

April - June 2017

# The Link

**NORTH ROAD CHAPEL**

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**BIDEFORD**

*‘Declaring all the counsel of God’*

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**PUBLIC SERVICES**

Lord’s Day:

Prayer Meeting .....	10.30 a.m.
Morning Service .....	11.00 a.m.
Evening Service .....	6.30 p.m.

Thursday:

Prayer Meeting .....	7.30 p.m.
Bible Teaching Ministry .....	8.00 p.m.

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The Authorized Version of the Scriptures is used at all Services

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# THE LORD'S DAY

## Part 3

*“Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily ... And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the Lord hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto the Lord: to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the Lord said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep My commandments and My laws? See, for that the Lord hath given you the sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day”* (Exodus 16:4-5, 22-30).

The Christian who takes a stand upon a Creation Sabbath will soon encounter critics who say: ‘Well, how is it that there is no record of Sabbath observance by the Patriarchs?’ Such a question contains an element of truth, but certainly not the whole truth. One must freely admit there is no record expressly stating that a weekly Sabbath was observed by the Patriarchs. Take Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others of

that era – concerning whom no direct statement is made in regard to the observance of the Lord’s Day. Is it therefore correct to suppose that for 2,500 years there was no Sabbath recognised? Does this prove that no Sabbath was ever instituted at Creation? Do two-and-a-half millenia of silence scratch out of Holy Writ the direct and categorical statement of Genesis 2:2-3? Is it not far more likely that – amidst all the corruption of man after the Fall, his being driven out of that paradise by a flaming sword and his consequent total depravity – that he simply failed in the observance of this institution? After all, had not humanity failed with regard to the Tree of Knowledge when in an unfallen state? Could they not now fail on this issue, in their state of sin?

Take by way of comparison, the ordinance of marriage instituted by the Creator a few verses further on. The original law concerning marriage was lost sight of, for much longer than 2,500 years. Jacob, David, Solomon and a host of others flouted the mandate of Almighty God concerning marriage, and polygamy was rife for generations; adultery was so commonplace that Moses connived at ‘bills of divorcement’ within the nation of Israel; and this continued right up to the time of Christ’s earthly ministry. But how did the Lord Jesus Himself view it? He did not go back to David’s flawed example; He did not go back to Moses’ compromise; no! He went back to **Creation**, to the original institution, and said: *“from the beginning it was not so”* (Matthew 19:8). **There** is the authority; **there** is the law concerning marriage. Genesis is the court of appeal in these matters: ‘the act of giving origin to’. God does not alter or amend. With Him there is no variableness. The institutions stand according to their original pattern.

So, to return to the critics: even if the ordination of the Sabbath had been overlooked and its observance neglected, this in **no way** implies that it was not originally instituted and remains forever binding. And we do not agree that the Sabbath was wholly forgotten or set aside for those twenty-five centuries. The critic bases his theory upon the silence of Scripture. Now whilst a ‘silence’ can be significant, to interpret the

Word of God by its silences is a principle that is dangerous in the extreme! To argue on the basis of silence, when an express institution has been established, is a most injurious way of handling the Holy Scriptures. Indeed, it completely undermines its authority and revelation.

As a matter of interest, it should be noted that there is also no mention of sacrifices from the time of Abel until the Flood – a period of some 1,500 years. Again, there was a space of about 300 years between Jacob at Beersheba and the deliverance from Egypt, with no mention of any sacrifice. Does this categorically prove that none were ever offered? From the death of Moses to the days of Jeremiah, a period of eight centuries, we read nothing of circumcision; should it therefore be assumed that circumcision had lapsed, or that God had waived the ordinance? The argument could be pursued still further, to the ritual of the red heifer, that wonderful provision for the daily cleansing of the people of God. It is not mentioned at all from the Pentateuch to the close of the Old Testament. Yet the apostle refers to it in the Hebrew Epistle as a well-known rite in constant use amongst the Jews.

Consider too the historical books subsequent to Sinai, when the Mosaic Law was at its peak. The books of Joshua, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel and 1 Kings contain decades of Old Testament history, but no mention of the Sabbath. Such is the weakness of arguing from silence. Sometimes the omissions of Scripture may have significance, but great care must be taken in their interpretation. They must never be the basis for spurious theology, much less made to cancel out a Divine institution.

When God has given a commandment or established an ordinance, it is not for man to say how frequently (if ever) He should repeat it. The Psalmist says, concerning God's commandments: "*Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of Thy righteous judgments endureth for ever*" (Psalm 119:160). That ought to be sufficient for any mortal. Why should man think that God must be continually repeating Himself?

Enough has been said to establish the truth that the Sabbath is a Creation Institution, and that the silence which follows in no way disproves its establishment or its validity.

Furthermore, there **are** traces of a recognised weekly observance during the period in question – very faint perhaps, and by themselves in isolation easily overlooked; but when set against the background of the instituted Sabbath in Eden, their significance can be discerned. Look at the very first act of worship recorded after the Fall: “*And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord*” (Genesis 4:3). In the marginal reference, the alternative rendering is given for the expression “*in process of time*”, namely, ‘at the end of days’. Set those words against the background of Genesis 2:2-3 and fresh truth appears: six days of activity, then at the end of those days, the rest of the Sabbath – a sanctified day; a day for God and for spiritual things. It was at the end of the days of labour. At the end of the days Cain and Abel engaged in worship – they recognised a holy day.

Some sixteen centuries later, God spoke as follows: “*For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth*” (Genesis 7:4). From this verse, we learn at least that time was reckoned by weeks, and that periods of seven days were familiarly referred to. It was not some strange or little-understood term. Where did such an idea come from, if not from Creation?

“*And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth*” (Genesis 7:10). Look at the margin again: “*On the seventh day*”. Evidently, the seventh day held meaning for Noah. Turn on in the book of Genesis: “*Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground; But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her*

*in unto him into the ark. And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; which returned not again unto him any more”* (Genesis 8:8-12). There are intervals here, not of six days or ten days, but seven.

Move on another 450 years to the period of Abraham, of whom God said: *“For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him”* (Genesis 18:19), and: *“Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws”* (Genesis 26:5). This was long years before the Mosaic Law was given. What then are the statutes here spoken of, if not the ordinances first instituted in Genesis – the Sabbath among them?

There can be little doubt that the ordinance became very faint during the years of bondage in Egypt. Indeed, as slaves working under such pressure, Sabbath-keeping was likely to be impossible for them. That Moses and Aaron encouraged the people to revive their observance of the day is suggested by Pharaoh’s complaint: *“And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens”* (Exodus 5:4-5).

One cannot conclude that the day was completely forgotten, because the liberated Hebrews re-instituted it, **before** the giving of the Law at Sinai: *“Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily”* (Exodus 16:4-5). God

prescribed a double collection on day six, to obviate the need for work on the seventh day of rest. This law was given, “*that I [God] may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or no*”. What law is the Lord referring to? The Ten Commandments had not yet been given. This is further evidence that the law of the Sabbath was already impressed on the minds of the people.

Consider the verses at the head of this article, concerning the miraculous gift of manna: “*See, for that the Lord hath given you the sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day*” (Exodus 16:29-30). This proves conclusively that the Sabbath is founded upon something much older than the Law given at Sinai, and shows the tremendous importance placed upon it by Almighty God.

Some will still argue, ‘can we prove that this was a direct continuance of the seventh day of the Creation week?’ Such reasoning is unnecessary – indeed it is foolish. At Creation, God established a principle: one day in seven for Himself. The exact computation from the original is not relevant. In all probability, after those four centuries spent in Egypt, the people would have lost track of days, or adopted the calendar of their oppressors. The momentous occasion of the Passover became their national ‘new year’ (cf Exodus 12:1-2) and their series of Sabbaths were also recalculated from that mighty event.

In a similar way, the Sabbath of the New Testament era recommenced with that mightiest of all happenings: as the Lord reappeared in resurrection life on the first day of the week, by which He effected the deliverance of His people from the bondage of sin. May God grant to every reader a right understanding of this vital subject.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)



# THE LAW BEFORE SINAI

There is a popular misconception, actively promoted in some circles, that the Moral Law of God commenced at Sinai, and was of relevance only to the Jewish nation. Understanding the books of Genesis, Job, and the early part of Exodus to pre-date the declaration of the Law to Moses, the following references are presented as evidence of the universality and timelessness of God's Law, from the beginning of the world.

## I

***“I am the Lord ... Thou shalt have no other gods before Me”***

*“the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect” (Genesis 17:1).*

*“If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: [pagan worship of solar or lunar ‘deities’] This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above” (Job 31:26-28).*

## II

***“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image”***

*“Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments” (Genesis 35:2).*

*“...against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord ” (Exodus 12:12).*

## III

***“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain”***

*“Job ... offered burnt offerings ... for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts” (Job 1:5).*

*“After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do ... neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God ... For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled ” (Leviticus 18:3, 21, 27).*

#### IV

##### **“Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy”**

*“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:2-3).*

#### V

##### **“Honour thy father and thy mother”**

*“And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren” (Genesis 9:24-25).*

*“Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padan-aram, ... and ... as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; And ... Jacob obeyed his father and his mother” (Genesis 28:6-7).*

#### VI

##### **“Thou shalt not kill”**

*“Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain ... What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto Me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand” (Genesis 4:8-11).*

*“And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man” (Genesis 9:5-6).*

#### VII

##### **“Thou shalt not commit adultery”**

*“Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man’s wife” (Genesis 20:2-3).*

*“And it came to pass after these things, that his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said unto his master’s wife*

... thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:7-9).

### VIII

#### **"Thou shalt not steal"**

"Wherefore saith my lord these words? God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing ... how then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold? With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen" (Genesis 44:7-9).

"In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death" (Job 24:16-17).

### IX

#### **"Thou shalt not bear false witness"**

"... peradventure ... I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me" (Genesis 27:12).

"My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit" (Job 27:4).

### X

#### **"Thou shalt not covet"**

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat ... And [God] said ... Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" (Genesis 3:6, 11).

"For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one" (Job 5:2).

"Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness" (Exodus 18:21).

**"Acquaint now thyself with [God], and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee. Receive, I pray thee, the Law from His mouth, and lay up His words in thine heart"** (Job 22:21-22).

## NOAH'S SABBATHS

The exercise of faith for which Noah is remembered and commended in Hebrews 11 was not confined solely to the building of the Ark. Whilst the coming of the flood was a great vindication of his century of faithful labour (both in constructing the huge vessel, and exhorting the world's populace to enter therein) that cataclysmic event was not the **end** of Noah's faith. In many ways, a greater need for trust in the Lord's word, and dependence upon His providential care, **began** on the day the door of the ark was miraculously closed and, "*the Lord shut him in*" (Genesis 7:16). From that moment, the inhabitants of the ark, human and animal, were utterly reliant on God for their preservation: the seaworthiness of the craft He had appointed, the longevity of a finite food supply, and His divine intervention in keeping the beasts alive, contrary to their natural behaviour and instincts.

The whole situation was doubtless exacerbated by the fact that Noah and his family were unable to see out of the Ark, or had at best only limited visibility. There was a single window, and a single door to the vessel (Genesis 6:16). The door could not safely be opened until the waters had receded away from the hull, and a sufficient portion of dry land was available to sustain the exiting animals. Even the window Noah did not risk opening until many months after the flood began; and whilst this afforded him an upward view of newly-exposed mountain tops (cf Genesis 8:5-6), it seems he had no sight of the ground, and it permitted no assessment of the condition of the post-diluvian world.

If the patriarch was vexed by the fact he could not see, and was obliged to spend his year of confinement in the Ark relatively 'blind', Scripture does not record it. He was required to live, in a very literal sense, 'by faith and not by sight' (cf 2 Corinthians 5:7). And thus, his record becomes an even more fitting analogy of the life of the Christian in this present evil world. Both the Old Testament type, and the New

Testament fulfilment, commence with the grace of God extended to His chosen people. Like Noah, each one is taught of God to ‘flee from the wrath to come’; like him, there is an exercise of faith required which is made the means of their salvation; like him, they are sovereignly brought in, and shut in, by God. Not now to an Ark of wood, but into **Christ** the Ark’s great antitype, who said: *“I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved ”* (John 10:9). He, the man Christ Jesus is, *“as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest”* (Isaiah 32:2), and to His saints He says: *“Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity”* (Isaiah 26:20-21).

As in the days of Noah, so in their lives upon earth, believers are securely kept ‘in Christ’, but still required to **live by faith** from day to day. Much is hidden from their natural sight, and they have no physical means of verifying the reality of those eternal yet invisible things, like the being of God, the outworking of His secret will, and their heavenly home above. Like Noah, every true Christian is safely and savingly enclosed in Christ, preserved from the present evil world and its ultimate overthrow, but in many other respects, unable to see. They have, at best, a small window through which upward glimpses may be caught, and assurances received. Everything else is by faith alone.

This God-appointed arrangement is not a vindictive act on His part; it is not an oversight, neither is it to the detriment of His people, any more than it was to Noah. Consider that the absence of large windows or other openings in the Ark was greatly to the increase of the security of its inhabitants. They were at no risk of being swept overboard, and likewise there was no way by which the flood waters could enter in to the vessel. Neither could any persons who had not entered the one door in God’s time, force an entry for themselves by other means. There was mercy in the arrangement too. The sight of the global destruction by water of ‘all flesh’ (cf Genesis 7:21-23), their futile attempts at survival and

ultimate inundation, would have been a terrible scene for any man to witness and live with thereafter. Noah was spared these things by the absence of any open window. Similarly, a permanent view of the post-flood world as the waters gradually retreated over a seven-month period, might have tried and exceeded the patience of the patriarch, and caused him to prematurely quit the Ark before the appointed time. From this difficulty, he was also delivered.

The life of 'faith not sight', designed by God for His people, is also for their good. The believer is not placed, so to speak, at the helm of his own salvation, with a view of life and eternity before him, and charged with the impossible task of navigation himself. Salvation, and the maintenance of it, is not 'by works': such an arrangement could end only in disaster. Rather are the saints of God safely ensconced in the very heart of the vessel, with the instruction 'only believe', and to: "*commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator*" (1 Peter 4:19). This is the more excellent way.

Also, the Lord's people are unable to perceive His secret will, His future plans, or His divine purposes in providence or judgement. As in the case of Noah, this is a great kindness toward them on God's part. What mortal could bear to have the omniscience of God? That hymn is true which says:

"The very dimness of my sight  
Makes me secure" (Parker)

And even in matters concerning the future blessed estate of His people, it is the Lord's mercy that conceals the full picture from them. For if a sight were afforded of the, "*new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness*" (2 Peter 3:13), what Christian, made cognisant of those eternal glories could bear to live on earth a moment longer? It was mercy that deferred Moses' view of Canaan until the hour of his death and entrance into that 'better country'; it was mercy that prevented Noah beholding the flood-washed world until it was ready to receive

him; and it is a mercy that the saints' current view of the 'mansions prepared for them' is 'through a glass darkly'.

Since in this analogy, the Christian's present experience on earth corresponds to Noah's sightless sojourn in the Ark, there are many relevant lessons to learn from the manner in which he conducted himself through that fourteen-month period. It is interesting to note with what exactitude the chronology of events is recorded in Genesis. Conscious that any previous systems of numbering years would be lost, it is evident that Noah began reckoning according to his own birth-date, and kept a careful account of the days. Light filtering through the topmost cubit of the Ark where it was ventilated (cf Genesis 6:16), circadian patterns of behaviour amongst the animals aboard, and elementary forms of timekeeping may have assisted in telling day from night. That Noah chronicled his voyage so precisely does not evidence a sense of imprisonment on his part; it shows he did not give way to doubt and despair, nor imagine his confinement would never end. It was an act of faith and confidence that he would ultimately: "*not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord*" (Psalm 118:17).

Significantly, Noah maintained the pattern of a seven-day week. This had been perpetuated amongst men since the Creation, and was ongoing immediately before the flood. A week transpired between Noah's entrance into the Ark, and the commencement of the destructive rains (cf Genesis 7:4, 10). Thus, he continued to measure and mark his existence through the long year with his family aboard the vessel. Since by the Scriptures' own inspired description, "*Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God*" (Genesis 6:9), of whom God said: "*thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation*" (Genesis 7:1), it is unreasonable to suggest he was a habitual Sabbath-breaker, or ignorant of that Divine ordinance. The Biblical record gives many proofs that Noah was acquainted with the commandments of God, could discern between the 'clean' and the 'unclean', the sanctified and the secular, and was familiar with the making of sacrifices. From

Creation, the Sabbath was a holy day, upon which offerings were rendered to the Lord, as Noah knew well from his godly forebears. How much more precious must the Sabbath days have become, when kept in the dark confines of the Ark? When all other days became almost indistinguishable from one another, how blessed to ‘remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy’, and render it wholly unto the Lord.

There are four Sabbath days on board the Ark concerning which greater details are given. They occurred during the eleventh month after the flood came. Upon the first of them, Noah sent forth a raven. On each of the next three occasions, he released a dove. Some might argue that, other than the weekly intervals, the precise day cannot be ascertained. This objection has some weight; however, from the acts that he performed, it is clear that they were days of worship, prayer, praise and strengthening faith – to the patriarch, and his family. The little description given about each one also teach much concerning how the Christian – shut in with Christ, living by faith, sojourning in this present world, awaiting the emancipation of glory – may profitably employ the Sabbath day, to the benefit of his own soul. One hymn-writer, speaking of the blessings of corporate worship, says:

“Shut in with Thee far, far above  
The restless world that wars below;  
We seek to learn and prove Thy love,  
Thy wisdom and Thy grace to know.”       (Stewart)

These words well describe the united experience of Noah in the Ark, and the Lord’s people of this present time, as they direct their eyes and affections heavenward, and seek the Lord’s face in worship.

Concerning entrance into the Ark, Noah received a direct revelation from heaven (cf Genesis 7:1-4), but of his exit, no such word was given. It is often God’s will that His people should use the Divinely-appointed means at their disposal to discern His truth and purposes. In the Ark



were examples of the entire animal kingdom to which Noah could make recourse. The New Testament Church has something more sure, in the Word of God, which shineth as a light in a dark place, whereunto they would do well to take heed in times when guidance is needed (cf 2 Peter 1:19).

On the **first** Sabbath day mentioned, the patriarch, doubtless with much careful thought and prayer, “*sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth*” (Genesis 8:7). Various practical considerations may have prompted this choice. The raven was accustomed to live in the mountainous terrain that had been recently exposed by the receding waters; it was able to survive upon such carrion as it would find in consequence of the flood; it is a bird able to soar for sustained periods without needing to land; and importantly it has a loud and distinctive call. From the language of the text, it is evident that the bird remained in the vicinity of the Ark, ‘going and returning’, which although Noah could not see, he would hear from its cry. How comforting that otherwise harsh and discordant noise would have been, breaking the deathly silence of the post-flood scene, and giving to the Ark’s inhabitants some assurance of life and hope beyond the confines of the vessel. The Christian who applies himself to the public means of grace on the Lord’s Day may be caused to receive comfort and encouragement, and hear the words of life. Though the instrument be coarse and unrefined – mere mortal men preaching the gospel – the Lord is able to bless those humble means, and make them a blessing.

On the **second** Sabbath day (inferred from the expression “*other seven days*” in Genesis 8:7) Noah sent forth a dove. This bird would require certain vegetation for its food; and having, in common with other related species, a ‘homing instinct’, could be relied upon to return swiftly to the Ark in the absence of external sustenance. Such was the result on the first attempt: “*But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole*

*earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark*” (Genesis 8:9). Though humanly disappointing, it taught Noah that there was no place or support for him amidst the waters of wrath, in that scene of judgement and destruction. The Christian likewise, is often reminded by the devotions and joys of the Sabbath day, that the ‘present evil world’ is not their home, but they await, “*a better country, that is, an heavenly*” (Hebrews 11:16).

A week later, a **third** Sabbath day was kept, “*and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark*” (Genesis 8:10). Observe the godly persistence of the patriarch in repeating this exercise. “*Seest thou how faith wrought with his works*” (James 2:22)? Undeterred by the seemingly limited results of his previous trial, yet still confident that God would deliver them, Noah applied himself again. There are many such occasions on which the Lord is pleased to ‘wait to be gracious’ (cf Isaiah 30:18). Seven prayers must Elijah make ‘ere a cloud arises from the sea; seven times shall Naaman wash in Jordan to be relieved of his malady. The lesson in each case is the same: “*let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not*” (Galatians 6:9). Alas, how soon do the Lord’s people tire in their observances; how many begin to say even of the Sabbath, “*Behold, what a weariness is it!*” (Malachi 1:13), not realising that – as with bodily exercise, receiving an education, or maintaining a diet – the benefits are only to be found through **continuance**.

Noah’s constancy was abundantly rewarded: “*And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off*” (Genesis 8:11). He maintained a heavenward vigil throughout the day, and as the natural light began to fade, a ray of hope shone forth, in the form of the olive-bearing dove. The leaf was new growth, taken from a tree native to lowlands and valleys: “*so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth*” (Genesis 8:11). This small fragment of foliage was made exceedingly precious to the Ark-bound patriarch, and assured him of the appearance of the new world. Here is the Christian’s experience

illustrated in beautiful metaphor. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit adopted the similitude of a descending dove, accompanying the testimony of God's Word (cf Luke 3:22). And in like manner – oft on the Sabbath day – in response to their watching and waiting – comes the Holy Ghost to the saints again; bearing a text of Scripture, bringing to their remembrance the things of the Lord, and producing from the least verse, volumes of comfort, “*everlasting consolation and good hope through grace*” (2 Thessalonians 2:16).

A **fourth** Sabbath day came, and Noah sent out the dove again. It did not return. Not because of failure or incapacity, but because, within close proximity to the Ark, it found a nascent, sin-purged land on which to dwell, and a permanent home. This was a more blessed token than its previous return! What emotions were stirred up then, in the faithful man of God – to realise that he, and the souls with him were saved, and would shortly walk abroad in the place prepared for them? What yearnings and desires to follow where the dove had led? Soon, he also would quit the dark confines of the Ark for the dawn of a re-created world; and exchange the fightings of faith for a new and blessed sight. To inspire such aspirations for glory in the heart of the Christian is a work of the Holy Dove: “*Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us **the earnest of the Spirit**. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:5-8). And when the Spirit's sweet influences are known in the assemblies of the saints, meeting on the Sabbath, they too echo the sentiments of Noah, and are caused to cry:

“Oh, that we now might grasp our Guide!  
Oh, that the word were given!  
Come, Lord of Hosts, the waves divide,  
And land us all in Heaven!”

R. J. Steward

## HERALDS OF SPRING

From earliest Biblical times to the present day, the transformation from winter to spring has been a source of joy and thankfulness. Solomon expresses this in delightful language: “*My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away*” (Song of Solomon 2:10-13). The first spring flowers or birds to appear in a particular locality varies around the world; yet whether they be daffodils or jasmine, skylarks or turtle doves, the sight and sound of them are a delight to the beholder.

The phenomenon of **migration** is one of the amazing demonstrations of God’s power in Creation. For example, certain species of birds around the globe display migratory behaviour at particular times and seasons. They perform this arduous feat with extraordinary regularity and precision, some travelling thousands of miles, hardly feeding or resting, and overcoming many hazards on the way. How birds perform this remarkable, twice-yearly journey is not fully understood, even by modern science. God in His infinite wisdom has created creatures with these inherent navigational skills (cf Job 39:26).

The passage of migratory birds was a regular and familiar sight in Palestine; especially that of the white stork which can still be observed migrating in their hundreds of thousands. It is these birds that Jeremiah the prophet instructs his hearers to look upon: “*Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord*” (Jeremiah 8:7).

Throughout Scripture, the call to, and necessity of **repentance** is a constant theme. In Jeremiah's time the need was of the utmost importance, as God's patience and long-suffering with His chosen people was coming to an end and severe judgement was imminent. The tragedy of the Jews to whom the prophet spoke was that they had gone away, but had **not returned** (cf Jeremiah 8:4-5). They stubbornly resisted the call of God through His servant to return unto the Lord, and find mercy and pardon. All of the Lord's people are 'prone to wander; prone to leave the God they love'. Self-will and stubbornness is in them all. Like migratory birds, they have constant need to return unto the God of their salvation in repentance. The analogy of migration used by the prophet teaches several spiritual lessons:

### **1.) THE BENEFITS OF MIGRATION**

Birds instinctively know that migration is beneficial to their survival. This is true of young fledglings that have never undertaken such a journey before. The perilous flight is made, not knowing what awaits them; but on arrival at their desired destination, they find an environment and circumstances perfectly suited to their needs. They quickly replenish their strength and vigour and enjoy a period of rest.

The benefits to those who truly repent and return unto the Lord – after a period of backsliding or wilful disobedience – cannot be fully expressed, either in this life, or in eternity to come. Nothing can surpass the joy of knowing the 'peace of God which passeth all understanding' (cf Philippians 4:7), His abundant mercy and forgiveness, and unimpaired fellowship with Him.

### **2.) THE HAZARDS OF MIGRATION**

All migrating birds find this journey is beset with trials and difficulties, stretching their endurance to the limit in order to reach their homeland. Despite storms and tempests, drought, deserts, starvation and predation, they still press onward.

Repentance is no easy pathway. It is beset with obstacles and hardships. Christ spoke often of the cost of discipleship. It means taking up the cross of self-denial (cf Matthew 16:24-25), and being forsaken by family and friends. The path to glory is strait and narrow – we must strive to enter in, fighting against the world, the flesh and the Devil (cf Luke 13:24). The so-called pleasures of this world last only briefly; its broken cisterns never satisfying the soul’s deepest longing. They quickly fail and dry up, not unlike the migrating birds’ late summer food supply.

### **3.) THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT MIGRATING**

It is essential that all migrating birds return to their winter or summer habitat. Failure to do so will inevitably result in death. Another remarkable fact relating to migration is that birds leave their summer quarters when their food supply seems most abundant. They instinctively know that their source of energy will not continue. Shortly following their departure it greatly diminishes. Any that fail to return will soon perish with cold or hunger. The people of God who failed to heed the warnings of impending judgement from the lips of Jeremiah would ultimately perish from famine, sword and pestilence (cf Jeremiah 24:8-10).

There is no better illustration given of the great benefits of repentance than from the parable of the Prodigal Son. He went from his father’s home and wasted his substance in riotous living, but being brought to great need, and despairing of his life, returned to his father’s house, in humble submission and repentance of his folly and sin. Oh, the joy and welcome he received from his father! (cf Luke 15:11-24).

The Scripture directs us: “*But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee*” (Job 12:7). Let us learn these lessons from the migrating birds, and pray to be kept evermore in God’s perfect way.

R. D. Steward (Snr)

## EDITORIAL

The following words of C. H. Spurgeon form a seasonal and unifying conclusion for the content of this edition:

“Sweet is the season of Spring: the long and dreary winter helps us to appreciate its genial warmth, and its promise of summer enhances its present delights. After periods of depression of spirit, it is delightful to behold again the light of the Sun of Righteousness; then our slumbering graces rise from their lethargy, like the crocus and the daffodil from their beds of earth; then is our heart made merry with delicious notes of gratitude, far more melodious than the warbling of birds – and the comforting assurance of peace, infinitely more delightful than the turtle’s note, is heard within the soul. Now is the time for the soul to seek communion with her Beloved; now must she rise from her native sordidness, and come away from her old associations. If we do not hoist the sail when the breeze is favourable, we shall be blameworthy: times of refreshing ought not to pass over us unimproved. When Jesus Himself visits us in tenderness, and entreats us to arise, can we be so base as to refuse His request? He has Himself risen that He may draw us after Him: He now by His Holy Spirit has revived us, that we may, in newness of life, ascend into the heavenlies, and hold communion with Himself. Let our wintry state suffice us for coldness and indifference; when the Lord creates a spring within, let our sap flow with vigour, and our branch blossom with high resolve.”

### **ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**

**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017 D.V.**

Services: **3.00** p.m. & **5.15** p.m. Tea served: **4.30** p.m.

Preacher : Mr G. D. Buss  
( Chippenham )

*a cordial invitation is extended to all*

## RECORDED MINISTRY

The expository ministry at North Road Chapel is recorded, and the following series are available: (Figures in brackets denote the total number of sermons)

### Preached by W. H. Molland

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD (19) **A M**  
THE ATONEMENT (72) **A**  
THE BOOK OF GENESIS (202) **A M W**  
THE BOOK OF EXODUS (105) **A**  
THE BOOK OF HOSEA (50) **A**  
THE BOOK OF JOEL (11) **A C M W**  
THE BOOK OF AMOS (29) **A**  
THE BOOK OF OBADIAH (7) **A**  
THE BOOK OF JONAH (9) **A**  
THE BOOK OF MICAH (21) **A**  
THE BOOK OF NAHUM (8) **A**  
THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK (11) **A**  
THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH (18) **A**  
THE BOOK OF HAGGAI (12) **A**  
THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH (42) **A**  
THE BOOK OF MALACHI (19) **A**  
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (224) **A**  
THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS (142) **A**  
THE EPISTLE OF JAMES (48) **A**  
ISRAEL'S WILDERNESS WANDERINGS (24) **A C**  
THE LIFE OF DAVID (182) **A**  
THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (142) **A**  
PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL (64) **A**  
THE HOLY SPIRIT (36) **A**  
SPIRITUAL UNION (30) **A**  
SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT (32) **A**  
THE CHURCH (51) **A**  
THE COVENANTS (65) **A**

THE DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE (5) **A C**  
SATAN THE GREAT ADVERSARY (8) **A**  
FESTAL DAYS & THE LAW OF GOD (9) **A C M W**

### Preached by R. J. Steward

BIBLE TREES (38) **A**  
SPIRITUAL WARFARE (33) **A**  
THE BOOK OF JOSHUA (79) **A**  
THE BOOK OF JUDGES (81) **A C M W**  
THE BOOK OF RUTH (27) **A C M W**  
THE LIFE OF SAMUEL (66) **C M W**  
SONGS OF DEGREES (51) **M W**  
THE BOOK OF PROVERBS (86) **C**  
THE BOOK OF JOB (98) **A C M W**  
THE LIFE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (48) **C M**  
THE LORD'S TABLE (31) **C M W**  
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES (147) **A C M W**  
1 THESSALONIANS (59) **A M W**  
2 THESSALONIANS (25) **C M**  
THE EPISTLE OF JUDE (36) **A C M W**  
LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES (50) **A**  
THE EXCELLENCIES OF CHRIST (45) **C M W**  
THE LIFE OF SOLOMON (86) **C**  
AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (31) **C**  
THE NAMES AND TITLES OF GOD (30) **C M W**  
1 PETER (*Current*) **W**  
THE PSALMS OF ASAPH (*Current*) **W**  
ECCLESIASTES (*Current*) **W**

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'**M**' = available in MP3 format.      '**W**' = uploaded to [www.northroadchapel.org](http://www.northroadchapel.org)

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