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The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.” (Luke 24:50-53)

“So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.” (Mark 16:19-20)

It is a point of debate among commentators whether the Ascension of the Lord constitutes a separate, eleventh post-resurrection appearance, or not. However, taking the relevant scriptures in balance, it seems rather to have been the culmination of the tenth visitation which His disciples received, after that He arose from the dead.

Of all the subjects dealt with in God's Word, there are few more soul-thrilling than the Ascension; the triumphal return of Christ as Mediator into Heaven; the **Man** Christ Jesus entering in to **Heaven** itself. It may appear strange that an event of such importance, and one which strikes the believer so forcibly, should not have been given greater coverage by the writers of the four Gospels. Could it be that they regarded the Ascension to be so closely linked with the Resurrection – so blended in significance – that a further detailed record was not necessary? Let it be remembered that the words written, and the words withheld, were all under the direct and divine control of God the Holy Spirit. So in the study of this subject (as in all others) the Scriptures must be searched in order to plumb the depths of this wondrous theme.

Whilst all the Gospels record the Resurrection, only two report on the Ascension, namely Mark and Luke, whose brief accounts head the present article. However, when Luke wrote the book of the Acts, a little expansion of detail is given: *“And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:9-11).

Proceeding still further into the New Testament, the tremendous subject of Christ’s Ascension is to be found again. For example: *“Wherefore he saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things”* (Ephesians 4:8-10). *“But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God”* (Hebrews 10:12). *“Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him”* (1 Peter 3:22). There are many glorious and precious truths connected with, and dependent upon, Christ actually returning into Heaven as man. The great event of the Ascension of the Mediator is cardinal to the Faith

The exact **time** of Christ’s Ascension was forty days after the Resurrection. In a previous article, the frequent occurrence of the number forty in relation to several crucial events in Scripture was highlighted. The **place** – the location from which He departed this earth – is also clearly stated. It was from the Mount of Olives, near to Bethany. A building was subsequently erected in this area called ‘The Chapel of the Ascension’, which is alleged to mark the exact spot. In

this, caution must be exercised, as sentiment, tradition, and the commercial influence of tourism all play a part. One commentator remarks how inappropriate are the supposed locations of many New Testament events, being “fixed by fancy”, and not at all in keeping with the letter or spirit of the Biblical narratives. Upon the particular event of the Ascension, he says: “On the wild uplands which immediately overhang the village, Christ withdrew with His disciples, in a seclusion which, perhaps, could nowhere else be found so near the stir of a great city. The long ridge of Olivet screening the hills, and those same hills the village beneath them, from all sound or sight of the city behind them, the view opening only on the wide waste of desert rocks and ever descending valleys into the depths of the distant Jordan; it was at such a spot of great privacy that the last interview took place” (A. P. Stanley, ‘Sinai and Palestine’, 1856).

The imagination readily captures the scene – the blessed Lord and Saviour leading those eleven men whom He had chosen, out into some quiet, isolated place; His last walk on earth with them; and approaching Bethany, but not entering it, He stops amidst the rugged grandeur of His own creation. There it was that He held His parting interview; and there He uttered His last words of blessing; and it was while those words were yet on His lips that He began, slowly and majestically, to leave the earth, even “*while He blessed them*” (Luke 24:51). Still speaking in accents of benediction, a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Surely there is a connection here with that bright cloud of shekinah glory – the symbol of deity – which for so many years had dwelt between the cherubim, above the Ark of the Covenant, upon the Mercy Seat. Now as Christ was to return to Heaven, into that most holy place, the shekinah cloud descended from Heaven to meet Him, and enfolding Him in its encircling brightness, carried Him up until He was lost in the ethereal blue. There, in that quiet, lonely spot, His

eleven disciples stood lost in wonder, gazing wistfully into the skies – but their Lord and Master was now gone far beyond the range of mortal vision, into a realm which no telescope could ever penetrate, nor space-shuttle ever approach.

As in bewilderment they thus stood and stared, two bright creatures appeared in their midst, described in Acts 1:10 as “*men... in white apparel*”. They gently chided the disciples for their longing, perhaps tearful and doubtful gazing, and gave assurance that this same Jesus should one day return from Heaven in precisely the manner in which He had departed. Cheered by this encouragement, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Such was the nature of the Ascension, by which the Lord visibly and physically left the earth.

To go further into this subject – what reasons are given in the Word of God for the **bodily** ascension of Christ into Heaven? In that Scripture previously quoted, it is made clear that the Mediator must needs ascend on high “*that He might fill all things*” (Ephesians 4:10). This is in accord with the Lord’s words to the two upon the Emmaus road, when He said to them, “*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?*” (Luke 24:25-26). The Hebrew epistle sets this out with even greater clarity: “*Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God*” (Hebrews 4:14); “*Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus*” (Hebrews 6:20); “*He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*” (Hebrews 9:12). “*For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hebrews 9:24); “*But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God*” (Hebrews 10:12).

These scriptures show the absolute **necessity** of the Ascension as being all a part of the great plan of Redemption – because the **priesthood** of Christ is involved. The Levitical system, which the New Testament describes as ‘a pattern of heavenly things’, sets forth this aspect of the Saviour’s work in a most profound manner. On the great Day of Atonement, the High Priest was required to make sacrifice; victims were slain, and then he could enter into the very presence of the Shekinah, sprinkling the Mercy Seat with the blood of the sacrificial beasts. As he came forth from that awesome presence, **alive**, so was assurance given that the Atonement was complete, and the sacrifice was accepted by God. This yearly entrance of the High Priest into the Most Holy Place prefigured the entry of Christ into Heaven at His Ascension. These parallels are drawn out in the Hebrew epistle: *“But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing... But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us... For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us”* (Hebrews 9:7, 8, 11, 12, 24).

Lying behind this process is the terrible fact that man has sinned, and in consequence has been banished from the presence and favour of God. Heaven was henceforth closed to him. The Law, with its uncompromising demands, excludes man from God. Nor could man ever meet those demands. The sentence pronounced upon man is death, and ultimately, eternal death. To rescue fallen man from this doom, and to satisfy the Law’s demands, thus restoring the sinner, the Son of God took a human nature into union with Himself, and thus

assumed the office of Surety. In this capacity – as Man – He would keep the Law perceptively, and suffer its full penalty, on behalf of all those for whom He stood as Surety.

It was essential that the Second Person of the Trinity should take on flesh and blood, to enable Him to do this. Had He not adopted a human nature, He would not have been fit to atone for those of the human race. Had the Law not been obeyed by one having human nature, His substitution would not have been legitimate, and it could never have been said “*by the obedience of **one** shall many be made righteous*” (Romans 5:19). Had He not become man, He could not have died, and so redeemed sinners from the curse and penalty of the Law.

Having been ‘made sin’, and bearing His people’s sins in His own body to the tree, what assurance is there that Christ’s atonement has been accepted? What token that all the Law’s requirements, perceptive and penal, have been met by Him? Namely this: that Christ was seen to rise from death again, in bodily form. All this was accomplished – Christ the Mediator lived, and died, and rose again, and appeared unto His own with many infallible proofs. Yet suppose this had been all, and the Saviour had remained upon earth, or simply vanished away. Would this have been a satisfactory conclusion to His work? Would this have given to believers the full assurance which they need?

True, the resurrection makes clear that sin and its consequences are eternally dealt with; but members of the human race need to know that they can ultimately be received into Heaven; to be where God is. It was the presence of God that was forfeited by the First Adam – where is the evidence that it has been regained by the Second Adam? Deliverance from Death and Hell does not imply admission to Heaven! Still more assurances are needed. It is necessary to see that the Mediator, fallen humanity’s great Representative, has visibly and

openly entered Heaven itself. Furthermore – to know that He has entered, not just to come out again like Aaron in the Tabernacle of old, but entered and **remained** there; as a pledge of His people’s perpetual rights of inheritance, in a Heaven which He has secured for them. This is what the Ascension demonstrates. Only thus is it seen that sinners lost and doomed by the First Adam are fully restored by the Second.

The First Adam was banished from paradise below, and consequently, so were all whom he represented as federal head – the entire human race. The Second Adam must be seen to be accepted in the paradise above, in order that those whom He represents might know their right of residence there. It was needful that the Mediator should enter Heaven itself, and be welcomed to its glittering mansions, and occupy it as Head of all His chosen people as a permanent habitation. This was done at the Ascension. It marked the completion of the work of Redemption. As He said to those two believers – Christ must needs suffer **and enter into His glory**. [To be continued]

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

“Observe the time when our Lord ascended: forty days after His resurrection. The care and love of Christ to His Church was manifested by this His stay with them. Unspeakable glory was prepared for Him, and did now await Him; but He would not go to possess it, till He had settled all things for the good of His Church. And when He had settled His family in order, and given charge to His disciples concerning the discipline of His house, He would stay no longer. [Here is] a good pattern for our imitation: to desire life upon the score of usefulness; to be willing to be gone when our work is done.”

William Burkitt (1650 – 1703)

THE ANCHOR OF THE SOUL

If the question be asked, ‘what hope have we poor sinners got of entering into God’s rest?’ the answer is: because Christ, our High Priest, is already entered Heaven, and we must do so in and by Him...

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil” (Hebrews 6:19). Now an anchor is used for securing a ship, particularly in times of storm, to prevent it from drifting. It is an invisible thing, sinking down beneath the waters, and gripping firmly the sand beneath. The winds may roar and the waves lash the ship, but it rides them steadily, being held fast by something outside itself. Surely the figure is plain. The “*anchor*” is **Christ Himself**, sustaining His people down here in this world, in the midst of the wicked, who are likened unto “*the troubled sea, when it cannot rest*” (Isaiah 57:20). Did He not declare, “*neither shall any pluck them out of My hand*” (John 10:28)? Certainly there is nothing in us ‘both sure and steadfast’: it is the love (cf John 13:1), power (cf Matthew 28:18, 20), and faithfulness (cf Hebrews 7:25) of Christ which is in view.

“Wither the forerunner is for us entered, Jesus, made an High Priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:20). Surely this explains for us the previous verse: it was the entrance of Christ into Heaven which settles fast the ‘Anchor’ within the veil! It was **for us** Christ has gone on high! A ‘forerunner’ is one who has already traversed every step of the race which is set before us (cf Hebrews 12:1,2), and who has entered into possession of all that toward which he ran. Because Christ has been where we now are, we shall soon be where He now is. Thus, the force of this figurative title of our Redeemer is not only designed to give assurance of our security, but to show us **where** that security lies – entirely outside of ourselves: held fast by a triumphant and ascended

Christ. Hence the force of His name here: “*Jesus*”, who “*shall save His people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21).

Condensing from Dr. Owen’s excellent remarks: Christ is a ‘Forerunner’ for us. First, by way of **declaration**. It belongs unto a forerunner to carry tidings, and declare what success has been obtained in the affair of which he is to render account. So when the Lord entered Heaven, He made an open declaration of His victory by spoiling principalities and leading captivity captive (cf Psalm 45:3-7, Psalm 68:18, 24-26). Second, by way of **preparation**. This He did by opening the way for our prayers and worship (cf Hebrews 10:19-22) and making ready a place for us (cf John 14:2-3). Third, by way of **occupation**. He has gone into Heaven, in our name, to take possession and reserve it for us (cf Acts 26:18, 1 Peter 1:4)...

Christ entered Heaven as the Great High Priest of His Church, as the Mediator of the new covenant, as the Forerunner of His people, as their Advocate (cf 1 John 2:1), and the ‘Firstborn of many brethren’. His design in so doing was “*to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hebrews 9:24). This He does “**now**”, at the present season, and always. What the typical priest did was of no continuance. But this “*now*” is expressive of the whole season and duration of time from the entrance of Christ into Heaven to the consummation of all things. Absolutely, His entrance into Heaven had other ends in view (cf John 17:5, Hebrews 1:3, etc) but to appear before God for His people as their High Priest, was the only end or object of His entering Heaven considered as God’s ‘Temple’, where is the “*throne of grace*”. This manifests Christ’s full assurance of the success of His undertaking, His complete discharge from all that guilt which had been imputed to Him. Had He not made a full end of our sins, He could not have appeared with any confidence as our Surety in the presence of God!

A. W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 1954

THE INAUGURATION OF THE KINGDOM

Acts 1:6

The forty-day period which the Risen Lord spent upon earth, between His resurrection and ultimate Ascension, is succinctly summarised in the words of Acts 1:3 “...*He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*”. It was necessary for the disciples to learn the nature of that kingdom to which they belonged in consequence of salvation, and the Saviour’s finished work – a kingdom that they would be instrumental in extending throughout the whole world. So important was this particular instruction that the Lord devoted His last words and acts upon earth to the teaching of it. This should be sufficient to stress its significance to every Christian reader.

Christ’s last appearance to His people seems also to have been one of the longest in duration. Taking the various Biblical records together, it is evident that the disciples assembled in Jerusalem as they had been instructed, and the Lord manifested Himself to them there. There followed the discourse recounted by Luke (cf Luke 24:44-49), in which they were told of a momentous event shortly to occur in the city, for which they should wait. Then the Lord led them away from that Upper Room, along a well-remembered route to the east of the capital, towards Bethany, some fifteen furlongs (two miles) away. They would have descended first through the Kedron valley, and then up the ridge of Mount Olivet.

Try to envisage the scene, and the thoughts and emotions of the disciples – men ‘subject to like passions as we are’; the same understandings, and misconceptions too. The past forty days have been sufficient to convince them of certain things: their Lord and Master is

alive again. He has defeated death, and risen from the grave – not as an ephemeral ‘spirit’ – but in material, bodily form. He is endued with supernatural power, enabling Him to enter locked rooms, to appear and vanish from sight, to travel instantly from place to place unnoticed, and to perform mighty miracles, even as before. He has promised that some great occasion will shortly befall in Jerusalem, and even now is leading His faithful followers to high ground, commanding a spectacular view of the place. They could look down onto it – people going about their business in the occupied city; Roman soldiers upon the walls; the Imperial Eagle flying over the Praetorium and the Fortress of Antonia. What will happen now? Their anticipation is almost palpable.

Perhaps they tried to guess at what would occur next. Was this the moment they had all been waiting? Is this to be the fulfilment of their Jewish hopes and desires? Eventually, all the company have reached the summit: *“When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1:6). Would He now call upon twelve legions of angels, and with His disciples, sweep down upon the city? Would He drive out the hated Romans, exacting judgment upon them who so vilely captured and put Him to death? Would He overthrow the puppet-king Herod, and Pilate, emissary of Rome, and set Himself upon the Throne of David – bringing pre-eminence, peace and prosperity to the Jews once more? Would He restore their kingdom? ‘Well Lord?’ they ask.

“And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:7-9). Reading these words casually, it might appear that their

main question went unanswered, or ignored. Not so. **Christ's Ascension was their answer!** There they stood: they were indeed on the brink of a new kingdom in which their Lord and King would ascend to the throne; this was truly the dawn of a new era, in which He would reign supreme, and promote them to places of honour. But then, **instead** of rushing westward, down the hill to the city, He suddenly begins to rise **upwards** – defying gravity, confounding nature. A drifting cloud opens to receive Him, and closes, and passes by – and there is the sky above, and the grass beneath, and Jerusalem behind, and the Roman banners still fluttering in the breeze.

Here, by word and demonstration, the disciples were being taught one final, forcible lesson. They were being given essential detail pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Here Christ practically showed it to them; previously He had put in words, saying (to Pilate, of all people!) “*My kingdom is not of this world*” (John 18:36). The disciples were painfully slow to grasp this truth. But not as slow as many professing Christians who still, after two thousand years, have not understood this basic message, that **the kingdom of God has nothing to do with national Israel.**

The disciples in their day were guilty of accepting popular opinion, and modern interpretations of the Scriptures. The priests, the scribes and Pharisees, the patriotic Jews of that time all believed much the same – that the Messiah, when He came, would come as a conquering national hero, and drive out the occupying Roman forces to restore the long-lost line of King David of old. The monarchy had been lost to Israel then for nearly six centuries. It terminated with the Babylonian invasion of 586BC, and when, 70 years later the Jews were repatriated from exile, autonomous government was granted, but they were not permitted a king. Their Persian masters were superseded by the Greeks; then by the Ptolemies; then the Syrians. For a brief period, the Maccabees successfully revolted, and established the Hasmonean

dynasty, until the Romans arrived under Pompey, and all designs on independence were finally quashed.

Still they hoped a Messiah would arise to restore their political fortunes. So when Jesus, called the Christ, began to minister publicly, He attracted attention. The people sought to make Him their king by force, which advancement He refused (cf John 6:15). In another incident, *“when He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17:20-21).

It was not only the Pharisees who needed to be undeceived. The disciples too had imbibed these patriotic errors. As they journeyed to the capital for the last time with the Lord before His death, *“He added and spake a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear”* (Luke 19:11). They thought the moment had then come, and that they were riding to the invasion of the city. Still after three years of the Lord’s ministry they were wedded to this Jewish delusion. It was a falsehood which Christ refuted with the last discourse of His mortal life. He eventually came face to face with the Roman representative in Jerusalem: Pontius Pilate, the Procurator of Judea. Was this a final showdown? Would the Messiah now claim His prize?

*“Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto Him, Art Thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me: what hast Thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: **but now is My kingdom not from hence**”* (John 18:33-36). The Saviour would not acknowledge any attachment

to national Israel; He immediately corrected Pilate's assumption "*Thine own nation*", with the riposte, "*My kingdom is not of this world*". These words evidently came to the attention of the disciples, as their inclusion in the gospel record shows, but still they did not understand.

Later, on the Emmaus Road, two of His followers admitted to their misconceptions, and disappointed aspirations: "*...the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him. But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done... Then He said unto them, 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?*" (Luke 24:20-21, 25-26). How slow indeed they were to grasp the simple truth! Christ was **not** come to redeem earthly Israel, or enter into political or regal glory. He was come to redeem His elect people of every nation, and enter into eternal glory.

This was the doctrine they so signally failed to comprehend. They were taking the words of the prophets, and restricting them to an earthly, Jewish fulfilment. They read the Covenants of old, and saw in them only physical blessing and material promises. But even the early patriarchs to whom those promises were originally made had seen them in a better, and more spiritual light. Remember Abraham – to whom was promised all the land on which He stood, descendants as numerous as the stars or sand, and blessing proceeding from one of his progeny to all the families of the earth. He had the spiritual insight to realise that this could never be fulfilled in the few square miles of Canaan, or through biological offspring. So he disregarded even the 'promised land' as being a 'strange country' (cf Hebrews 11:9) and looked instead for a city better far than any earthly Jerusalem (cf Hebrews 11:10, 16); in fact, he saw Christ's day, and was glad (cf John 8:56). The same can be said of Moses, David and the prophets. They had faith and aspirations beyond the small, disappointing confines of Palestine, and

the tiny nation of the Jews. They believed in that which was spiritual, and eternal.

Yet before criticising the disciples' slowness and misunderstanding too much, it should be registered that these same mistakes persist in the present. The apostles at this point in the Biblical narrative had had only three years to get to grips with gospel truth. The modern Christian has had two millennia. But still this foolish notion persists: that earthly Israel is yet to be restored, and that Jerusalem is somehow key to God's purposes. The Crusaders believed it as they launched their futile and barbarous campaigns; misguided Western politicians appropriated it in later centuries; and certain indoctrinated world leaders still think this way today. It is a sad fact of history that much of the political and military mayhem which characterises the Middle East has stemmed from this error, and is perpetuated by it.

Dispensationalists, many of the cults, and those with modern 'prophetic' inclinations, seize upon current affairs in Israel, and every new twist in its convoluted story, and boldly interpret these things according to their man-made timelines and calendars. Some even dare to predict dates and years, times and seasons – as though they knew, and were authorised to publish, the secret will of Almighty God. To such as these, come the further words of Christ: *“And He said unto them, **It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power**”* (Acts 1:7).

God does indeed have plans for Israel, as He does for **every nation** of the world, both present and future – but those details are **not** for man to know. The disciples could not be told that in 70AD, Titus would raze Jerusalem to the ground; they could not know that, in its turn, the Roman Empire would rise and fall. Much less could they predict the time of Christ's Second Advent: *“...of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the*

Father” (Mark 13:32). These things are a great enigma, permanently concealed from human knowledge. All predictions must, by definition, be wrong.

The best that mankind is given are ‘signs of the times’, by which it is possible to measure the general state of this fallen world, and trace its swift course to judgment. Beyond that, man’s eyes are ‘holden’, and he dare not presume or surmise. Says Paul, “...*of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). Here then, at Christ’s Ascension, were three final and essential lessons pertaining to the Kingdom of God which the disciples were taught, audibly and visibly: Firstly, that Christ’s Kingdom is **not** of this world, but is spiritual and eternal in its nature. Secondly, that the restoration of national Israel has no place in the Divine purposes of God. Thirdly, that the rise and fall of nations, and the times appointed for Christ’s Kingdom and return belong to the secret will of God, and cannot be known by men.

The disciples needed to learn very quickly that the Kingdom of God was non-national, international, and ‘supra-national’, and put that knowledge into practise. They had to be weaned away from their Judeo-centric tendencies; for a command was to follow: “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). Henceforth, their great purpose and objective was to be eyewitnesses of Christ, in an age when mortal eyes would behold Him no more. And this testimony they were to spread abroad.

“*In Jerusalem*” – this much might be possible for them. It would be dangerous and beset with personal risk; but Divine power was promised, and they were already in the place. “*And in all Judea*” – this

was a tall order, but manageable. It was a large area for so few to deal with, but the Seventy had successfully gone out before (cf Luke 10:1, 17), and now the number of believers was greater (cf Acts 1:15). “*And in Samaria*” – here was a bigger problem. There was long antagonism between Jews and Samaritans; they were ‘the opposition’, the ‘other side’, consisting of non-Jews, and renegade Syrians, and persons of questionable pedigree, beyond the pale of Jerusalem. Must they really go there, too? The Lord had left them an example – not shunning to pass through that region (cf John 4:4) – and declaring its lost inhabitants to be like “*fields... white already to harvest*” (John 4:35).

“*And unto the uttermost part of the earth*”. Could this really be the instruction? Must the disciples also go to the masses of the Gentiles; realms they had never known; where the Jews’ religion had never reached; to those who were complete strangers to the commonwealth of Israel? Must these be reached with the Gospel also? **Yes**. For the Kingdom of God was not coming **to** Israel, it was coming **from** Israel, and spreading into all the world. The Jewish homeland had no monopoly or divine right on God’s kingdom; it was simply its origin upon earth. The disciples had to grasp this truth now, or the Great Commission would never be achieved. Praise God that they did, and forsaking former errors, went forward in the light of truth! Thanks be to God, for had they failed to do so, the Gospel would never have reached Britain, or any of those lands in which these words are being read now.

In conclusion, there is warning to be taken from these verses in Acts, because there are many pertinent parallels with the present day. **Then**, at the beginning of the New Testament age, the disciples were still infatuated with national Israel, to the extent that it blurred their vision, and marred their understanding. Still they were asking “*wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel*”, until the Ascension suddenly occurred, leaving them confounded. **Now**, at the end of the

age, many Christians are still obsessed with national Israel, to the extent that it blurs their vision, and mars their understanding. Still they will be asking, 'wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel', when the Second Advent comes, finding them unprepared and confounded. Such are the perils of carnal, earth-bound vision, and eyes that do not look 'steadfastly toward heaven'. Would that Christians today might learn the lessons that the disciples were taught, and "*walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His Kingdom and glory*" (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

R. J. Steward

"Surprising that the apostles, after three years' training in the school of Christ, after the tragic event of the crucifixion, after the transcendent experience of the resurrection, and after listening to the risen Christ's exposition of the things concerning the kingdom, should have still clung to the idea of a temporal monarchy. Yet [this is] neither unnatural nor difficult to understand when one remembers how full the air then was of materialistic and carnal conceptions of the coming Messianic kingdom, how the apostles from their youthful days had drunk in these ideas and practically lived upon them, and how invincible, even in good men, early prejudice is.

Leaving their mistaken notions to be corrected by the Holy Ghost (cf John 16:13), the risen Christ assured them their wisdom lay in not endeavouring beforehand to know times and seasons in connection with the kingdom – a hint to students of 'prophecy'; that times and seasons were solely within the ken of the Father who [has] appointed these in the sovereign exercise of His own authority (cf Deuteronomy 29:29); and that their special task would be that of witnessing for Christ..."

Thomas Whitelaw (1840 – 1917)

EDITORIAL

The Holy Scriptures have much to say on the subject of **righteousness**; that state of rectitude, moral uprightness and perfection in accordance with the Divine Law, which characterises God, and ought also to distinguish His people. Yet for all its frequency in the pages of the Bible, ‘righteousness’ is a virtue that is entirely disregarded by society, and increasingly marginalised in the Church. Rarely is the necessity and value of righteousness declared from the modern pulpit.

There are two aspects of righteousness which are important to the saints: firstly, the **imputed** righteousness of Christ. This superlative and impeccable standard of rectitude is imparted to all God’s believing people upon faith in Christ, in the process of **justification**. “*The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe*” (Romans 3:22). This is to be accompanied, secondly, by the **practical** righteousness of the believer. Having received the unsurpassable, peerless righteousness of Christ, the Christian is inspired to henceforth live accordingly; in obedience to the Lord’s commandments: “*...yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God*” (Romans 6:13). These two features must always go together – Christ’s justifying work in the heart will be manifested in the believer’s life.

What is righteousness actually worth? Viewed from a carnal perspective, it would seem a positive disadvantage: worldly men and women have no respect for the righteous, and dismiss them out of hand; even within the church, those trying to maintain godly and upright lives are often reproached as ‘legalistic’, ‘holier than thou’ or as something of an embarrassment. But from a heavenly point of view, righteousness is a virtue whose value is almost beyond computation.

“For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; His countenance doth behold the upright” (Psalm 11:7).

The unbelieving masses of the world should take note. Consider the case of Sodom and Gomorrah – those unspeakably wicked cities which the Lord determined to destroy. Abraham feared lest any of God’s people should be caught up in their overthrow, and obtained the concession that just ten godly persons would be sufficient to avert imminent judgment of that abominable land. In the event, only one righteous man was living in all the cities of the plain. This single individual was enough reason for God to withhold His hand. To him God said, *“See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither”* (Genesis 19:21-22). The deliverance of one righteous soul was of such great significance to the Almighty.

What was true of immutable God then must be true still today. Iniquity has only increased and worsened through the intervening years, and the cry of it ascends perpetually heavenward. Wickedness seems to exceed that which obtained in the days of either Lot, or Noah; yet judgment is withheld, and the long-suffering of God continues to wait. Why should it be so? It is **for the sake of His righteous remnant**. It is because *“the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly...and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment”* (2 Peter 2:9).

Let none ever underestimate the value of righteousness, or its practitioners – for the continued existence of the world may well depend upon them; they are precious in the sight of the Lord. Rather, let all God’s people be exhorted, *“and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”* (Ephesians 4:23-24).

TWO NEW BOOKLETS

The CHRISTIAN	
and the VOTE	X
R. J. Steward	

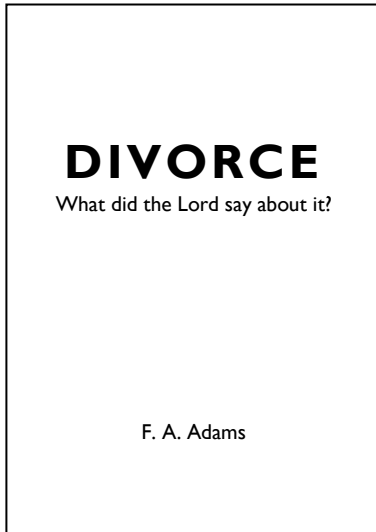
Further to the very positive response received by the previous edition of *The Link*, the articles on the subject of voting are now available as a separate booklet.

This matter continues to be a cause of confusion and uncertainty to many Christians, for whom this publication is strongly recommended; emphasising the Biblical truth of national separation and political abstinence.

A5-format, 15 pages

Theologians and commentators have had much to say on the question of marriage and divorce over the centuries, and many gross errors have thus been propagated. This booklet examines what **Christ** said on the subject, and the continued relevance of His words. First published in 1949, the further erosion of the marriage institution since then makes this essential reading for Christians today. We are pleased to make it available once more in this new reprint.

A5-format, 15 pages



Available from North Road Chapel, Bideford. Free of charge