cross. He bases his argument for the headship of the male upon the original creation of the woman to be a helpmeet. His discussion on divine forgiveness as the fundamental basis of our relationship with God relies on the recognition that it depends upon our repentance and acknowledgement of sin. But this he argues is not inherited from Adam, as Augustine propounded in his doctrine of original sin, as we all fall short after our likeness to Adam. Our understanding of the death of Christ has been confused by the terms 'representative' and 'substitute' which are not Biblical terms. The death of Jesus from a fatal spear thrust, as proved from medical evidence, was a true pouring out of life to be a life-giving power for us, if we follow his example. Suffering is a fact of life which provides no easy answer but no doubt faces us all with a challenge of learning by experience.

Alan's detailed treatment of Ezekiel's vision of the Temple presents a very thorough and well documented interpretation relating to the contemporary history and to the book of Esther, but rejecting its relevance to the future, as we are clearly taught in Hebrews that animal sacrifice ceased after the supreme sacrifice of Jesus.

That exposition further endorses his argument that the Bible must be read within the context of history and environment. It is a word of God speaking to people in their own situations, as for example Paul's letters to different churches, though basic principles still apply. Alan seeks to restore the reputation of the

woman at the well by reference to Samaritan customs. He also seeks to reinstate the character of Pilate by a thorough examination of the Gospels and the historical records to illustrate the extreme dilemma to which he ultimately succumbed through understandably human weakness which does not merit condemnation. Alan applies some original ideas to the controversial statements about swords in the Gospel accounts. He substantiates his own personal belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection by the archaeological evidence of the site of Golgotha of which he provides pictorial proof. As Jesus is our High Priest at the Mercy Seat, he is there to receive our prayers with the full authority of the Father. After a comprehensive consideration of the many features of the afterlife, judgement, punishment etc, Alan agrees with Paul in his answer to the question posed in I Corinthians 15:35. about the nature of resurrection, that such a question is foolish, as in our natural human condition we cannot comprehend the future which will be wholly different.

In conclusion he makes a brief resume of the history behind the production of the King James version of the Bible.

This book is altogether a rich compendium of thoughts, ideas, theories and suggestions to promote and stimulate a search for Truth.

Sheila Harris

Copies of this book may be obtained from:
Elvin Nix, Thelwell Cottage, Welsh Newton,
Monmouth, NP25 5RN. Price £3.50 inc p&p.

Review

The Origin of the Bible

ed Philip Wesley Comfort, Tyndale House, Wheaton, 1992

This book of 308 pages is divided into five sections – the authority and inspiration of the Bible, the canon of the Bible, the Bible as a literary text, the Bible text and manuscripts, Bible translations – with contributions from thirteen scholars, all of whom regard the Bible as the authoritative record of God's revelation. In his introduction, the editor poses the question regarding the Bible; 'No other book has had so many books written about it – so why another one?'

More than fifty years ago I purchased my *Companion to the Bible*. First published in 1939, this book of 515 pages, edited by T. W. Manson of Manchester University, drew on the expertise of fifteen scholars and went through seven impressions until 1956. 'The form and contents of this book are determined by the conviction stated in the introductory chapter: that the primary and vital interest of the Bible is that it records the authentic word of God.' With its three parts – the Book, the Land and the People, the Religion of the Bible – it has served me well.

The Origin of the Bible has a different emphasis. Philip Comfort states that the theme addresses 'the processes that went into making the Bible the inspired text that it is.' Hence, for those who wish to increase their understanding of how we got our Bible, this book is a mine of information, especially as there is increased emphasis in our preaching to show the relevance of the Bible for Life in the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, this book does not have an index, although each section concludes with a bibliography.

In 2009 over a period of twenty-seven weeks a number of ecclesias in New Zealand conducted seminars entitled 'Learn to Read the Bible Effectively.' The first talk introduced the Bible as a collection of 66 books. Many of us remember learning to recite these during our Sunday School days. Did we know that 'the earliest Christian use of *ta biblia* (the books) is said to be 2 Clement 14:2 (c. A.D. 150).'¹ Professor Bruce also reminds us that while the term 'testament' 'came into general Christian use in the later part of

the second century² the word really means covenant. As our seminar notes pointed out ‘the teaching of the Bible is based upon covenants of promise that God made with faithful men in time past.’

The question that we need to ask is how did our Bible come to comprise 66 different books. The word canon (from an Egyptian word meaning a reed used for measuring) is used for the list of authoritative scriptures found in our Bible. That the early Christian church accepted the Jewish scriptures known as the Old Testament is evident by the way in which the New Testament writers quoted from it. Jesus, himself, said, ‘These are the Scriptures that testify about me’ (Jn 5:39). In the section entitled ‘The Canon of the Bible’ we are given a possible history of how the Jewish Scriptures came to be regarded as coming from God. ‘The first Christians shared with their Jewish contemporaries a full knowledge of the identity of the canonical books. However, the Bible was not yet between two covers: it was a memorized list of scrolls.’³

One important difference between the Old Testament and the New is that, whereas the Old was composed over a period of many centuries, the New was written within a period of approximately half a century. ‘From available information, the gradual process which led to full and formal public recognition of a fixed canon of the twenty-seven books comprising the New Testament takes us down into the fourth century of our era.’⁴

Just as the question of the canon is not often thought about, neither is the question of the authority of Scripture. Carl Henry⁵ sees the revolt against Biblical authority as part of a wider authority crisis seen in Western civilization and in his contribution he discusses the Bible’s view of itself. A major difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations is where the ultimate authority lies. ‘The use of the Bible as an exclusive dogmatic authority is specially characteristic of those Christian communions which accepted more or less completely the Reformation of the sixteenth century... they went behind the Church to the classical documents of Christianity in the Scriptures and found a final authority in them.’⁶

The section whereby the Bible is considered as a literary text brings new insights to our understanding of the Bible as we are reminded, ‘the sacred book of Christianity is a thoroughly literary book.’⁷ We know that when we seek to interpret passages of scripture we need to be aware of their context. Likewise, ‘the Bible can be better understood and more fully appreciated if we view it in its historical setting.’⁸ In my opinion, Christadelphians generally tend to have a good knowledge of ancient history, but the religious literature of the ancient Near East is not widely known.

As noted in *The Endeavour Magazine* in December 2011, the British Museum has a collection of more than 130,000 cuneiform tablets and fragments from Mesopotamia acquired during the 19th century. Among the types of literature are commercial documents, personal communications, legal codes, treaties, wisdom literature,⁹ stories of origins (cosmogony), and hero stories. The comparison of parallels between Mesopotamian and Biblical creation and flood stories led some scholars to posit that the Genesis stories are dependent on earlier Babylonian myths. ‘Further discovery and careful comparative analysis has adequately substantiated the independence of the Bible.’¹⁰ In this connection, the study by Bro Wilfred Lambert¹¹ has been seminal.

The final sections of *The Origin of the Bible* are concerned with texts and manuscripts and with Bible languages and translations. Although, there is much to teach us here, I suggest that a lot more detail is to be found in F. F. Bruce’s *The Books and the Parchments*, Pickering and Inglis, 4th ed, 1984, which should be on all our bookshelves.

John Stephenson (NZ)

Notes

1 *The Origin of the Bible: The Bible*, F. F. Bruce, p 3.

2 *ibid* p 5.

3 *The Origin of the Bible: The Canon of the Old Testament*, R. T. Beckwith.

4 *The Origin of the Bible: The Canon of the New Testament*. Milton Fisher,

p 66.

5 *The Origin of the Bible: The Authority of the Bible*, Carl Henry, pp 13-28.

6 *The Authority of the Bible*, Fontana Books, 1971, C. H. Dodd, p 20.

7 *The Origin of the Bible: The Bible as Literature*, Leland Ryken, p 109.

8 *The Origin of the Bible: Literature in Bible Times*, Milton Fisher, p 97.

9 *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1960,

W G Lambert.

10 *The Origin of the Bible: Literature in Bible Times*, Milton Fisher, p 107.

11 *A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis*,
Journal of Theological Studies, 1965, pp 287-300.

The Bible, as a revelation from God,
was not designed to give us all the information we might desire,
nor to solve all the questions about which the human soul is perplexed,
but to impart enough to be a safe guide to the haven of eternal rest.

Albert Barnes

The Funny Side of Life

King Ozymandias of Assyria was running low on cash after years of war with the Hittites. His last great possession was the Star of the Euphrates, the most valuable diamond in the ancient world. Desperate, he went to Croesus, the pawnbroker, to ask for a loan.

Croesus said, 'I'll give you 100,000 dinars for it.'

'But I paid a million dinars for it,' the King protested. 'Don't you know who I am? I am the king!'

Croesus replied, 'When you wish to pawn a Star, makes no difference who you are.'

A sceptical anthropologist was cataloguing South American folk remedies with the assistance of a tribal elder who indicated that the leaves of a particular fern were a sure cure for any case of constipation. When the anthropologist expressed his doubts, the elder looked him in the eye and said, 'Let me tell you, with fronds like these, you don't need enemas.'

A famous Viking explorer returned home from a voyage and found his name missing from the town register. His wife insisted on complaining to the local civic official, who apologized profusely saying, 'I must have taken Leif off my census.'

Evidence has been found that William Tell and his family were avid bowlers. Unfortunately, all the Swiss league records were destroyed in a fire ... And so we'll never know for whom the Tells bowled.

Teacher: Donald, what is the chemical formula for water?

Donald: H I J K L M N O.

Teacher: What are you talking about?

Donald: Yesterday you said it's H to O.

Teacher: Simon, what do you call a person who keeps on talking when people are no longer interested?

Simon: A Teacher!

The combination 'ough' can be pronounced in nine different ways. The following sentence contains them all: 'A rough-coated, dough-faced, thoughtful ploughman strode through the streets of Scarborough; after falling into a slough, he coughed and hiccoughed.'
