

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
Volume 8, Number 2, May 1997

Samson
The Trial of Jesus Christ
Growth of the Righteous

BEAUTIES OF THE TRUTH is published as a service to the brethren to stimulate their consideration and appreciation of the boundless riches of God's Word. It is published free of charge. Subscriptions will be entered for all who request it. Address all correspondence to: Beauties of the Truth, 10034 S.W. 52nd Avenue, Portland, OR 97219. Editorial Board: Bros. Jerry Leslie (Managing Editor), Carl Hagensick, Raymond Luke, Michael Nekora, David Rice, Stephen Suraci.

Samson

Samson was one of the most colorful figures among the heroes of the Old Testament. Paul lists him in the company of such stalwarts as Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (Hebrews 11:32-34).

As is the custom of scripture, both his failings and his triumphs, his stumblings and his glorious victories, are equally described. They present a frank look at one of the most dynamic and inspiring lives Israel ever produced.

He was a chosen vessel of the Lord. His birth and service were predicted even before he was conceived. Like Isaac, he was a child of promise given to a barren mother. Strict instructions were given to his mother to abstain from wine or things unclean, "for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb" In these respects he joins the select company of Samuel and John the Baptist, who likewise were children of promise given to barren mothers, were appointed chosen ministries by God before their birth, and received the Nazarite vow for life.

HIS MISSION

The narrative of Samson begins in Judges 13. The opening verse explains that for Israel's sins the Lord "delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years" The Book of Judges had earlier recorded that "the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon" (Judges 10:7), the former oppressing Israel in the south and pushing east from the Philistine cities near the Mediterranean coast, the latter oppressing Gilead east of Jordan and from time to time

pushing west over the Jordan to afflict Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim.

The affliction of Ammon was finally broken by “Jephthah the Gileadite,” and the narrative of this deliverance fills chapters 11 and 12. The Philistine oppression was more intractable and was not finally broken until the victories of Samuel following Samson's death. But to stir Israel to faith again and rouse them to a sense of the overcoming power of God was the mission of Samson. “He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judges 13:5).

“And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson [“sunlight” *Strong's Concordance*] and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol” (Judges 13:24, 25). Soon the affairs of Samson became entangled with the Philistines, overruled of the Lord, for “he sought an occasion against the Philistines” (Judges 14:14).

SAMSON PICTURES THE CHURCH

At first some may recoil at the suggestion that Samson was a picture of the Church, noting his various weaknesses. But the history of the Church is not without its weaknesses and stumblings also, though as Samson was so the Church will be victorious finally. In R4088 Bro. Russell draws several comparisons between Samson's experiences and those of the church through history.

“If we were to draw an analogy as between Samson's temptation and the temptation of the body of Christ it would imply that we should be specially on guard against the blandishments of the world and the adversary through the nominal church, which figuratively is called a woman - more, she is described in the Scriptures as a harlot.

“It was when Samson rested his head upon the lap of Delilah that he was shorn of his hair and of his strength ... Similarly those who are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might through their faithfulness to the vows of consecration ... are in danger of going to sleep in the lap of the modern Delilah, Churchianity. A spirit of drowsiness is their spirit, of rest from the activities and self-sacrifices of their vow, a spirit of slumber; and with that spirit goes their strength. Is there not in some respects an analogy between the experiences of Samson and the experiences of the church of Christ? Consider the activities of the early church and the victories they gained in the name and strength of the Lord. Consider how the adversary entangled and seduced the church, and how for a considerable time the stupor and drowsiness and ease and worldliness were upon those who vowed to be faithful to the Lord and his service. Consider how the strength of the Gospel message was lost while in that drowsy condition in the “dark ages” Consider how the eyes of our understanding were put out even as Samson lost his natural sight. Consider that even since the Reformation time the church has been to a large extent under the blinding influence of the adversary, a slave to churchianity and the world, even as Samson was the slave of the Philistines. As their slave Samson was used instead of a horse to turn a great wheel for grinding their food; and thus indeed the church has been grinding food of a certain kind for many while still a slave to the world and under its blinding influences.”

Consistent with this application is that Samson was a Nazarite, and the particulars of their vow (Numbers 6) are emblematic of the vow of consecration undertaken by the saints. Even the name Samson (sunlight, or little sun) reminds us that the saints are now lights in the world, and later will shine as the sun in the kingdom (Matthew 13:43).

SEVEN EPISODES IN SAMSON'S LIFE

There are seven distinct episodes in the narrative of Samson.

- (1) His early betrothal to a Philistine woman, and the riddle about the slain lion.
- (2) Letting loose 300 foxes in the fields of the Philistines.
- (3) Samson's flight to the rock Etam.
- (4) Slaying 1000 Philistines with the jaw of an ass.
- (5) His affair with a harlot and the conspiracy to kill him.
- (6) His affair with Delilah and his betrayal.
- (7) Toppling the pillars, destroying the house of Dagon.

These seven episodes match the experiences of the church depicted in Revelation in the seven stages of the Church. The three women in the narrative represent religious movements in which the true Church has been entangled during the age.

(1) The early struggle of the church was against Judaism, represented by Samson's Philistine fiancée. The setting was at the time of wheat harvest, representing the harvest of the Jewish age. As there was a riddle in this story, there was also a riddle at the time of the early Church. "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness" (Judges 14:14). Literally this referred to the lion carcass Samson observed by the roadside, in which bees had swarmed and produced a reservoir of honey. In picture it points to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Jesus, from whose death came nourishment and the sweetness of the heavenly call. Those who could identify Jesus as the source of these blessings could receive a change of garments (justification). Samson was betrayed by his fiancée because she was in fear of her life, but in the end she and her father's house were burned. It reminds us of the Jews who turned on their own Messiah, fearful for "our place and nation" (John 11:48). But in the end they lost it all in the baptism of fire in 70 AD, and in the end Samson's fiancée and her father's house were consumed as well.

(2) In retribution Samson turned loose 300 foxes tied to firebrands to burn the fields of the Philistines. The second trumpet of Revelation also describes a retribution by fire: a burning mountain (pagan Rome) cast into the sea. It is noteworthy that when Jesus mentioned Herod, an authority appointed by Rome, he termed him a fox in Luke 13:32.

(3) In the third church Papacy began to rise, forcing the Elijah class to flee to the wilderness. Just so, Samson fled to the wilderness for safety. Elijah was fed by ravens during his exile, and Samson lived on the rock Etam which means "place of ravenous birds" (*McClintock & Strong*, "Etam").

(4) The fourth church was during the dark ages, the time of great Jezebel's reign. "I will kill her children with death" promised Jesus. Spiritual life was scarce, and spiritual death and plague everywhere rampant. Even on the literal level, this period of the church saw the black plague sweep through Christendom and decimate its population. In the fourth episode of the Samson story we see a great carnage, 1000 Philistines slain. The instrument was the jawbone of an ass. This animal represents the same as its close cousin the horse, that is doctrines - as for example when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a new foal, representing the new doctrines he presented to Israel. That it was a bone from the mouth of the ass suggests it was spiritually the voice of truth as a rebuke to the sins of Papacy during the dark ages. Samson almost perished in this episode, finally rescued by

the Lord by providing a source of water, just as the church almost perished in the dark ages, but was preserved by a fountain of truth from teachers such as Waldo and Wycliffe.

(5) To the fifth church it was said “Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die ... and hold fast, and repent” (Revelation 3:2, 3). This describes the condition of the church during the midnight of the age, when the church was nearly asleep in the arms of the harlot Papacy. If they would not repent - reform - they would surely perish. So Samson, had he continued with the harlot in the city till daybreak, would have perished. But at midnight he rose, triumphantly left the city and carried the gates away as a sign of strength and triumph. So the church was reformed, and the faithful left the Papal harlot.

(6) Samson later grew careless through his attraction to Delilah, just as the post reformation church became careless and at ease among the nominal churches which had developed out of the reformation. Because of his carelessness his hair, the emblem of his vow, was cut, his strength gone, and his eyes put out. So the saints before the Lord's return were in relative darkness, having become “lukewarm” and in need of “eyesalve.”

(7) The last phase of the church sees her triumphant again. Samson's hair began to grow, his strength increased, and his last act was to topple the pillars of the Philistine temple and begin a great release from the old oppression, though dying in the process. So the church at the end of the age proclaims the pillars of society will be toppled by the force of the incoming kingdom, and all the world will enjoy the freedom of the next age. The church is taken in the midst of the collapse of this world.



Samson and Delilah

AN INTERESTING SEQUENCE OF NUMBERS

Samson's story includes a remarkable number of “threes” The riddle he proposed was not solved in 3 days, the reward offered was 30 changes of garments, the foxes numbered 300, and the men of Judah who implored Samson to surrender were 3000. As this is a picture of the opening of the Gospel Age, it is of interest to note that our age opened with these same numbers. Jesus was in the grave for 3 days, he was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, he was anointed with 300 pence of oil, and the church added 3000 persons on the day of Pentecost. Probably there is some meaning in the number three that represents the atonement provided by Jesus which opened up the gospel of grace.

LESSONS FROM SAMSON'S LIFE

In many respects Samson lived after the flesh. Though moved by the Spirit of God he was not begotten of the Spirit. Thus in many respects he was not an example of Christian conduct. But in this he was a sterling and noble example: loyalty to the cause of God and to Israel, the covenant people of God. “His faith was continually manifest in all that he did, and his whole life was used in serving his people” (R5613).

He generally stood alone against Israel's oppressors -sometimes even turned over to them by his own fearful countrymen - yet by faith he boldly stood with neither sympathy nor support from his fellows. In his last hours he was unhesitating in his willingness to perish for his cause, and his last brief prayer shows a heart of full

devotion to the service of God. "Let me die with the Philistines" (Judges 16:30). Are we thus willing to lay down our lives in service?

We close with this extract from R5613: "One lesson we may learn from Samson's experiences is the importance of having an object in life. No one can get the best out of his life unless he have some definite purpose before him. Parents should encourage their children ... to aspire for the best of what they are capable in life.

'Dare to have a purpose true, And dare to make it known'

"In boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 16, there is a surging of the life forces which, rightly directed, tends to make of them noble men and noble women ... There is in youth a striving for nobility.... The faithful parent or guardian may be very successful in setting before the opening mind the reasonable obligation which he has toward the Creator, and the blessed privilege of laying down life itself on the side of right against wrong, on the side of truth against error. With matters thoroughly appreciated, the number of moral heroes in the world would be greatly multiplied"

- *David Rice*

The Trial of Jesus Christ

Each year, as we celebrate the Memorial of Jesus' death, we are brought closer to Him through the realization of what he suffered during that last day which ended in his death. Nothing that is recorded of his life has such an impact on our appreciation of the magnitude of his suffering and sacrifice on our behalf.

At the conclusion of the celebration of the Passover, April 2, AD 33, Jesus instituted the Memorial of his death, a ceremony properly celebrated by Bible Students on the anniversary of that date each year. At the conclusion of the partaking of the bread and the wine, Jesus and the Apostles went out to the garden of Gethesemane. Jesus was already aware that he was to be betrayed by one of his own Apostles, Judas, and thus began the World's Greatest Trial.

We will understand the trial better if we know something about the characters involved, other than Jesus. The most important of these was Annas, for he was directly responsible in ordering the death of Jesus. He was considered by some to be the uncrowned king of Judea; he was the wealthiest and most influential man in the entire province. Probably it was he who directed Caiaphas in telling the people that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. How right his words, and how terribly evil his motives! (John 18:14). There is no question that Annas masterminded the proceedings that led to Jesus' crucifixion. Annas had been Chief Priest for seventeen years, and then had appointed each of his six sons to the office, and deposed them in succession, finally appointing Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Annas controlled the money changers in the temple, probably making a substantial profit. When Jesus drove the money changers from the temple he struck at the very heart of Annas' wealth and power (Mark 11: 15-17), and in effect signed his own death warrant. It is evident that Annas served only his own interests, and had little or no regard for the Law.

The next character in our story is Pontius Pilate, who was born in what today is Barcelona, Spain. He would probably have remained an unknown had he not managed to marry Claudia, granddaughter of

Caesar. For this conquest Pilate was elevated to the rank of Roman General and was given as his first assignment the governorship of Judea. He seems not to have been qualified either morally or intellectually for a responsibility of such magnitude, although, as we will see later, he did show a positive sense of justice in his handling of Jesus' trial. His early experience in Judea was noted for the imposition of certain rules and regulations which denied some religious rights, which led to riots and insurrections, requiring the Romans to

call in troops from other areas.

Another actor in our story who presided over one of Jesus' trials was Herod, probably the grandson of the Herod who slew the infants when Jesus was a young child. Herod was the Vice-Tetrarch of Galilee, and the one who ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. Herod had heard much regarding Jesus and hoped that he would provide entertainment of some kind for his court. Jesus referred to Herod as "that Fox" one of the very few personal derogatory remarks he ever made.

Finally, there was Barabbas. Being a conquered people was as unpleasant and distasteful to the Judeans in AD 33 as it would be to people of today. The burning ambition in many in that day was to drive the hated Romans from their soil, and to restore their government and political independence as a nation. Barabbas was the insurrectionist, revolutionist hero of his day. He was the popular hero who sought to organize sufficient arms and forces to reestablish the kingdom. Even Jesus' own disciples had thought that this was what he would do! (Luke 24:21)

Today we can study the Jewish Code and the Roman Law as they existed in Jesus' time. By applying the facts reported in these trials, all of which took place within six hours, we can arrive at certain conclusions regarding the legality of these events. Numerous errors at law occurred during these trials, and had Jesus the right of appeal almost any one of these would have sufficed to release him. Sometimes we in America suppose we were the first to become deeply concerned with the rights and liberties of the individual, but not so. The Judeans (Jews) were deeply concerned about such rights, and they established greater safeguards and more elaborate procedures to insure them than we possess today. A son of Abraham must under no circumstances be put to death unjustly or wrongly.

MARK 14:43-46 recounts the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. Here was the *first* of the errors against the law. Jesus was arrested on the information of an accomplice, a co-criminal, his disciple, Judas Iscariot. Under the Jewish Code a co-criminal or conspirator was not considered a credible witness; therefore his word was insufficient under their law to justify the arrest of another.

Jesus was arrested at about the hour of midnight, in the garden, as the soldiers and the multitude sent by the High Priest came with their swords, staves and torches. The Jewish Code prohibited the arrest of one accused of a capital crime in which his life might be in forfeit after the hour of sunset and before the hour of sunrise. Their belief was that one who was taken away from his family, friends and neighbors during the hours of darkness might in some manner be denied his legal rights. Yet Jesus was arrested in the middle of the night. This was the *second* infraction of the law.

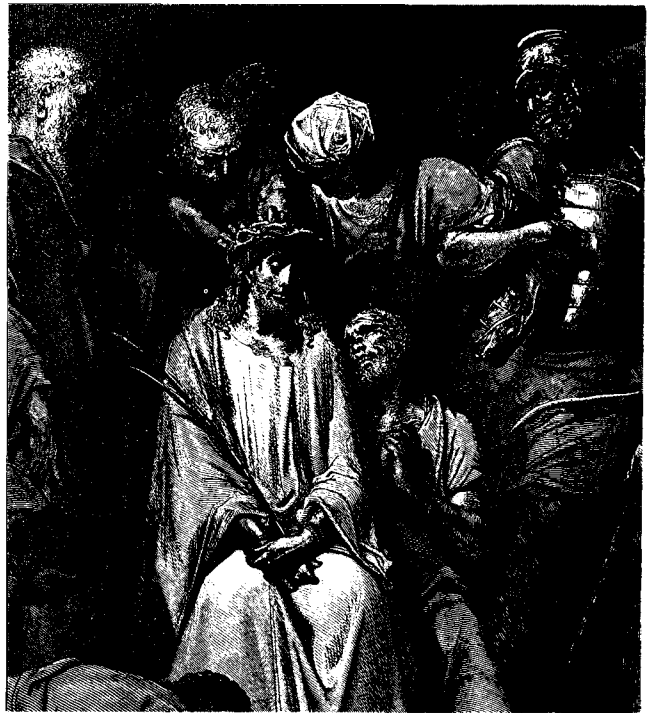
The Crown of Thoms

JOHN 18:12, 13 records the *third* error of Jesus' trial. Annas, father-in-law to Caiaphas, had no legal authority to try or even interrogate Jesus. He was not then an officer of the court, and the Jewish Code did not provide for a one man court anyway, the smallest number being three, and then 23, and finally 73. They believed a one-man court was insufficient, for one judge could be partial and might not adequately protect the rights of the accused.

Evidently Jesus, this son of a carpenter, this uneducated person (John 7:15) knew his legal rights. He knew he did not have to testify against himself, and that they must bring forth two or three witnesses to prove their case (Deuteronomy 19:15). Jesus knew that as long as he taught openly in the temple, the synagogues and in the fields, he had done nothing wrong, for he never taught secretly. He knew that they must prove their case against him according to the law, but they failed to do so. Annas' attempt to interrogate Jesus was a clear violation of law.

JOHN 18:19-24 relates that Jesus was sent to Caiaphas and interrogated regarding his disciples and his doctrine. Jesus had refused (rightly so) to answer Annas, and was then sent, bound, to Caiaphas, High Priest and evidently chairman of the Greater Sanhedrin. He had convened the Sanhedrin shortly after midnight, although under their Jewish Code it could not be convened between sunset and sunrise, for the Judeans believed the judges of the Sanhedrin could not intelligently, alertly and accurately hear the testimony against a man accused of a capital crime during the hours of darkness. Yet they tried Jesus shortly after midnight. This was the *fourth* infraction of their own law!

MATTHEW 26:57-61 records Jesus' questioning before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin; the effort to find false witnesses, resulting in only two charging him with the claim that he would destroy and rebuild the temple in three days; and then the adjuring by Caiaphas as to whether he was the Christ.



The Crown of Thorns

In the proceedings before the Sanhedrin there was no prosecutor or district attorney as we know him today. The charge was made and proved by the complaining witnesses themselves, and the members of the court were denied the right to actively interrogate or prosecute the accused. Jesus was accused of sedition, seeking to tear down or destroy the Hebrew religion. The two witnesses accused Jesus of saying he would tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days. We know from John 2:21 that “he spake of the temple of his body.” However, they believed he intended the literal temple, which had taken more than forty years to build. Since there were only two witnesses, and they were not in complete agreement, Caiaphas realized he would lose this particular charge, so he took control of the prosecution contrary to the Code. This was the *fifth* infraction.

Finding that he was not able to establish the allegation of sedition, Caiaphas changed the charge in the middle of the trial, a proceeding that would not be permitted today. He changed the charge to blasphemy. This was a crime in which the accused allegedly claims to himself a spark of divinity, either that he is divine or that he is the Son of God. This was violation *number six*.

Jesus declined to answer the charges of Caiaphas, which he was legally permitted to do, until Caiaphas pulled a master stroke. He said to Jesus (Matthew 26:63) “I adjure you ... “ The word occurs only seven times in the Bible. It was a solemn and seldom used Hebrew oath, going beyond our present day oaths “So help me God,” for in addition to requiring one to answer truthfully, it also compels him to answer. In today's language, Jesus could not take the 5th amendment. Jesus recognized the solemnity of this oath, and when he was asked “I adjure you by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God” Jesus said “Thou hast said, nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:63, 64). With this testimony from Jesus that he indeed was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Caiaphas closed the testimony and asked for an immediate vote, after literally condemning Jesus before a vote was even taken (verse 65). This was a gross violation of Jewish Law, number seven.

Under the Jewish Code, at the conclusion of the testimony of a capital crime, the judges were directed, in the language of the code, to return home, and there to eat light foods and drink light wine, then sleep well for two days and two nights, and then to return, **ONLY THEN**, to vote, after again hearing the testimony against the

accused. Caiaphas also asked for a simultaneous or voice vote, which was the *eighth* flagrant violation of their code. The code expressly provided that the vote should be cast one at a time, beginning with the youngest member, and then ascending in seniority until the oldest and most mature had voted, since only in this manner would the vote of the junior member not be influenced by that of the elder and more wise. The *ninth* violation!

They all voted that Jesus was guilty. Under the Jewish Code a unanimous verdict of guilty was a verdict of acquittal. The seeming paradox is explained by the belief of the Judeans that unless the accused had secured the sympathy and belief in his innocence by at least one member of the court, he had been denied a fair trial. A unanimous verdict would raise the possibility of a purely emotional decision, possibly indicating “mob psychology.” In their code a verdict of guilty must be one less than all, but more than half. They all voted guilty. Flagrant violation *number ten*.

As mentioned previously, it was not lawful for the Jews to put anyone to death (John 18:31). So they took Jesus to Pilate. It seems clear that Pilate followed each of the four steps of the Code of Criminal Procedure: accusation, interrogation, defence and verdict, for he first said as he came out of the palace “What accusation do you bring against this man?” They answered “If he were not a malefactor we would not have delivered him unto thee” Then Pilate replied “Take him, and judge him according to your law” They replied “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” We cannot apply this particular act to a specific law, but it is a clear case of verdict before trial, and we may properly call this violation *number eleven*.

On hearing the accusation of the Jews, Pilate took Jesus into the palace and followed the second step, that of interrogation and examination. (John 18:28, 38 records this part of the trial.) Pilate asked Jesus

“Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus then entered a defence, the third step, being one of justification. “My kingdom is not of this world [age]: 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” Being satisfied with that defence, and the obvious fallacy of the charges, Pilate returned his verdict to the Jews. “I find in him no fault at all.” Pilate seems to have understood justice!

In the meantime, the Chief Priest, the scribes and the Pharisees, in cooperation with the soldiers, were stirring up the multitude to demand the crucifixion of Jesus. Pilate sought in some way to avoid this responsibility, and when they said (Luke 23:5) “... He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place” Pilate seized upon this information as a possible solution. If he were a Galilean he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, so Pilate had Jesus sent to Herod. Today this would be called a change of venue on the judge's own motion. However, Jesus would not answer Herod's questions so they mocked him, arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him back to Pilate (Luke 23:11).

For the second time Pilate took Jesus into the palace and said to him “Whence art thou?” but Jesus did not answer (John 19:9-11). Pilate asked why Jesus did not answer, knowing that he had the power to either release Jesus or crucify him. To this Jesus replied that Pilate only had power from God, and that those who had delivered him had the greater sin. Then Pilate went again to the crowd and said “I find no fault with this man.” The crowd cried out “Crucify him, crucify him” and Pilate replied “But why, why, what crime has he done?”

Pilate, knowing the innocence of Jesus, made one more effort to release him as he recalled it was the custom at the beginning of the feast of Passover for the governor to release from the crowd any one prisoner then held captive (Matthew 27:20-22). When Pilate asked them whether he should release Jesus or Barabbas, the Chief Priests and elders persuaded the people to demand Barabbas and to crucify Jesus. Since Pilate could find no guilt in Jesus he demanded (verse 23) of the chief priest a reason for their charges. When Caiaphas saw that there might be a release of Jesus he played his master stroke - he changed the alleged crime from a Jewish crime to a Roman crime, one that Pilate would find almost impossible to resist: that of treason against Caesar, for any man who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar. Probably Pilate reasoned that if he were to do nothing about someone who claimed to be a king, and Caesar heard of this, it might go hard for him. And Jesus

HAD acknowledged that he was a king Nevertheless, Pilate tried to release Jesus by saying to them (John 19:15) “Shall I crucify your king?” The chief priests answered “We have no king but Caesar.” And so, realizing the innocence of Jesus, but the impossibility of resisting the priests, Pilate washed his hands of the matter and delivered Jesus to be crucified.

One of the amazing features of Jesus' trials is the almost total absence of his disciples, the most prominent one being his betrayer, Judas, and then the denial of Jesus by the Apostle Peter. What a heartbreaking experience for our Lord this must have been.

When Jesus was delivered to be crucified he was compelled to carry his own cross until he could no longer carry the burden. Then came the degrading and painful crucifixion, along with two common criminals. But in spite of the pain and anguish Jesus instructed John to take care of Mary, his mother, even as he suffered on the cross.

The suffering of Jesus on behalf of the church, and for the entire human race, is still so vivid even after 1950 years that we can shed our tears of love and sympathy for that greatest gift ever given in this vast universe. Further it is the greatest and most precious gift that will ever be given!

But there on the crude cross, pierced with nails and wounded in his side, Jesus' death was not the end, but the beginning His death as the Ransom for all, to be testified in due time, was the crowning glory of the fulfillment of the Law, the perfect man's life sacrificed for Adam's forfeited perfect life. Thus the fulfilling of that Law went infinitely beyond anything that was then expected by the Jews of Jesus' time. But for us at this end of the age, the Scripture 1 Corinthians 15:22 becomes all meaningful: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” This becomes a vital and guaranteed promise, since Jesus has accomplished his Divine Purpose, assuring the promised blessing of all the families of the earth.

— *Homer Hamlin, researched by attorney Howard Rankin*

Growth of the Righteous

“The Righteous shall flourish as a Palm Tree; he shall grow up as a Cedar of Lebanon.” - Psalms 92:12

There is a wealth and depth of meaning in every line of the Bible could we but fathom the divine intention. Some have questioned - Why is not Scripture given in simple language so all might readily understand? We might well reply - for the same reason that gold is not found on top of the ground, where everyone could easily pick it up. The Lord wants man to dig for spiritual as well as earthly treasure.

Coming now to the text, “The Righteous shall flourish like the Palm Tree.” Why does the Lord in this connection liken the righteous to the palm tree? What is there about a palm tree that conforms to the character of a saint? In what respect does the palm tree flourish? Why did not Jehovah God liken a saint to some other tree? Why does he select the palm tree?

The palm is a peculiar tree. It somewhat resembles a telegraph pole, with a little tuft of green at the top. There is nothing about a palm tree to invite either respect or admiration. Just so it is with respect to the saint, the righteous. The Lord denominates these as a “peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9) and there is about them nothing that would command the respect or admiration of the average individual or passerby. We are distinctive from all others of mankind.

Their name is peculiar, not after Paul, or Luther, or Calvin; but they belong to Christ - they bear his name. Their talk is peculiar for others to hear - just one subject is precious and dear - THE PLAN OF THE AGES, “A

Ransom for All,” “Times of Restitution” (Acts 3:19-21). Their food is the Word of God, which “rightly divided” (2 Timothy 2:15) becomes meat in due season. The deep things of God are plain to them (1 Corinthians 2:10). “Man shall not live by bread alone” (Matthew 4:4; Revelation 10:8-10). Their dress is peculiar, it is not their own. It is the white spotless Robe of Christ's Righteousness, which covers our unwilling blemishes -we must keep it white (1 Peter 5:5; Psalms 45:11-15; Isaiah 61:10). Their work is peculiar - they are reaping the field, they are wielding the sickle of Truth, gathering the wheat. Their rest is peculiar - they have entered into God's rest (Hebrews 4:3). Their creed is peculiar, very short and not hard to learn, not man-made (John 15:10-14). Their faith is peculiar - they really believe God's Word to be true. Their faith is built by hearing the Word and proving all things by a “thus saith the Lord” Their hope is peculiar - they hope to attain joint-heirship with Jesus and to share His reign (Romans 8:17).

The Palm Tree grows straight. It grows straight heavenward. This illustrates the intention of the saints, the righteous ones. Their course, like that of the Palm Tree, is heavenward and straight - no branching aside. God says “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree” Notice the similitude. Not only does the palm tree grow straight heavenward, but it overtops all the other trees. In its majestic simplicity it rises far above the common kind. This is true of the righteous. In regal simplicity of heart they are exalted above their fellows in the Heavenly Father's sight. They flourish like the palm tree (Colossians 3:1-3, Philippians 2:9,10; Ephesians 1:17-23).

Now we begin to see why the Lord used that expression - the Palm Tree possesses characteristics befitting the character of a saint. Of all the forest growths the Palm Tree casts the least shadow. It does not interfere with the growth of its neighbor by hindering the rain and sunshine. So likewise the Lord's people, the righteous, do not retard the growth and prosperity of other fellow-beings by preventing the rain of truth and the glorious sunlight of God from falling upon them. They do all they can to assist others who are entitled to a share of life's blessings.

Again the Palm Tree is softest at the heart, whereas other trees are harder at the heart. This betokens the heart attitude of the righteous. In loving sympathy the saint endeavors to fulfill the law of God, cultivating the fruits and graces of the spirit day by day. More and more we see why the Lord used the Palm Tree to exemplify the character of the righteous. Oh, the depth of wisdom in the inspired Word! Could we but fathom its mighty depths! It is a wonderful book to those whose spiritual eyes have been enlightened sufficiently to grasp the lengths and the heights and depths of God's gracious plan for the salvation and redemption of mankind.

Of all the trees extant the Palm Tree has the fewest roots - has the least hold upon the earth. It has a main tap root, like a carrot extending straight down into the earth with minute rootlets just sufficient to maintain its upright position. All the nourishment it derives from mother earth is used in its upward building and not in securing an earthly hold. And so it is with the righteous -they are in the world but not of the world. All the vitality derived out of the world is employed for their uplift and spiritual welfare. They are not concerned in the securing of earthly rights and privileges. They, too, have the least possible hold upon the earth and its affairs. They are seeking to lay up treasures in heaven. “The righteous shall flourish like the Palm Tree.” How true!

The Palm Tree has another characteristic - it will not be repressed. Put a heavy slab over the spot where a Palm Tree starts to grow and note the result. It will lift that stone or grow around it and continue its course heavenward. In California near the Mariposa trail a settler in early days built himself a little cabin directly on the spot where a Palm Tree was growing Did that cabin hinder the Palm Tree? Not much! The Palm Tree came up through the floor of that cabin. It penetrated the ceiling and grew out through the roof. There stands the cabin, and there is the Palm Tree. The righteous are not easily repressed or swerved from their heavenward course. They refuse to be hindered by the difficulties and besetments of life. If impossible for them to remove an obstacle from their pathway, they will pass on around it, go over it, or if necessary through it - any way to get where they are determined to be.

Why did not the Lord use the stately oak tree in its majestic strength and stateliness, its vigor and beauty to exemplify the character of the righteous? Why not the common forest trees? Dear friends, they are not even green. Six months of the year these trees have the appearance of deadness. There is no growth, no prosperity. Would the Lord want his people apparently inert half the time of their existence on earth? Surely not. He wants them like the Palm Tree - evergreen, ever showing signs of life, ever prosperous in the things pertaining to Almighty God and their own spiritual aggrandizement. We note further: the older the Palm Tree, the more abundant, luscious and sweeter is its fruit. Besides, it bears early and late has an extended fruit season, does not bear fruit for itself, holds forth its fruitage in clusters, so that one can help himself to much or little as may be desired. How appropriate all this is to the righteous characteristic. The longer the Christian is in the way of the Lord, the sweeter and more abundant his fruitage the fruit of the spirit - love, joy, peace, brotherly kindness and all those kindred virtues enumerated by the Apostle Paul. Come to the Christian early or late, in season or out of season, and secure this fruitage in large or small measure, as may be desired. We have not this fruitage for self, but for others in need. Here again we note the appropriateness of the text to the righteous characteristics - they (the righteous) "shall flourish like the Palm Tree"

Another peculiarity of the Palm Tree: the dust of the desert (which adheres to trees ordinarily) does not accumulate on the Palm Tree. The righteous one keeps himself pure and unspotted, free from all earthly influences, free from contamination, free from the doctrinal dust that is blown by the winds as "wind" in scriptural symbolism denotes doctrine.

Yet another point. There is in the palm locality in Palestine a poisonous vine known as the "tree killer" It derives its name from the fact that it kills every tree with which it comes in contact by enshrouding the tree so thoroughly as to shut out all sunlight and by absorbing the moisture from the ground. The tree dies and the poison vine stands there in the form of the tree which gave it shape. No tree is known that will successfully resist the action of this "tree killer" save one alone, the Palm. It matters not how many of the "tree killing" vines may grow about and upon the Palm Tree. It survives. It remains alive. So with the righteous. Many and severe may be the troubles, besetments and poisonous influences of this life; many and heavy the burdens which tend to destroy others. They live right on and continue their heavenward course. Though bowed down beneath a load of care, the righteous ones flourish. It is written: "The righteous shall flourish like the Palm Tree"

- H. E. Deitrich (now deceased)