

January – March 2007

**T
H
E

L
I
N
K**

**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together, and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him.” (Luke 24:13-16)

The fourth appearance of the Lord after His resurrection was to two perplexed people who were journeying from Jerusalem. They had obviously been in the city for the Passover celebrations, during which time Christ was arrested, tried and crucified. Then He had been buried; but now rumours were abroad that He had risen from the dead. Very confused and cast down, the couple were returning home to Emmaus, some seven miles distant.

The identity of these characters is unknown; only the name of one is given as Cleopas (cf Luke 24:18). He should not be confused with the Cleophas of John 19:25, who was husband of Mary. There is a greater difference between these names in Greek than appears in their English translations. Scripture gives no biographical detail about the two travellers, because it has little bearing upon the narrative. Of more importance is their state of mind – they were perplexed and sad. As they left the capital and pursued the winding path that lead to their home town, *“they talked together of all these things which had happened”* (Luke 24:14). Recent events had left them distressed and dejected.

Completely absorbed in conversation with one another as they trudged on in fading light, they were somewhat startled by the appearance of a stranger, who suddenly joined them as if from nowhere, saluting them with a kind enquiry: *“What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk,*

and are sad?" (v. 17). Knowing the true identity of this figure with the benefit of hindsight, the reader cannot fail to be impressed by the singularity and beauty of the ensuing interview. There is a gradation and orderly arrangement in the Lord's appearances. None occurred by accident, but each has a special significance and conveys a precise line of teaching. Had the organisation of these visitations been left to human wisdom, first priority might have been given to the eleven disciples, or to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who so fearlessly and tenderly conducted Christ's burial. Others would perhaps propose an appearance to Caiaphas, Herod, or even Pontius Pilate.

How different is the Divine prerogative, as the Lord, on the very first day of His resurrection goes out into the byways to meet two unidentified people; to resolve their doubts and revive their drooping spirits. A most precious lesson is taught by this incident, and further, glorious aspects of the Kingdom of God are set forth by the Great Head. He, the Good Shepherd of the sheep, will ever leave the ninety-and-nine to seek out the sheep that is in distress. It was in such a manner that He drew near to those two upon the road, revealing all the love and sympathy of His devoted heart toward His own.

In response to the enquiry concerning their sadness, Cleopas asks: "*Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?"* (v. 18) – to which the stranger replies, "*What things?"*" (v.19). Even in this small detail the Lord gives further instruction, showing the need for personal confession and expression in spiritual matters. He knew full well the cause of their sadness; better even than they knew it themselves. Yet it was needful for them to give voice to their inward emotions. The same is true in regard to faith. There are those who journey along life's pathway in a state of soul distress – perhaps in doubt or lacking assurance; having not yet believed, but

inwardly disturbed and troubled, earnestly desiring to be saved and to experience the joy of God's Salvation. The Lord knows all about it, for those very yearnings are imparted by His Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, His Word states: "*I will yet for this be enquired of... to do it for them*" (Ezekiel 36:37). A personal call and verbal confession is necessary to the reception of salvation. "*Whosoever shall **call** on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Acts 2:21). "*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*" (Romans 10:9). This is one of the fundamental lessons "*pertaining to the Kingdom of God*" – entrance thereto involves a personal statement of faith. The individual must give utterance to those secret desires, begotten of the Holy Spirit in their heart.

When Christ drew forth the thoughts of these two people, their problems and difficulties were disclosed. "*We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel*" (Luke 24:21). They were holding false notions regarding doctrine; imagining that events would take a very different course to the one they had followed. By getting them to air these views, the Lord was able to open up and discuss the issue at their level of understanding, and bring the truth to light. The same principle applies today: not until a person freely discloses their problem can a minister or servant of God give help and assistance. Only when the Philippian Jailor cried out "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" could Paul and Silas step in with the answer to his agonising quest: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*" (Acts 16:30-31).

The couple on the Emmaus road held certain fixed and dogmatic ideas whilst remaining ignorant of the truth. This is a common ploy of the Adversary. He is quite content for persons to maintain firm ideas and convictions in religious matters, provided they are in error! Cleopas and his companion believed that this Jesus was a mighty prophet and that He would prove to be the great emancipator

of national Israel. They had been happy in this persuasion until the events of recent days had begun to shake their beliefs. This one in whom they trusted had been arrested, put to death and buried. More astonishing still was the report that the grave was now empty, and angelic messengers spoke of Him being alive again. The confused travellers could not understand these facts; they had no true conception of the work of Calvary, nor the death and resurrection of the Saviour.

The Lord's method for addressing their misapprehensions was simple and thorough: "*beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in **all** the scriptures the things concerning Himself*" (Luke 24:27). Here in the detail of the fourth appearance, the Great Head is speaking of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. By lip and by example He is setting the pattern, and giving "*commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen*" (Acts 1:2): in this case it is the **consecutive expository preaching** of the Word of God.

These two men would have had only the Old Testament, since the New was not yet compiled. Doubtless they knew it well, or at least thought they did – but they had not applied its historical and prophetic aspects to anything other than national Israel. They had read the books of Moses, the account of the Hebrews' bondage and deliverance from Egypt – but saw no spiritual significance. They learned of God's daily provision and miraculous sustenance of that company in the wilderness – but saw only the material blessings. There too was God's establishment of a religious order, sacrifices, offerings and many elaborate ceremonies – but they did not perceive Christ prefigured therein. The glorious future of the promised land was described – but they could not see the Heavenly Canaan which it foreshadowed, and so confess themselves to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

After the Pentateuch and histories were the Prophets, who spoke of deserts blossoming as the rose, of peace and prosperity under a mighty Messiah – and whilst they claimed these promises for the land of Israel, they never saw the Church of Jesus Christ typified. So through the Psalms, and all the Old Testament they never looked beyond Jewry, but seized upon the promises at a national level, making only a carnal and earthly application.

In short, the two upon the road laboured under the same error which continues to blight the thinking of many Christians today, namely: dispensationalism – that the Old Testament prophecies must be literally interpreted as pertaining to national Israel, rather than figuratively applied to the Church, which is the **true** Israel of God. On the very first day of His resurrection ministry the Lord took great pains to correct this falsehood. The belief of the two men was that a Messiah would come and deliver the nation of the Jews from foreign oppression. “No!” says the Risen Christ, “your deductions are entirely wrong! The Sent One of whom the prophets speak comes to suffer the **very things** that are so distressing you now. You are foolish in holding these delusions, and slow of heart, having completely failed to grasp that which the Old Testament writers set forth.”

A stern lesson is here laid down for all those who handle the lively oracles of God, and minister His Word. Christ gives commandment through this fourth appearance, and reveals a fundamental aspect of the Kingdom of God: it is **Spiritual** and **not national**. It involves every nation, tribe and tongue, and there is no Jewish aspect to the New Covenant. Whether it is the Pentateuch, or the Prophets, or any other section of Holy Writ, the things concerning Christ must be preached; all that pertains to Him must be expounded and carefully explained.

For how long the interview between the three journeying characters continued it is difficult to tell, but it must have lasted a considerable

time, given the ground that was covered. The seven-mile walk in darkness might have taken two hours, and this remarkable discourse cannot have been much shorter in duration. How was the sermon received? Did the travellers turn upon the stranger and accuse him of ‘over-spiritualising Scripture’ or criticise His amillennial position? Such is a common response today; but Cleopas and his friend were not so dismissive. Their minds were opened by the Holy Spirit to receive the truth and to accept this divinely imparted exegesis.

Upon reaching their destination, the Stranger who had so enlightened them made as if He would have gone further, but they constrained Him to stay, and He consented. Having turned in, they sat down to eat. This was not (as some suggest) the Lord’s Supper, for that is a Church ordinance, not a private or domestic one. Rather, the footsore pilgrims, hungered by their exertions, partook of a welcome meal. It was at this point that the Lord added physical sight to spiritual insight, and they suddenly recognised who it was who had thus discoursed with them. Having imparted this last assurance, the Saviour departed, leaving two confident, happy and well-instructed individuals. “*Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way?*” (Luke 24:32) they said, overjoyed.

Previously, having imperfect understanding coupled with nationalistic ideals, they had persisted in error – which produced only sadness and confusion. Holding parts of God’s Word in isolation lead to a misinterpretation of the whole. But now they could say of Christ: “*He opened to us the scriptures*”. Herein the Lord has left all His ministers an example that they should follow in His steps – to expound the Scriptures in detail, in total and in order; making full proof of their ministry (cf 2 Timothy 4:5) diligently seeking the true spiritual meaning, and faithfully applying it.

W. H. Molland
(transcribed by R. J. Steward)

The Testimony of Christ to the Scriptures

As He drew near to the cross, our Saviour's testimony to the Scriptures has a still more sacred import. "*Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished*" (Luke 18:31). "*For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me, And He was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning Me have an end [fulfilment]*" (Luke 22:37). On the night of His betrayal, in the shade of Olivet, three times our Saviour points to the fulfilment of these Scriptures in Himself (cf Matthew 26:31, 53, 54; Mark 14:48, 49). Three of His seven utterances upon the cross were in the words of Scripture, and He died with one of them on His lips.

But perhaps the strongest testimony of all that Christ bore to the Old Testament was after His resurrection. On the very day that He rose He said to two disciples going to Emmaus, "*O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*" (Luke 24:25-27). Not only did He sanction the Scriptures, but also that method of interpretation, which finds throughout the Old Testament a witness to the Messiah of the New. Thus on the very first day of our Lord's return He resumed His former method of instruction even more emphatically than before, proving His claims not so much by His own personal victory over death as by the testimony of the Scriptures. After this Jesus appeared to the eleven and said: "*These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them; Thus it is written, and thus it*

behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (Luke 24:44-46)... It is during this period that He set His seal upon the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, the threefold division of the complete Old Testament Scriptures according to the Jews, the very same Scriptures that are in our possession today.

But, lest even this should not be enough to confirm our faith, we are given in the Book of Revelation a glimpse of our glorified Saviour, still *“this same Jesus”*, still quoting from the Scriptures, and still applying them to Himself. He says: *“Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death”* (Revelation 1:17-18). And again: *“He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth”* (Revelation 3:7). Here He quotes from the two parts of the one Book of Isaiah, from chapter 44:6, which says: *“Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and His Redeemer the Lord of Hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside Me there is no God...Fear ye not”*, and from chapter 22:22, *“And the key of the house of David will I lay upon His shoulder; so He shall open, and none shall shut; and He shall shut, and none shall open”*. Truly the key – not only of life and death, but the key to the Scriptures – is laid upon His shoulder, and He still unlocks the meaning of the book...

A. M. Hodgkin
“Christ in all the Scriptures” (1907)

“There are things dispersed throughout *“all the Scriptures”* concerning Christ, which it is of great advantage to have collected and put together. You cannot go far into any part of Scripture but you meet with something that has reference to Christ, some prophesy, some promise, some prayer, some type or other; for He is the true *“treasure hid in the field”* of the Old Testament.”

Matthew Henry

Conversation

It happened on a solemn eventide,
Soon after He who was our Surety died;
Two bosom friends, each pensively inclined,
The scene of all those sorrows left behind;
Sought their own village, busied as they went,
In musings worthy of the great event:
They spake of Him they loved, of Him whose life
Though blameless had incurred perpetual strife:
They thought Him, and they justly thought Him One
Sent to do more than He appeared to have done;
To exalt their nation and to lift them high
Above all else, and wondered He should die.
Ere yet they brought their journey to its end
A Stranger joined them, courteous as a friend,
And asked them, with a kind, engaging air,
What their affliction was, and begged a share.
Informed, He gathered up the broken thread,
And, truth and wisdom gracing all He said,
Explained, illustrated, and searched so well
The tender theme on which they chose to dwell,
That, reaching home, they said, "The night is near,
We must not now be parted, sojourn here."
The humble Stranger soon became their Guest,
And, made so welcome at their simple feast,
He blessed the bread, but vanished at the word,
And left them both exclaiming, "'Twas the Lord!
Did not our hearts feel all He deigned to say?
Did not they burn within us by the way?"

William Cowper

THE LAW AND THE TESTIMONY

Part 1 – Christ and the Scriptures

The Written Word of God is suffering from serious neglect. Many Churches are losing sight of its authority, power and efficacy. This manifests itself in various ways: the public reading of Scripture is denied its prominence in worship; trustworthy translations are exchanged for corrupted ‘versions’; expository ministry is giving place to topical addresses; vast portions of the Bible are unread and unknown. It is no longer considered sufficient to quote verses of Scripture in defence of truth or refutation of error – they must be supplemented by the words of philosophers, commentators or theologians. Even respectable evangelical Churches prop up their weak notions of ‘sola scriptura’ with creeds and confessions penned by fallible men.

If one part of the Bible suffers more than another, it is the Old Testament. Few readers can progress beyond its opening six chapters before resorting to humanistic interpretations or the hypotheses of science. Others give their own excuses for dismissing this portion of God’s Word – either it is too Jewish, too legalistic, too far removed from the gospel, or just too hard to understand. The New Testament is published in isolation from the Old, and many Christians begin to regard them as entirely separate entities – not realising that unless **both** are present, they do not have a Bible. Against these prevailing attitudes and trends comes the clear testimony and example of the Lord Jesus when upon earth.

The Old Testament read by Christ

In the early years A.D. when the Saviour dwelt amongst men, that portion of Scripture now known as the ‘Old Testament’ was already consolidated and well established. It was generally divided into three broad sections: the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms (cf Luke

24:44), with the other historic and poetical works also included. This situation obtained until the close of the first Century, by which time the Gospels and Epistles had been compiled and added to the canon. So from Matthew to Revelation, whenever “*the scriptures*” are referred to, by name or inference, the **Old Testament** is primarily intended (e.g. Matthew 22:29; Acts 17:2, 11; 2 Timothy 3:15). ‘The Bible’ as possessed and read by the Early Church, by Paul, by the disciples, and indeed by the Lord Himself, comprised the books of the Old Testament.

That Christ actually read the Scriptures is evident from such verses as Luke 4:16, where it is described as being His customary engagement. In private too, He knew what it was to “*live...by every word of God*” (Luke 4:4). His knowledge of that Word was intimate and entire, but still He read it in its written form and made it His “*meditation all the day*” (Psalm 119:97). He exhorted His hearers to the same godly exercise, repeatedly asking the rhetorical question: “*Did ye never read in the scriptures?*” “*have ye not read in the book of Moses?*” “*What is written in the law? how readest thou?*” (Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:26, Luke 10:26). Most directly of all, He gives this simple yet timeless three-word challenge: “*Search the scriptures*” (John 5:39).

The Old Testament vindicated by Christ

Concerning the Lord it is said, “*Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth*” (1 Peter 2:22). Nothing the Saviour said, nor any word He uttered tended to ambiguity, deceit or the propagation of falsehood. Therefore, the very fact that He continually quoted from the Old Testament is proof of its validity, accuracy and reality. He did not cite the Scriptures as being moral fables or the apocryphal inventions of antiquity, but as reliable historical fact. It is a remarkable providence that those Old Testament events most likely to raise doubts or questions are the very ones Christ referred to in His ministry.

For example, many modern commentators denounce the Genesis flood as fantastical, or at best a much-exaggerated local phenomenon; but the Lord confirms the event, **and** its universality, speaking of “*the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all*” (Luke 17:27, cf Genesis 7:19-24). Similarly, the supernatural destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is prone to much interpretation and explaining away, yet this also is established by Christ: “*the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven*” (Luke 17:29 cf Genesis 19:23-24). To this list may be added the extraordinary appearance of God to Moses (Luke 20:37 cf Exodus 3:2-6), the Divine sustenance afforded to the Israelites as they journeyed to Canaan (John 6:49,58 cf Exodus 16:11-21) and the miracles performed by the prophets (Luke 4:25-27 cf 1 Kings 17, 2 Kings 5). Whilst textual critics deny the existence of an individual prophet called Isaiah, the Lord quotes him numerous times by name (Matthew 13:14, 15:7). And though biologists ridicule the notion that a man could be swallowed by a fish and survive the ordeal, the Saviour places great emphasis on just such an occurrence: “*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*” (Matthew 12:40).

If these events were nothing more than Jewish myths, it would have been reprehensible for the Lord to give credence to them and quote them as fact; He would have been guilty of guile. The sinlessness of Christ and the truth of the Scriptures stand or fall together. To give heed to the spurious interpretations of sceptical theologians is tantamount to charging God with unrighteousness (cf Romans 9:14).

It was prophesied of the Messiah, “*He will magnify the law, and make it honourable*” (Isaiah 42:21); exonerating all that had been

written in the Old Testament era. He confirmed this aspect of His work, when He said *“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth”* (John 18:37). As a peerless legal practitioner, Christ bore a consistent and impeccable testimony to Scripture in the courts of humanity. He is, in every sense, the *“Faithful and True Witness”* of God’s Word.

The Old Testament preached by Christ

The record of Christ goes much further, demonstrating both the veracity of the Scripture, and its power to bring life, light and understanding. He not only defended the written Word, but also expertly used and applied it to ‘bring the truth to sight’. When in the Synagogue, it formed the logical foundation of His ministry (cf Luke 4:16f); when surrounded by the multitudes, it was equally relevant, *“and He preached the word unto them”* (Mark 2:2). In the company of His disciples, He *“expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself”* (Luke 24:27), and equally when confronting antagonistic Jewish leaders, He grounded each argument upon the Written Word (e.g. Matthew 23:29-46). In every case, the Scriptures are pertinent and effectual, whether to Jew or Gentile, disciple or detractor, wise man or wayfarer.

Perhaps most notably of all, when confronted alone by the Great Adversary, the Lord did not resort to supernatural means for His defence; neither did He rely on His power to work miracles. His weapon of choice against the Devil was, as ever, a declaration of the Word of God, and verses of the Old Testament (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Three fiery darts were launched, and three times they were parried: *“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone...”* (cf Deuteronomy 8:3); *“It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God ”* (cf Deuteronomy 6:16); *“it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve”* (cf Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 10:20). Even over the *“old serpent”* himself, the Scriptures have authority and power. Their force is

undiminished with age, and still today they will prove “*quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword*” (Hebrews 4:12) when properly handled and rigorously applied.

The Old Testament fulfilled by Christ

The relationship between Christ the Incarnate Word, and the Written Word of God is best described in His own words recorded in Matthew 5:17, “*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*” This was the Saviour’s ultimate purpose and goal. The Scripture is given by Divine decree, and its fulfilment is imperative. All that was written found its accomplishment, perfection and objective in Him (cf Luke 22:37, Romans 10:4).

There was the fulfilment of the **Prophets**. From Genesis 3:15 to Malachi 4:5 innumerable portions of the Old Testament looked forward to the coming day of the Lord. They testified of the Saviour in the finest detail, from His pre-eternal existence (cf Proverbs 8:22-31), through His conception (cf Isaiah 7:14) to His ascension back to glory (cf Psalm 24). He performed every word spoken, absolutely and entirely. Even in His last extremities upon the cross, the completion of these prophecies was His chief concern, and He would not ‘give up the ghost’ until all was done: “*Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst*” (John 19:28 cf Psalm 69:21). Thus by His life and death and resurrection, He ensured that not the slightest pen-stroke of the Old Testament went unaccounted for.

There was also the fulfilment of the **Law**. Many may wonder why it is necessary to have contained within the Bible the fine detail of the Law as prescribed to God’s Old Covenant people. It stands as a measure of the holiness of God and His hatred of sin. It shows the

magnitude of His righteous demands upon man, and the impossibly unattainable height of the Divine standard. These are the Commandments to which Christ willingly submitted Himself; the precepts and penalties incumbent upon Him. And He **fulfilled them all**. In His spotless, perfect life He was “*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*” (Hebrews 7:26) by virtue of keeping every word of God’s Law. In His vicarious, threefold death He experienced every conceivable punishment and judgment which that Law could threaten or inflict, and thereby fulfilled all its punitive aspects too, (whilst simultaneously effecting a propitiation for His people’s sins).

The righteousness wrought by Christ’s obedience is imputed to all those who believe upon Him, and they are justified by faith (cf Romans 4:24 – 5:1). Consequently, the ‘legal’ sections of the Old Testament now take on a whole new significance and meaning: they become a detailed description of the righteousness which every saint receives, the blessedness into which they have entered, and the judgments from which they are eternally saved.

Conclusions

Certain Jews of the Lord’s generation wrongly thought that He was denying or dispensing with the Law and the Prophets. There are many Christians in the present day who believe the same – imagining that the Lord has consigned the Old Testament to Jewish history, and excusing themselves in neglecting it. The Bible speaks for itself: He did not come to destroy, but to glorify, verify and exemplify its every word. The Old Covenant may have waxed old and vanished away, but the Old Testament has not. It constitutes the lively oracles of God (cf Acts 7:38), His Word which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Peter 1:23), magnified above all His Name (Psalm 138:2), which cannot pass away (Luke 21:33). “*For ever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven*” (Psalm 119:89).

Part 2 – The Christian and the Scriptures

Having considered the attitude of the Lord to the Scriptures, and in particular the Old Testament, it is necessary for every Christian to examine themselves, and their mindset. “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 2:5), for He has left “*us an example, that ye should follow in His steps*” (1 Peter 2:21). Consider three ways in which the Old Testament Scriptures have very special relevance to the New Testament believer:

A Description of the Faith

The Apostle Paul had a thorough understanding of the Law and the Prophets, and recounts some familiar details of the Exodus to the early believers at Corinth, before concluding: “*Now these things were our examples...these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for **our admonition**, upon whom the ends of the world are come*” (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11). Similarly to the Romans: “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4). These histories and prophecies contain countless types, illustrations and lessons for the Church. Whilst being factually accurate, they serve the higher God-ordained purpose of instructing His New Covenant people. Israel’s wilderness wanderings are a case in point, depicting amongst other things the bondage of sin, redemption, baptism, pilgrimage, spiritual warfare, death and glory. The intricacies of the priesthood all demonstrate the relationship of Christ to His people as Mediator and Intercessor.

The inspired commentary of Hebrews casts a glorious light on many Old Testament details. The eleventh chapter lists many of the ancients by name, and describes their faith – an essential virtue for the children of God in every age. These all stand as a great cloud of witnesses, giving a practical demonstration of the life of faith, and

inspiring subsequent generations of Christians to “*run with patience the race that is set before us*” (Hebrews 12:1).

A Means to Faith

One vital feature of Holy Scripture, which cannot be overlooked, is its power to bring conversion and spiritual life. It is the means which God has appointed to achieve this great end: “*Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Romans 10:17). Christ confirmed it when He said, “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life*” (John 5:39). There is a tendency among Christians to think that outsiders will only be saved by the preaching of apologetics, intellectual arguments to reason or strong evangelistic appeals. Improper emphasis is laid upon communication techniques and presentation styles. Others suggest that for the unbeliever to be convinced, they need to see a great spectacle, hear phenomenal personal testimonies, or even witness some miraculous event. Yet these are weak and fallible instrumentalities. What could be simpler to believe than the clear record of Holy Writ? Such was the Lord’s argument, when in a parable He rebuked the Pharisees: “*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*” (Luke 16:31). The power to save is not found in signs or wonders or man-made innovations. It resides solely in the Word of God, wrought upon and applied by the Spirit of God.

Paul exhorted Timothy to continue in those things which he had learned, namely the “*holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Timothy 3:15). James adds a further instruction “*receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls*” (James 1:21). This Divinely imparted ability, inherent in the Written Word still persists to the present day. There is nothing in this world more able to bring life to the spiritually dead than the Scriptures of Truth, distinctly read, and faithfully preached.

A Measure of Faith

The position which the child of God takes regarding the Word of God is a question of the utmost importance. One of the clearest evidences of sonship is implicit trust and reverence for the Father's words. This applies equally in matters spiritual: "*He that is of God heareth God's words*" (John 8:47), the saints demonstrate their faith and love toward God by their faith in, and love for, His Word the Bible. There is no greater contradiction than professing Christians who claim to believe the fundamental tenets of the faith, but simultaneously reject certain portions of the Word. How can a person believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, whilst disputing the very Scriptures which testify of Him? He asked the same question of the Jews: "*had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*" (John 5:46-47)

There are within Scripture "*some things hard to be understood*" (2 Peter 3:16), and many more that defy human wisdom and mortal sense. In such places, the saints must rely upon the Holy Spirit for instruction (cf 1 Corinthians 2:12-14), and **exercise faith**. This principle will guide the believing reader safely from Genesis (where "*through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God*" – Hebrews 11:3), to the Revelation: "*These sayings are faithful and true...blessed is He that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book*" (Revelation 22:6-7). Then, "*Lord, increase our faith!*" and "*Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law*" (Psalm 119:18).

R. J. Steward

"Say, Christian, wouldst thou thrive
In knowledge of thy Lord?
Against no Scripture ever strive,
But tremble at His Word.

If aught there dark appear,
Bewail thy want of sight;
No imperfection can be there,
For all God's words are right."

J. Hart

Editorial

From the time of the Lord's first Advent and incarnation upon earth, worldly-minded men have misunderstood His Divine purposes, and failed to perceive the great spiritual objectives that He accomplished. At the very first mention of one "*born King of the Jews*", jealous Herod, fearing for his throne, "*was exceeding wrath*" and took drastic measures to prevent any attempt upon his national sovereignty and crown (cf Matthew 2:1-18). This strength of feeling and nationalistic fervour was present among the masses of Jewry too, when some thirty years later the Lord appeared publicly, preaching and doing wonders. The people would readily have resorted to physical and violent means to establish Him as an earthly monarch: "*Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone*" (John 6:14-15). Even this practical rebuttal of their secular aspirations did not suffice to dispel them, as later "*He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come*". To their disappointment "*He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there!*" (Luke 17:20-21).

Pontius Pilate evidences the same confusion and ignorance in the conduct of the Lord's trial a few years later. "*Then Pilate... called Jesus, and said unto Him, Art Thou the King of the Jews?... Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a king then?... And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross, And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS*" (John 18:33, 37; 19:19). This condition of bewilderment also persisted in the minds of Christ's own disciples. The distress and grief of the two who journeyed to Emmaus was largely due to their erroneous assumption that, in a purely political and governmental sense, "*it*

had been He which should have redeemed Israel ” (Luke 24:21). Even a few minutes prior to the Lord’s ascension back to glory, there were those who ignorantly “*asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*” (Acts 1:6). To which they received an emphatic, visible and negative answer, moments later.

The sad fact of the matter is that, two millennia on, many Christians continue to labour under the same delusion: the notion that Christ’s kingdom has a carnal, earthly aspect. Some look in vain toward the Middle East, hoping that the Lord will change His mind, do that which He consistently refused to do when upon earth, and reign in so-called ‘Jerusalem’. Others turn to the allegedly ‘Christian’ countries of the West, and talk of a time when the Church will prevail over the physical nations of the world, ushering in an era of spiritual peace and prosperity. There is nothing new under the sun. These are essentially the same errors that the Lord refuted throughout His earthly ministry.

It behoves every believer to learn from the examples of the New Testament, and to grasp the truth of Christ’s words: “*My Kingdom is **not of this world**...My Kingdom is not from hence*” (John 18:36). The realm which Christ has established, and to which every saint belongs, is **spiritual** in nature, **divine** in origin, **heavenly** in location and **eternal** in duration. It “*cometh not with observation*”, that is, it cannot be seen with mortal eyes. Being a spiritual, everlasting institution, it is invisible and unperceived by human sight (cf 2 Corinthians 4:18). There will never be a geographical location to which men could point and say, “*Lo here! or, Lo there!*” is the Kingdom of God.

There is no such place upon earth as a ‘Christian Country’: not England, or America, or Rome, or Israel – for “*the whole world lieth in wickedness*” (1 John 5:19). The patriarch Abraham knew it,

and regarded even the covenant country of Canaan as alien territory: “*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a **strange country**...For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Hebrews 11:9-10). Let every true Christian adopt the same faith and testimony as faithful Abraham! “*For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country...now they desire a **better country**, that is, an **heavenly**: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city*” (vv. 14, 16).

Maintaining the error that Christ’s spiritual kingdom has earthly expression will inevitably produce the same sad consequences as recorded in the New Testament. In some cases, violent nationalism and strife: how many wars have been fought by those who foolishly thought they defended the Church, or advanced God’s purposes? In other cases, grievous disappointment: the turmoil of Palestine, and the terminal decline of Christendom continually thwart the hopes of premillennialist and postmillennialist alike. In every case, a misinterpretation of the Word of God: what blessings, instruction and promises those believers forfeit, who apply them to an earthly kingdom, instead of to themselves, the Church of the Redeemed.

Rather, let every right thinking Christian quit such earth-bound ideas, and “*give diligence to make your calling and election sure...For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the **everlasting kingdom** of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:10-11).

Preliminary Announcement

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 2nd & Lord’s Day 3rd June 2007 D.V.

Preacher: Mr R. J. Steward
(Minister, North Road Chapel)