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Beliefs That Matter

"To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." - 1 Cor. 8:6.

SOME years ago, I attended a YMCA forum which had as its theme: "Beliefs That Matter." There were from 150 to 200 men present, all interested in promoting the welfare of youth. Included amongst those who participated in the discussion were, perhaps, a dozen college presidents; the forum itself being presided over by Dr. Sidney E. Smith, President of Toronto University.

When the opportunity presented itself, I expressed the thought that perhaps the most important belief with which a young man starting out in life could be equipped, was belief in the existence of the one true God; that he is perfect in wisdom, justice and love; possesses almighty power; and has a purpose, sure of accomplishment, that, under his over-ruling providence, right will ultimately triumph, wrong be forever suppressed.

This belief I regard as basic-essential alike for Catholic, Protestant, and Jew. Without such belief, a young man is like a ship at sea without a rudder; with it, if he continue to make progress, he will weather all the storms of life, and eventually make port. Not only so, but while this has always been true, it is particularly true today, in view of the conditions through which the world is passing.

How is this basic belief to be obtained by a young man just starting out in life, and how are we ourselves to retain this faith, and not only retain it, but strengthen it, exercise it and nourish it, in these difficult times? It is to this question we address ourselves in the paragraphs which follow.

FAITH NOT CREDULITY

In the first place, this basic faith must be distinguished from credulity. Credulity is a disposition to believe without sufficient evidence. Faith, on the other hand, is a firm persuasion as to the truth

of a matter, on the grounds of satisfactory evidence. While it is true that we must sometimes trust God where we cannot trace him, nowhere in the Scriptures are we taught to exercise a blind faith in any one, not even in God.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us in chapter 11, verse 6, that "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." From this text we see that the very beginning of faith is a conviction that God is. How do we reach this conviction? I answer: By knowledge.

Let me illustrate this point: Two boys are out in the woods one day, when they come across a watch lying on the ground, in good condition, ticking *away* the moments. What do these boys conclude as to the origin of the watch? Do they say one to the other: "What a wonderful specimen! It must have taken thousands of years, perhaps millions, for all those tiny little parts to arrange themselves in such a fascinating and useful way as to record the passing hours! You know very well those boys would say nothing of the sort. They would rightly assume that somewhere in this wide world there must be a watchmaker. Even though the opportunity of meeting the watchmaker were never theirs, they would still believe in his existence.

If, then, a watch implies the existence of a watchmaker, what does a watchmaker imply? A watchmaker's Maker, most assuredly! We behold the heavens declaring *his* glory, the firmament showing his handiwork. We note how fearfully and wonderfully made we ourselves are, and on this knowledge we reach forward into something that is not knowledge but faith—we *believe* God is.

BELIEF BASED ON KNOWLEDGE

Belief in God's existence, then, is based on knowledge. Belief in God's character, that he is just, wise, benevolent, gracious, slow to anger, plenteous in mercy, also comes about through previous knowledge of him. It is not blind credulity, but firm persuasion, based on satisfactory evidence.

Perhaps another simple illustration will make this clear. A report reaches us, let us suppose, that a close friend, whom we have known for many years, was last seen on the streets of a distant city, in a condition of drunkenness. Some one who had never met our friend, or whose knowledge of him was very limited, might remark: "Dear me, that's too bad; what a pity; another good man gone wrong;" or words to that effect. How much faith does that one exercise in our friend? None at all. Why? Because he has no knowledge of him. Men do foolishly drink to excess, and for all he may know, our friend may have done so.

But what happens when the report reaches us? It is instantly rejected by us, doubtless with a measure of indignance that the good name of our friend should have been slandered by so incredible a story being circulated about him. Why so different a reaction on our part? Because we know our friend.

However, we do not really *know* the story to be untrue. *We know* no more about the report of drunkenness than does the man who failed to exercise faith in our friend. We could not appear in court and solemnly affirm that of our own personal knowledge the report which reached us is untrue. But from the knowledge we do have of our friend, gained through years of close association and happy fellowship, we are convinced that the report is untrue. With this knowledge as a basis we are able to exercise faith beyond actual knowledge, and confidence in our friend remains unshaken.

Faith in our friend, then, comes as a result of prior acquaintance with him. It *is thus* that faith in God comes.

At this point, some one may say: With what you have said thus far, I am in very good agreement. There is no question in *my* mind but that belief in God, and in the ultimate triumph of good over evil, is basic and, praise the Lord, such basic belief I have. And I intend to nourish it along the lines you have indicated, namely, by getting better acquainted with God and with his plans. May I ask: Have you any specific suggestions which I might adopt?

To this I reply: Yes, I do have. Out of a number, let me briefly mention four, which I am trying to put into practice myself, and which, with due humility, I venture to submit for your adoption.

STUDY THE BIBLE

First: Study the Bible. Study it carefully, prayerfully, bringing an alert mind to bear on its lessons; and study it regularly. Make notes as you go along, for later review.

The Bible bears on its surface a most remarkable claim. It claims to be nothing less than the revelation to man of the thoughts and purposes of God with respect to the race of mankind. Examine this claim. Examine it yourself. Do not delegate the job to another. Certainly you may use all the helps available; indeed you should do so. There are several translations, each throwing a little special light on the text; there are concordances and other up-to-date helps to be had, which will prove invaluable. One of the best helps to the study of the Bible I know of, is a little book written some years ago for the special benefit of beginners. It is called "The Divine Plan of the Ages." Use all of these helps, but remember-the study must be done by you, yourself. No one can do it for you. There is no royal road to learning.

Able students of the Bible tell us, not only that its claim to be the revelation of the mind of God is well verified, but that the Bible is a veritable gold mine.

In 2 Timothy 2:15 St. Paul instructs Timothy that he should "study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." How does one rightly divide the word of truth? Experience has taught us that the way which yields the most satisfactory results, is to divide it dispensationally to take note of the times and seasons; to relate the truths of the Bible to the epochs or eras to which they belong. Broadly speaking, the Bible unfolds God's dealings with mankind, as they relate to three great dispensations-three great epochs or eras: (1) the age before the flood, (2) the period of time which has elapsed since the flood, and (3) the age on which we are about to enter. All three of these ages have reference to the same planet, namely, the Earth on which we now live. To those who have been under the impression that the Bible teaches that the earth is to be destroyed by fire, it will come with something of a surprise to learn that the " See description of our Pocket Edition on the back page.

Bible does not so teach. On the contrary, the Scriptures declare that "the earth abideth forever." This statement appears in the Book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 1, verse 4 (Eccl. 1:4). Consequently, and notwithstanding all talk of atomic energy and hydrogen bombs, I look for no dissolution of this planet.

ONE EARTH -- THREE AGES

Three ages are mentioned in the Bible, each in connection with this selfsame earth, which continues throughout all three. For some years now, competent students of the Scriptures have

held that we have reached the end of the second of these ages, and are about to enter the third. Indeed, some assert it as their belief that the ends of these ages overlap, and that even as the second is closing, the third has already begun. Be that as it may, all thinking men and women today are united in their belief that great changes are impending in the affairs of mankind.

This suggestion, that the Bible be studied dispensationally, is not a new idea. There is an old Latin proverb, which reads: "Distinguite tempora et concordabunt scripturae." Translated into English, this proverb reads: "Distinguish the periods and the Scriptures will harmonize." Yes, many apparently conflicting statements are seen to harmonize when allocated to the particular periods to which they relate. Rightly divided, the Scriptures show us the true character of God; why he has permitted evil for a season; when he intends to suppress it; why the world has reached its present state of chaos; what he proposes to do about it, and how;-they show us also how we may best adjust the pattern of our lives to fit into his overruling plan.

In 2 Peter 3:4-14, each of these three worlds or ages is referred to as a separate "heavens and earth." Here the word "heavens" symbolizes human government and social arrangements. It is sufficient to note here that the second of these "worlds" or "ages" or "heavens and earth," namely, the one in which we live today (this "present evil world" as it is termed by the Apostle Paul in Gal. 1:4) is about to pass away. St. Peter tells us this in his second letter, chapter 1, verse 7 (2 Pet. 1:7). According to an Old Testament Prophet (Zephaniah 1:18) the earth is to be destroyed, not with literal fire, but with the symbolic fire of judgment. The present order or arrangement of government and society (not that of the physical sky and earth) will pass away. Nay, it is even now in the process of passing away. The present "heavens" must give place to the "new heavens" -- that is, to Christ's spiritual control. The present "earth," -- that is, human society as now organized -- must symbolically "melt," and be "dissolved." It will be succeeded by a "new earth," that is, society reorganized, in harmony with earth's new Prince -- Christ. Righteousness, peace, and love will rule among men when present arrangements have given place to the new and better Kingdom, the basis of which will be the strictest justice.

In harmony with this symbolic use of the words "world" and "fire," many will recall the graphic description of affairs by Woodrow Wilson, just before the United States entered the first World War: "The whole world is on fire," said he, "and happy shall we be if a spark does not set us on fire also."

ARMAGEDDON IMMINENT

Before Woodrow Wilson came into office, another President, Theodore Roosevelt, had used a word, which today is well known, but which, when he uttered it, sounded strange and unfamiliar to the reporters-a word which sent them searching, not their dictionaries only, but their Bibles. It was the word "Armageddon."

Armageddon, the reporters discovered, was the name given to the plain of Esdraelon, the scene of many battles recorded in the Old Testament; and hence the prophetic scene of the great battle between truth and error, right and wrong, love and hatred, with which this present "world" or "age" is to close. (Rev. 16:16.) The Battle (or, rather the War) of Armageddon, which even in Theodore Roosevelt's time seemed imminent, and to which the First World War undoubtedly led, is fast approaching. Wise men of the world recognize this. For years they have seen the elements of this social conflagration in preparation. Selfishness, increase of knowledge, concentration of wealth, wrong ambition, fear and despair, are the ingredients, whose friction has set the angry passions of the world aflame, causing its various "elements" to melt in the "fervent heat." - 2 Pet. 3:10.

This outlook, which statesmen are at their wits' end to avert, would occasion us only heartache, were it not for the assurance of the Scriptures that the end results shall prove beneficial, overthrowing the reign of selfishness, and establishing, through Christ's Mediatorial Kingdom, the reign of righteousness. Yes, after the destructive forces of this titanic struggle shall have spent themselves, "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more," as Isaiah, in chapter 2, verse 4 (Isa. 2:4) of his prophecy declares. Mankind will have learned the utter futility of seeking to live apart from God and, in their extremity, will call upon him to save them. When, in such contrition and humility of heart, they do turn to him, they will find him waiting to be gracious. He will put his wondrous laws of truth and justice, of righteousness and love, in their minds. He will write them, not again on tables of stone, but in the softened tablets of their hearts. He will be to them their God, and they shall be to him his people. No more will it be necessary for a few enlightened ones to instruct the others in regard to the gracious character and purposes of God, for all shall know him from the least to the greatest. - Heb. 8:10, 11.

HOPE BEYOND THE GRAVE

Nor is this hope held out to those only who have not actually entered the tomb. No!-in order to give Adam and his entire family this favorable opportunity just described, there is to be an awakening of the dead, as we read: "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." (Acts 24:15.) This statement of the Apostle is in full harmony with the Master's own words: "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice [the voice of the Son of God] and shall come forth. (John 5:28, 29.) We thank God for the wideness of his mercy, like the wideness of the sea; we praise his name that he is no respecter of persons, that every member of Adam's race, condemned through Adam's disobedience, redeemed from that condemnation by the death of Jesus, shall have a full opportunity of coming to a knowledge of the truth, and of using that knowledge for his own recovery from sin, sickness, sorrow, pain, and death-for the ultimate attainment of human perfection and everlasting life in Paradise, the scriptural name for the restored earth. - 1 Tim. 2:4; Acts 3:21.

First, then, study the Bible. Study it in the spirit of prayer, with the thought in mind of becoming better acquainted with the character of our heavenly Father, and with his glorious plans and purposes; -- and study it with the intention of bringing your life into conformity therewith.

(Continued in next issue)

- P. L. Read.

Lights and Shadows in Christian Experience

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." - Romans 8:18.

IN the January issue, we began a devotional study of the conditions obtaining in the Bethany family and, pondering the distinctive characters of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, sought to apply to ourselves the lessons developed in the sacred narrative. After prayerfully reviewing the scene unfolded in Luke 10:40-42, we journeyed, in thought, to the special circumstances surrounding the awakening from the sleep of death of "Our Friend Lazarus." The story is told in the eleventh chapter of John.

At first the sickness of Lazarus came as a surprise to the two sisters. As they discussed the matter they could not understand it. But of one thing they were very sure-if the Lord had been present, it would not have happened. And so, as they watched Lazarus slowly sinking, they decided to send a message to Jesus. Notice the message they sent; it is evidently reported in their own words: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." Here is no complaint; no urging of immediate action; just a simple statement of the facts. No doubt the message veiled an unexpressed prayer. But they could trust him to read the unexpressed longing of their hearts. Even in their great sorrow, they could not press him to come, aware, as they were, of the dangers which awaited him in Judea. They merely informed him of the situation, leaving it to him to decide how he should act.

How is it with us? When we send messages to the Lord concerning our personal matters, are we not inclined, sometimes, to say: "Lord, he who loves *you* is sick -- *come at once.*" The sisters knew the love that Jesus bore them and that if anything could be done for Lazarus, Jesus would do it. So too, we, knowing full well that Jesus loves us, should realize that when we cry unto him in the hour of need, it is enough that we remind him of our knowledge of his love, and assure him of our abiding confidence in him.

ASCERTAINING THE FATHER'S WILL

Jesus received the sisters' message, but made no immediate attempt to return to Bethany. Instead, he said: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God." (Our Lord's words here would seem to be as much for the benefit of the disciples present, as for the absent sisters.) He then remained two days longer in the wilderness of Perea, whither he had fled from the enmity of the Jews.

Perhaps we may never know just why Jesus delayed his departure these two days. We do know that the direct result of his miracle in awakening Lazarus from the sleep of death, was his own condemnation and death. No doubt he had a presentiment that such would be the outcome. In all probability, therefore, his delay was deliberate -- designed to afford him special opportunity of communing with the Father, to make certain that he fully understood his Father's will concerning him, and that grace sufficient would be supplied him for every step of the way.

Having gathered the meaning of the providential circumstances associated with Lazarus' sickness, Jesus promptly decided to return to Judea. But at the word "Judea" the disciples are ready to object, contending that it would mean suicide. "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and

goest thou thither again?" To this, however, Jesus replied in words of deep significance: "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If *any* man walk in the day, he stumbleth not." These words, applied to his own case, very evidently mean: "If duty calls, I may fearlessly go. While the time allotted to me by my Father has not yet expired, no harm can come to me, in the path of duty. My twelve hours of work are not 'quite over. Mine hour is not yet come. (John 2:4; John 7:6.) The duration of my earthly life is meted out and secured to me by my Father. The Jews will not be able to shorten, by a single moment, the time assigned to me for accomplishing my mission. During these twelve hours I am walking in daylight, and therefore will not stumble. However, if, as you seem to be proposing, I should arbitrarily endeavor to prolong my life, by refusing to go where duty calls me, I would be as one walking after day-time has ended-in the nighttime. Real danger of stumbling would then reach me, for I would be without the light of my Father's countenance."

This saying of Jesus applies to all the members of the Church, in their measure, for "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Psa. 116:15.) No harm can come to us, in the line of Christian duty, save in God's own time, and as he may permit. On the other hand, if, by failing to do our duty, we did succeed in prolonging our life-if, for example, we were to deny the faith in a time of religious persecution, our life, thus lengthened, would no longer be illuminated by the light of God's will. In such a condition, we would seek in vain for wisdom from above, to direct our course. In such darkness, we would "*stumble*"; i.e. morally perish. Or again, in time of comparative peace, if, shrinking from trouble or unpleasantness, one seeks to prolong his life, and refusing what he realizes is God's will, turns into some softer and easier path, then indeed danger threatens. He may prolong his life, but his "day" is done.

"OUR FRIEND LAZARUS SLEEPETH"

Our Lord next proceeded to discuss the case of Lazarus further: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." These words did but serve the disciples as yet another reason why they should not go to Bethany. Surely, they reason, if Lazarus had been sick and is now resting in sleep, it would be wiser to wait for him to awaken in the normal way, at which time he would be recovered from his ailment. Then Jesus told them plainly: "Lazarus is dead."

From our Lord's procedure here, we may learn a lesson on how to present the truth. It should be adapted always to the hearer's ability to receive it; beginning with the simpler lessons, and only after these have been grasped, proceeding to the more difficult. Thus, instead of announcing two days earlier that Lazarus was dead, and thereby bringing a shock to the minds and hearts of his disciples, our Lord break's the, sad news gently, gradually leading *up* to it, preparing their minds to receive it.

This is still his method of dealing with his people. He prepares them for their. hour of trial, *and* does not lay upon them more than they can bear. He considers their case-teaching them by slow and gradual discipline, leading on step by step.

Jesus next informs the disciples that, for their sakes, he *was* glad not to have been in Bethany at the time of the sickness and death of Lazarus. Had Jesus been in Bethany, it is: more than likely that he would have been led to heal him. Because of his absence, Lazarus had been without the benefit of our Lord's presence and healing touch, and thus had been permitted to die. But in the overruling providence of the Father, this would prove advantageous, not only to Lazarus and his sisters, but also to the disciples; the faith of all being greatly strengthened, when they saw "the glory of God" as, in the exercise of the Father's power, our Lord awakened Lazarus from the sleep of death.

IF THOU HADST BEEN HERE

In John 11:19 we are told that many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. They needed all the sympathy they received, for all the past bright memories of Bethany seemed buried in desolation and sorrow. We may picture the scene: the stronger and more resolute spirit of Martha striving to stem the tide of overmuch sorrow; the more sensitive heart of Mary, bowed under a grief too deep for utterance, able only to indicate by her silent tears the unknown depths of her sadness.

Thus they are employed, when "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him." It requires no small fortitude in the season of sore bereavement to face an altered world, but again we have illustrated the strong character of Martha, her quick apprehension and vigorous action. When Martha reached Jesus just outside the village, she stood before him and said: "Lord, If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

These words were not intended as a reproach *on* Martha's part, for she could not have been ignorant of the fact that her brother was dead before Jesus, had received the news of his illness. Moreover, would she have allowed herself to complain of our Lord's course of action, *just at* the time when she is about to make the very greatest of requests? On the contrary, she merely expressed her regret that Jesus had not been there at the time of her brother's illness, and this regret only helped to prepare for the petition she was about to make: "But I know, that even now [although so late], *whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.* " On these words of Martha, the eminent scholar *Godet* comments: "The reticence of this indirect request is admirable." How wonderfully restrained is Martha, in this great sorrow. Of course she hoped that, included in her "whatsoever," would be the awakening of her brother. But she is too reticent to say it. The Master-her Lord-will know best what to do.

THY BROTHER SHALL RISE AGAIN

Jesus responds to her faith with a word of promise: "Thy brother shall rise again." This assurance was capable of being interpreted either in a general sense as referring to the general resurrection (which all devout Israelites believed would take place at the inauguration of Messiah's reign) or in a particular sense (as having reference to the approaching awakening of Lazarus.) It is more than likely that Martha sensed the reference to the approaching awakening of Lazarus, but not being sure, she applied our Lord's words to the general "last day" resurrection, which she did regard as certain. This gave Jesus the opportunity to explain his words further, and to declare expressly, what she had hardly dared to hope: "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

Here Jesus speaks words that have echoed down the corridor of the Gospel Age, bringing hope and comfort to millions. In these few words we have the core of the Gospel, Jesus expressing the confidence of his final victory over , sin and death, and the glorious work of the resurrection, first for the Church which is his body, gathered *in* the Gospel Age, and" later for all mankind during the Millennial . Kingdom, as it holds sway over all the earth. Freed from the confusions of the creeds of Christendom, we see clearly that all not now disciples 'of the Lord have, nevertheless, the hope of a share in the general resurrection in the Millennial Kingdom (whether they understand it now or not); whereas those living during the Gospel Age, who had been footstep followers of Jesus -- who have consecrated themselves to do the Father's will, even unto death -- these have already, by faith, passed from death unto life. They have been made alive unto God as

new creatures in Christ Jesus. To these the very crown of life -- immortality -- has been held out as their hope. They are to share in the throne of God and of the Lamb. These things, of course, were hidden until after Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was shed abroad in its begetting and anointing power, at which time it took the things of Jesus and made them known to the Apostles, and through them to the early Church, and to us.

To these words of our Lord, Martha made answer in language strangely reminiscent of Peter's great confession, when Jesus asked him: "Whom say ye that I am?" "Thou art the Christ," Peter had replied, "the Son of the living God." So here, in response to the kindly leading of our Lord, Martha's faith had been strengthened to the point where she, too, was able to express her strong conviction that Jesus was, indeed, the Son of God, the promised Messiah, to whom all the prophets had borne witness. No doubt the full grandeur of our Lord's Bethany utterance could not be appreciated by her until after Pentecost. This was true also, in the case of Peter. With us however, the case is different. Christ has died, yea rather, has risen again. (Rom. 8:34.) Pentecost has come, with its wonderful outpouring of the holy spirit. We are living at the end of the Gospel Age. Just beyond are the "times of restitution" when all the wonderful depth of the message which fell from our Lord's lips will be fully accomplished. "What manner of persons ought *we* to be?"

(Continued in next issue)

- A. L. Muir

Half Hour Meditations on Romans

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And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. -- Gal. 3:17, 18

IN our last Meditation we noted that Abraham's earthly seed are distinguished in a number of scriptures, but such distinction is not made in the verses now under review (Rom. 4:13-16). Here the Apostle is occupied with the fact that the condition of his country men at the time he wrote was that of blindness. They rested in the law and thought the promise would be secured to them on that account, ignoring the faith which was the sole instrument in Abraham's case both for justification and inheritance.

This cannot be: "for if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect (Rom. 4:14).

In the Galatian letter St. Paul presents the *historical* proof that the keeping of the Law could not secure the fulfillment of the promise (Gal. 3:17, 18). He there shows that the Law Covenant was not given until four hundred and thirty years after the Abrahamic Covenant. It therefore could make no difference to or make no change so as to annul or abrogate that older covenant which rested on Gods promise and mans reliance on Gods faithful performance of that promise. In the passage before us he reaches the same result from another standpoint. His reasoning is that if an inheritance is promised on the one condition of faith and then it develops that in order to come into possession of the promised inheritance it becomes necessary to first render obedience to certain other conditions not previously stipulated, it becomes apparent at once that the promise was not serious.

It could not have been made in good faith and any reliance thereon would be misplaced. This would be still more apparent if the conditions imposed were impossible to execute. In that case the one exercising faith in the promise would find his faith made *void, emptied* (the word is the same as that in **Phil. 2:7** where the Apostle speaks of our Lord as *emptying* himself). His faith would be deprived of its object, drained of its contents, and thus made useless. Not only so, but the promise itself, having an impossible condition attached to it, would be paralyzed in its effects.

But the promise, as a matter of fact, was made by Almighty God himself. It must therefore have been made in good faith. To suppose otherwise would be to doubt the veracity of God. Such a conclusion can not for a moment be entertained (Rom. 3:3, 4). Therefore no such impossible condition as obedience to the requirements of the Law Covenant could have been attached so as to interfere with the fulfillment of the promise. Or to use the words of the Apostle: "There fore it [the promise and its fulfillment] is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed" (Gal. 3:16).

Where Law Is Not There Is No Transgression

Moreover the opposition of the Law and the Promise both in their operation and in their effects is still further manifest in Gal. 3:15: "Besides, the Law works out wrath; but where law is not, there is no transgression" (*Diaglott*) .

The Apostle must not be understood here as affirming that prior to the giving of the Law there was no sin, for as a matter of fact we know to the contrary.

He himself informs us in the next chapter (Rom. 4:13) that "until the law," that is to say from Adam "until the law sin *was* in the world." What we understand him to be teaching us here is (1) that where there is no law sin, in the form of transgression of law, cannot exist; (2) that no sooner is a law given to fallen man than he is bound to transgress it because his imperfect state is such as to render him powerless to do otherwise, and (3) the transgression of law brings in its wake the condemnation and punishment of God. This idea of Laws operation and effects is worked out in remarkable detail and to our great edification in Romans 7, as we shall see. At present it must suffice us to note Laws incompatibility with Promise and to rejoice in the knowledge that "*therefore* it is of faith that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the Law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is father of us all."

The Seed Is Composed of Jewish and Gentile Believers

Some have supposed that the Apostle does in these words distinguish between heavenly and earthly seed.

Those who adopt this view understand the seed "which is of the Law" to refer to the earthly seed and the seed "which is of the faith of Abraham" to have reference to the heavenly. We have already indicated our belief that the scriptures elsewhere do indeed make this distinction, but we are unable to see that this distinction is made here. To our understanding the Apostle does but differentiate here between believers of Jewish and Gentile origin without any indication of whether they will be found amongst the heavenly or the earthly seed.

Instead of the promise being made of none effect as it would have been had it depended for its fulfillment on obedience to the requirements of the Law Covenant, it was made sure by depending on faith only. And to whom was it made sure? We answer: To all the seed in the true and full sense of that word as we have endeavored to point out that sense in the preceding paragraphs. After what has gone before we can not doubt but that the expression "all the seed" refers to all believers, both Jews and Gentiles. The seed "which is of the Law" would thus refer (not to fleshly Israelites without faith nor yet to those Jewish believers only who were destined to become a part of Abraham's earthly seed, but) to all Jewish believers, with out regard to whether they would be found amongst the heavenly or the earthly seed. If this thought be correct, then the corresponding phrase the seed "which is of the faith of Abraham" would refer to Gentile believers, some of whom might be of the earthly and some of the heavenly seed of Abraham.

It may be objected that in referring to the seed "which is of the Law" St. Paul does not mention the qualification of faith and therefore he is speaking of Israel after the flesh, without regard to whether they are believers or not. But neither the immediate context nor the general tenor of scripture will support this objection. In light of the foregoing context we have considered, we cannot but understand that the presence of *faith* is implied in "all the seed" to whom the promise is made sure and that the expression "which is of the Law" refers not to Jews as such but to the Jewish believers only. In the case of the Gentiles, that seed "which is of the faith of Abraham," the attribute of faith is expressly mentioned because it appears in them without any question of it being supplemented by abortive attempts at obedience to the requirements of Law.

Father of Us All

The last words of Rom. 4:16 "sum up all that has been developed in the previous context. Believing Jews and Gentiles, we all participate by faith not only in justification" but also in the inheritance; for the true seed to whom this promise was made was that of faith, not according to the Law. Abraham is therefore the sole stem from which proceed those two branches which form in him one and the same household of faith.

When then shall we say (we Israelites) that Abraham our forefather has found *according to the flesh*? Not righteousness, certainly, for *that* he found by faith.

Nor was his the faith of a circumcised man, for it was several years previous to his circumcision that his faith was reckoned to him for righteousness. Moreover it is not "according to the flesh" that he was made heir of the world. The inheritance of the world is not his as the reward of merit (because of his having performed every requirement of Gods righteous law), for this he did not do. It is his because he rested in the promise, because he relied on, trusted in the unfailing word of God.

Such, as we have seen, has been the substance of the Apostles argument in the first sixteen verses of chapter four of our Epistle. But unbelief in mind and heart is difficult to conquer; prejudice is not easily disarmed and routed. And notwithstanding the Apostles cogent reasoning, a Jewish opponent would yet be apt to debate the matter further. Such an one might insist: "What you say, Paul, is undoubtedly true *so far as it goes*. But the inheritance, as you have shown and as I am glad to concede, is really not so much centered in Abraham himself (illustrious father of our nation though he be) but in his seed, especially in his Messianic Seed. That great One for whom our nation yet waits with longing expectation. This Messianic Seed was certainly promised to be a son of David *according to the flesh*. It is written: Jehovah hath sworn unto David in truth; he will not turn from it; *Of the fruit of thy body* will I set upon thy throne. And David, in his turn, was a descendent of Abraham *according to the flesh*.

Now there could have been no David and consequently there could be no Messianic Seed unless there had first been an Isaac. And Isaac was born to Abraham in the way of natural, physical generation. Is it not apparent therefore that instead of finding nothing according to the flesh, as you would have us believe, Abraham really found a very great deal? For he found Isaac thus; and without Isaac it is clear that the whole plan and purpose of God would have been frustrated." If possessed of a sufficiency of this worlds polish and refinement such an opponent might hesitate to utter the rest of his thoughts, but if not he would add: "And we Jews are the descendants of Isaac -- Gods chosen people. Surely there must be something wrong with your gospel, Paul, reducing us as it does to the level of Gentile dogs in the sight of God."

A mind as familiar as was St. Paul's with the secret thoughts of the Israelitish heart could not, as an able writer has observed, "neglect this important side of the question." On the contrary, in the verses we now consider (Rom. 4:17-22), he enters into this new subject as boldly as into the two preceding. Sapping the last root of Jewish prejudice by scripture, he demonstrates that the birth of Isaac, no less than the grace of justification and the promise of the inheritance, was the effect of faith.

The Birth of Isaac Was "A Birth from the Dead"

Let us follow the Apostle as he traces in the Old Testament narrative the evidence that Isaacs birth, natural though it was, was yet a miracle vouchsafed to living faith -- that it might well be

described as a "birth from the dead." First he will appeal to scripture to support his previous assertion that Abraham is the "father," not of believing Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. And will the scriptures support his argument? Will the law again be found to "witness" to his message? It is even so. The Gospel preached beforehand to Abraham: "In thee shall all nations be blessed" (**Gal. 3:8**) lies hidden in the very name of the Patriarch. For the name "Abraham" means "Father of a great multitude." How, then, had he come to receive this name? Was it always his? No, indeed! It was given him in connection with the confirmation of God's promise: "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham, *for a father of many nations have I made thee*" (**Gen. 17:5**).

There is in this promise, though, an expression that seems to be belied by the facts of the case. How could God say, "I *have made* thee a father of many nations," when as a matter of fact Abraham was still childless? Is there not some error in the translation here? Should not the record read: "I *will make* thee a father of many nations"?

Such a conclusion indeed would necessarily be our had the promise proceeded from the mouth of any other than the great Jehovah. But the form this language takes only reveals his grandeur, for, as the Apostle goes on to say, he is that God "Who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). In his sight a thousand years are but as a day and a day as a thousand years. In his sight, therefore, all generations are included in one view -- the dead as though they still lived; the unborn as though they already existed.

Such is the majesty of our God, and it is always appropriate for us to pause in humble adoration when we contemplate it. But the point with which the Apostle is chiefly concerned here is to show that the faith of Abraham corresponded to that majesty. And what an insight his analysis gives us into the essence and quality of Abraham's faith. It was undoubtedly the two attributes of God the Apostle here mentions: his power to *quicken* ("God who quickeneth the dead") and his power to *create* ("God who calleth those things which be not as though they were").

On these Abraham's faith fastened in this moment of decision. Quickening power there must be if from his body, now "as good as dead," and in Sarah's old age there should come a son through whom the promise might be fulfilled. "Quickening power there will be," reasons Abraham, "for God's purpose knows no hindrance. Dead though I and my wife may be as regards our generative faculties, God is he that giveth life to the dead. And though I see them not, it is as much in his power to summon them to appear as it is in mine to summon my servants; he has announced his purpose so to do, so my faith takes hold on his promise and already I rejoice in prospect of my own future life and in the seed which for multitude he has likened to the starry heavens above my head, and which in his sight are no less real."

- P. L. Read

Israel Today

Again it is our pleasure to submit a "Land of Promise" report from Brother Casimir Lanowick, Editor of "Jews in the News." With this, his fourth report, Brother Lanowick invites our special attention to the following Scripture:

"I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."-
Jeremiah 3:14, 15.

- Ed. Com.

Jerusalem, December 24, 1958

Here it is Christmastime in the Holy Land, minus the tinsel, hustle and bustle, and great commercial activity that is so apparent in the United States and other parts of the professed Christian world. The general course of life in Jerusalem and all over Israel at this time is quite normal. *The Jerusalem Post* declares that at least 2,000 Christians have just passed through Mandelbaum Gate into the Old City of Jerusalem, which is in Jordanian territory, and then of course they will be making their pilgrimage to nearby Bethlehem. .

The sign right across the road from our home, pointing southward, reads: "Ramat Rachel (the Hill of Rachel) 1700 meters" -- or just over one mile distant. At this high elevation is located one of Israel's border outposts, a "kibbutz," communal agricultural colony, and as one strolls through it to reach the spot where a splendid panoramic view of Bethlehem is afforded, a statue depicting Rachel and her children attracts attention, reminding us of the precious promise of Jeremiah 31:15-17 -- (Matt. 2:17, 18).

A number of times we have taken this walk (which always calls to mind the experience the disciples had on the road to Emmaus), and each time we have reached Ramat Rachel we have wondered at just what spot the shepherds were located nineteen centuries ago when they heard the glorious angelic throng singing their hallelujahs at the birth of the babe Jesus, the destined Savior of the world. If Edersheim is correct, the shepherds who beheld the heavenly host and heard those golden voices were not mere ordinary shepherds but rather shepherds on Migdal Eder ("tower of Eder") south of Jerusalem, who watched over flocks which were intended for Temple sacrifices. If so, these shepherds would speak of the things they had seen and heard concerning the Infant Child to *all* around, and especially in the Temple (Luke 2:17, 18), for truly here in Bethlehem was born "that Great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20) -- veritably, the "Tower of the flock" - Micah 4:8.

You will be interested to learn that the five brethren from America who are in Israel now for prolonged stays will assemble in our home during this Christmas week end, and we will take this walk together, God willing, although we realize that Jesus' birth probably occurred in the month of October.

Before the establishment of the State of Israel, it was the custom of Christians to annually gather in the hills around Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, with shepherds and their flocks, for the purpose of singing hosannas to the Highest in commemoration of the great event that took place there so many centuries ago. Now the Arabs do not permit this custom.

The name of Jesus still comes *to* the fore here. Recently the press stated that the life of Jesus will be filmed in this land commencing late next year. The Hollywood director George Stevens has been engaged to produce the film based on Fulton Oursler's book, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, depicting the life of Jesus.

An interesting sidelight in connection with this festive season of the year is the following announcement that appeared in *The Jerusalem Post*: "Christmas trees will be sold by the Haifa Municipality for £3.000 (\$1.65), which includes cost of delivering the tree to the customer's door. Interested persons may apply at the Haifa Town Hall, Room 403, until 1:00 P.M. December 21st."

Even though we ourselves do not get excited about all the frills and trappings used in America and elsewhere to build up the holiday spirit, we think this was a thoughtful gesture on the part of the Mayor of Haifa and the city council. Incidentally, there are several Jewish printing firms in Israel that produce lovely Christmas greeting cards.

Tomorrow afternoon a special Christmas message will be delivered on Kol Israel, the national radio station, by the well-known Protestant minister in Jerusalem, William Hull, author of the book, *The Fall and Rise of Israel*. Special ads have appeared in the daily newspapers featuring Christmas church services, there has been a Christmas oratorio musical program at the majestic Y.M.C.A. building here in Jerusalem, and tomorrow there will be a carol sing there. So all in all, Christmas has not been totally ignored here in the Jewish State as some Gentiles who have never been in the Land of Promise may imagine.

THE GLAD TIDINGS IN PRINT

The other day we visited the Evangelical Bible Book Store in Jerusalem, and in looking over their supply of published Scriptures found that they had the New Testament available in twenty-two languages. The Hebrew edition is beautifully printed, in very readable type, well-bound, and sells for the unbelievably low price of 680. A similarly printed Arabic rendering of the New Testament Scriptures sells for even less. And a complete English Bible, containing both the Old and New Testaments, is sold for well under \$1.00. We were very happy to see the Word of God made available to the people in this land at such a nominal cost.

Among other things, we note that *The Jerusalem Post* carries regularly an advertisement publicizing the weekly gatherings of the Israel Messianic Assembly, a group of Jews who believe in Jesus' Messiahship and who hold services weekly at the Y.M.C.A. We might add that we have practically weekly contacts here with believers in Jesus the Messiah.

"ONE OF A CITY, TWO OF A FAMILY"

An immigration movement is now under way that is of great significance. In recent weeks there has been a large influx of Jews coming to the Land of Promise from Eastern Europe. This immigration wave is of such proportions that the Israel Government has found it necessary to launch a special immigration loan and they are appealing to the inhabitants of the nation to subscribe £20,000,000 (\$11,000,000) for this emergency absorption program in the initial financial effort.

Here are a few samples of the news items that appear from day to day regarding the arrivals:

"The largest single group of newcomers to arrive in Israel in recent months from Eastern Europe - - 456 immigrants, mostly from Romania -- reached Haifa in the S.S. *Artsa*. Many were met at the

port by relatives. Permanent housing has been made ready for all newcomers in development areas, villages, and 'kibbutzim' in various parts of Israel, but some prefer to join relatives in town. A number of professionals among the immigrants were taken to (lovely) Tivon where they will live in temporary quarters until they find work in their field."

A later dispatch reads: "Over 500 immigrants arrived in Haifa on Thursday, most of them from Eastern Europe. Some 100 boarded the S.S. *Israel* in Italy. In the late afternoon the S.S. *Artsa* brought another 400 immigrants. They are remaining on board until early Friday morning when they will be taken to development areas."

And the most recent immigration news release states: "One thousand fifty-nine immigrants, the majority of them from Eastern Europe, arrived in Israel by air during the past week."

In contrast with the Jews of Morocco, Iraq and other backward countries, who have come to Israel in large numbers, the Jews now coming from Eastern Europe are skilled workers and much better educated. They will make a vital contribution to the upbuilding of the nation and help greatly in raising the standards.

A couple of days ago we spoke to a Polish Jewish merchant who operates a grocery store in the heart of Jerusalem and who has been living in this country for many years. He was telling us of his contacts with the Jews who have recently reached Israel from his former homeland. In the case of his family, he informed us that out of approximately 200 members only one other survived -- his sister; "all the rest were exterminated by either the Nazis or the Bolsheviks." So the Scripture in Jeremiah 3:14 is truly being graphically fulfilled in our time, for they are coming here "one of a city, and two of a family."

To help facilitate the settlement of the thousands of Jews who are arriving from Eastern Europe, the United Jewish Appeal National Conference of 1,200 community leaders from all parts of the U. S., held in New York City, recently resolved to establish a special \$100,000,000 fund for the reception and absorption of immigrants to Israel. This fund will be in addition to the regular 1959 drive for normal UJA purposes, of \$105,000,000.

David Ben-Gurion, the Prime Minister of Israel, fired with the vision of his people's deliverance, has just stated: "I feel that this coming decade will witness a second miracle of our era--the miracle of the redemption of the Jews from the countries where they are doomed to destruction. This miracle will not be less important than that of the establishment of the State."

The Prime Minister began his speech with some indicative figures: "Over 2,400 Jews from 36 different countries had arrived in Israel during November, over 1,000 of them from a European country -- which shall remain nameless -- and over 3,000 more Jews in that country have received passports for their imminent immigration to Israel," he reported. Over 900 of these newcomers will be young people under 18.

Mr. Ben-Gurion pointed out that only about 15170 of the Jewish people of the world live in Israel, and that only one-third of the country is settled. He warned that leaving large parts of the country under-populated endangers Israel's very existence in the long run.

In an editorial comment in one of Israel's daily newspapers, the following observation is made:

"How should the integration process work? Ideally a country should absorb immigrants only at a pace which should enable them to fit smoothly into the framework of the receiving society.

Houses should be there for them to rent when they arrive, jobs must be neither scarce nor unfamiliar, and there should be good friends and neighbors to smooth over the initial roughness. Israel has never yet been in a position to indulge in this natural absorptive process. If the last rap of the mason's trowel and the last rap of the carpenter's hammer fixing the roof is the music of greeting that welcomes a new immigrant to his village, then we congratulate ourselves on an almost miraculous achievement. Housing, employment, and fitting -- in have lagged very far behind arrival for most of our newcomers; this fact is forced upon us by an incredible mass immigration."

RINGED BY ENEMIES

As in the days of Joshua, when the Lord commanded the children of Israel to take possession of the land, conflict and bloodshed also accompanied the fulfillment of the Divine purpose regarding the posterity of Jacob in the second return, described in detail in the Book of Nehemiah. And we have a parallel situation in the Land of Promise today. The recent merciless shelling of the agricultural settlements in the northern part of Israel by the Syrian Army, where at least a half-million-dollars worth of property damage was inflicted, has the same overtones as related in the historical account concerning Israel's second return 2,500 years ago.

What is it like in Israel when one of these serious incidents or bombardments occurs? The newspaper headlines in London, New York, and other cities of the world blare forth the news concerning the military operation, and naturally readers of these papers take it for granted that the people in Israel are very tense and fearful. But to the contrary, this is not actually the case. The blasting of the agricultural settlements by the Syrian armed forces was not taken lightly by the Government or the citizens of the Jewish State, yet it is surprising what calmness and spirit of confidence prevailed among the people. One cannot help but think of what the Lord told Joshua: "Be strong and of good courage." - Joshua 1:6.

So, in sizing up the situation, we find that the conditions under which the children of Israel are occupying the land today are little different from those that existed in Joshua's time, or in Nehemiah's day. The fact that Israel is experiencing trouble is no sure sign of the Lord's disfavor, for if it were, then we would have to use the same reasoning in connection with the previous returns to the land by the exiled Jews. - See Nehemiah 4.

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR RULE OF LAW

It will be of genuine interest to the brethren to know that at the first International Lawyers' Convention held in Israel (in 1958), David Ben-Gurion, in a message to the conference, listed three Hebraic doctrines which lie at the basis of the rule of law: (1) "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (2) "One law and one statute shall be for you and for the stranger that lives among you." (3) "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more."

"If these three supreme laws are adopted by the legislatures of all peoples," Mr. Ben-Gurion continued, "and if the U.N. succeeds in establishing them in the relations between the nations, the world will be delivered from the danger of ruin and destruction, and the relations between man and his fellow, and between each nation and its neighbors, will be established on foundations of peace and justice.

"It is good that now in these days of world confusion and anxiety, there should go forth from jurists of many nations, assembled in the Holy City, the call of Micah: 'It has been told thee, O

man,, what is good, and what the Lord requires of thee: only to deal justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.'

ISAIAH CRIES OUT

During the past four months we have been able to see the famous Dead Sea Scrolls a couple of times. These scrolls are now on display in a special vault room located in the new Administration building of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. We call to mind the Passover Season of 1955 when we first beheld the display of the ancient unrolled Isaiah scroll, purported to be 2,000 years old, and took special note of the printed card that was placed beneath it. On it the scholars had stated, in both Hebrew and English, words to the following effect:

"Upon close examination it has been found that this ancient scroll hardly varies from the Masoretic text -- or the Book of Isaiah as we have it in our Bibles." This is a great testimony to God's faithfulness -- a proof of Divine providence in the preservation of the text of Isaiah through the *many* centuries:

This revelation has been a great blow to modernists, and also to those who were so prone to apply to the nation of Israel the passages of this major prophetic writing that deal so extensively with the coming *of* the Messiah, the 53rd chapter in particular.

It is indeed very significant that eleven years ago, before the founding of the State of Israel, this very old scroll of Isaiah was discovered, instead of one of the other prophetic books. And so in various ways the Lord is speaking to the children of Israel today, and truly he will select -- "according to his heart" -- shepherds, or pastors, to enlighten them, as he promised.

The Question Box

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." - Isaiah 7:14.

Question:

What is the lesson to be drawn from Isaiah 7:14?

Answer:

The lesson, as I see it, is in reference to the birth of Jesus -- a lesson concerning the great Messiah; a lesson for all times and for all people.

DUAL FULFILMENTS

Some prophecies, however, have more than one fulfillment. Isaiah 7:14 is one such. Failure to recognize this constitutes one of the main difficulties confronting the student of prophecy. One school of thought notes an early application, but is not able to see a later (usually higher) fulfillment. This is particularly true of orthodox Jews-and perhaps especially in their understanding of Isaiah 7:14. Another school of thought, Christian in concept, sees the higher fulfillment, but is not always able to recognize any earlier application.

In the study of any prophecy having, or which appears to possess, a predictive* character, it is important to obtain first an understanding of its immediate application; in other words, it is necessary to ascertain what it meant to the writer and those to whom he wrote. What was its meaning to *them*? Only after *this* question has been satisfactorily answered are we in a position to properly grasp the later application (or applications).

* While all prophecies "tell forth," not all "foretell."

Let us look at a few illustrations of this. Consider, for example, Hosea 11:1. There we read: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." Quite obviously, this has reference to the infant nation of Israel and its deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh. No orthodox Jew could fail to recognize this. Yet Christians, under the guidance of the New Testament, see that it has reference not only to the coming of Israel out of Egypt, but also to the coming of Jesus out of Egypt centuries later. (Matt. 2:15, 19, 20.) Moreover, guided by the holy spirit, the passage is seen by Christians to have yet another significance -the coming of spiritual Israel (the Gospel-Age Church) out of that which Egypt typifies, namely, the world (its aims, ambitions, associations, spirit).

Again, when David, in Psalm 22, wrote: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" he was without doubt writing concerning himself. Most people, unacquainted with the New Testament, could come to no other conclusion. Yet *we* know that the Lord was overruling David's choice of words so as to make him speak prophetically of the Messiah who was to come. - Matt. 27:46.

Take the words of Isaiah 61:1:

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings." Here Isaiah, of course, could have reference only to himself and his ministry. But he was a prophet through whom God spoke. (2 Pet. 1:21.) Consequently his words were such that they

could be predictive. Jesus himself shows that they were, when in Luke 4:21, he applied them to himself and his ministry: "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." While, therefore, we know that there was *a measure* of fulfillment in Isaiah and his ministry, it is not difficult for us to recognize that only in Jesus are the words filled to the full.

JESUS BORN OF A VIRGIN

Returning now to Isaiah 7:14: As already noted, this prophecy appears to have had a dual fulfillment. It foretold an event shortly to occur, namely the birth of a son to a woman who was then a virgin, and the birth of whose son, therefore, could be known only to God; hence an event which could be recognized by King Ahaz as a sign that God would be with him and with the nation. The words employed in the prophecy, however, were such that they described also a future glorious event, even the birth of Jesus of a woman who should appropriately be called *the* virgin, and who should remain so at the time of his birth. If the name Immanuel (God with us) was appropriately given to the boy in Isaiah's day, how much more fittingly might it be given to Jesus! He filled the prediction full. At the time of his birth, Mary, his mother, was a virgin, and he had no earthly father -- Joseph being his foster father. As the angel Gabriel, in answer to Mary's question as to how it could be that she should have a son in view of the fact that she was a virgin, replied (RSV): "The holy spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." - Luke 1:35.

CORROBORATIVE SCRIPTURE

When we meditate for a moment on the virgin birth of Jesus, many corroborative Scriptures come rushing to mind. We recall, for example, the Baptist's testimony recorded in John 3:31: "He that cometh, from above is above all; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth; he that cometh from heaven is above all." Here the Baptist is contrasting himself with Jesus. How shall he find appropriate words! "After the flesh" he was his cousin, yet it is evident that he regards Jesus as a being of another order, as standing on quite a different platform from his own. He can find no words strong enough to mark the difference between himself and Jesus. Jesus is "from above" -- "from heaven." I am "of the earth," and "speak of the earth." Jesus said of him that he was a burning and a shining light; John, however, knew himself to be unworthy to loose the Lord's shoe-latchet. While the Baptist is not discussing the "virgin birth," his words certainly do not conflict with that doctrine.

Let us look next at the disciples' words found in John 16:19, 30: "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb [parable] ... now we are sure that thou camest forth from God."

These words were the response of the disciples to a very clear utterance of our Lord, to which he had given expression in the immediately preceding verse: "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father." Of what other member of the human race could these words be truthfully spoken?

But "the time would fail me" to list all the Scriptures which come to mind. Peter's reference to "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19) -- surely this would require a virgin birth! Job's inquiry: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" (Job 14: 4)-a question which had only a negative answer in his day. The description of our Lord given by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that Jesus was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"; the Apostle John's reference to Jesus as the "only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14); as the "Word of God" (John 1:1); the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14); St. Paul telling us of one who "though being in God's form yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God" (Phil. 2:6); who "was rich, but for our sakes became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9) these all mark Jesus as one apart, who though he took our human nature, and though he was in all points tempted as we (his brethren) are tempted, was "yet without sin." Heb. 4:15.

In writing a biography, it is customary to trace a man's career "from the cradle to the grave." In the case of Jesus one must go back further than the cradle and continue on beyond the grave. One must go back "to the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14) to find the origin of the "Only Begotten One," (John 1:14) the "Firstborn of all creation." (Col. 1:15.) Only from *that* beginning may we trace the circumstances whereby a clean thing was brought out of an unclean -- a root out of a dry ground; a perfect man out of the imperfect, contaminate race. This was accomplished by a miracle. The mighty Logos became flesh -- being born of a virgin.

WHY IS THE DOCTRINE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH IMPORTANT?

The doctrine that Jesus was born of a virgin, rightly understood, is of great importance to both the Church and the world. Had Jesus derived his life from an earthly father, the quality of that life would have been no different from ours. Ours was contaminated at the fountainhead, *in* Father Adam. So also would have been the life of Jesus. It would have been a dying one, just as ours. Receiving only such a life, he would have been on his way, willy-nilly, to the grave -- just as we are. His death would not have been a voluntary one, but one from which he could not escape. He would thus have been without power to save us; he would not have had the wherewithal to save even himself.

But when, in the fulness of the time, God sent forth his Son made of a woman (Gal. 4:4), it was not a case of an earthly father passing on to him a spark of a dying life. No, indeed! It was as Jesus himself declared: "I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me." - John 8:42.

An inspired writer puts the matter succinctly: "Such an high priest *became us*"; that is to say, such an high priest was appropriate to the necessities of our case; namely, one who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). Only such an one as he could have saved us. Praise God that he and his Father had the heart to do so.

EMMANUEL - GOD WITH US

This is the great message of the New Testament to the Church, and eventually to the world: Emmanuel, God with us. God was with his ancient people, and spoke to them often and unmistakably by the mouth of his Prophets. He was there in the burning bush, in the Shekinah of the tabernacle, and in the pillar of cloud and of fire, as well as in the Angel of Jehovah, whom many believe was the pre-human Logos. But he came into new and closer relationship when he sent his Son, and when he, the mighty Logos, became flesh. Jesus Christ was "God made manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16); he was so true and adequate a manifestation of God; so at one with the Father (in purpose and in spirit-not in person) that he could truthfully say: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (John 14:9.) This was a fulfillment of the prophecy, "God with us," indeed -- nay, it was *the* fulfillment, before which the earlier one fades into relative insignificance.

"God is with us" in the life of the Church, for Jesus laid its foundations in his blood, and became himself its cornerstone and the bishop of our souls. "God is with us" in our personal experiences, for Christ Jesus is our Brother and Savior, our refuge under the consciousness of sin, our strength in temptations, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, with the Psalmist we say "We will not fear," whatever may be our present lot, and whatever may befall us. "God is with us" under our present burden, and in the unknown events of the future. "God is with us" *in* life, in death, in time, and in eternity. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me." "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." - Psalms 23, 46, 73.

- P. L. Read.

Faith for Today

"Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" - Luke 18:8.

THE purpose of the parable which opens this chapter is to teach the lesson "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." To this end Jesus used the story of a judge who after long refusals finally heeded a widow's pleas. The heavenly judge is like the unjust judge in that he delays justice; but not like him in being "unjust," or in his motive for the delaying of justice.

This parable was much needed in our Lord's day, for the rabbis had taught, Dummelow says, "that God must not be fatigued by too frequent prayer. Three times a day was enough. 'If a man comes to address you every hour, you say that he holds you cheap: the same is true of God, whom no man ought to fatigue by praying every hour.'" This false teaching was doubtless offset by this parable for many of Jesus' hearers; but it was meant especially for our day, for Jesus so indicates in his application of it in the text quoted above. This remark was introduced by a "nevertheless," indicating that not all in our day would profit by Christ's teaching on this point.

Faithfulness in prayer, which is both a privilege and a duty, is taught by comparison and contrast in this parable.

"This widow was *a stranger*, nothing related to the judge; but God's praying people are his own elect, whom he knows, and loves, and delights in, and has always concerned himself for. She was but *one*, but the praying people of God are *many*, all of whom come to him on the same errand, and agree to ask what they need. (Matt. 18:19.) ... She came to *a judge* that bid her *keep her distance*; we come to *a Father* that bids us *come boldly* to him, and teaches us to cry, *Abba, Father*. She came to an *unjust judge*; we come to a *righteous Father* (John 17:25), one that regards his own glory and the comforts of his poor creatures, especially those in distress, as *widows* and *fatherless*. She came to this judge purely upon her own account; but God is himself engaged in the cause which we are soliciting; and we can say, *Arise, O Lord, plead thine own cause*; and *what wilt thou do to thy great name*? She had no friend to speak for her, to add force to her petition, and to use interest for her more than her own; but we have an *Advocate with the Father*, his own Son, who *ever lives to make intercession* for us, and has a powerful prevailing interest in heaven. She had no promise of speeding, no, nor any encouragement given her to ask; but we have the golden sceptre held out to us, are bid to ask, and it is promised that it shall be given to us. She could have access to the judge only at some certain times; but we may cry to God *day and night*, at all hours, and therefore may the rather hope to prevail by importunity. Her importunity was provoking to the judge, and she might fear lest it should set him more against her; but our importunity is pleasing to God; the prayer of the upright is *his delight*, and therefore, we *may* hope, shall avail much, if it be an effectual fervent *prayer*." - *Matthew Henry*.

The parable supposes that all God's people are praying people. Doubt on that point is not suggested, but the parable warns that some would grow weary of leaving their affairs in God's hands (Luke 18:1), and the application of verse 8 points the finger of warning at us who live in the day of the Lord's return, and inquires, "Are you faithfully praying, 'Lead thou me on'; or have some of you returned to the old days when you 'loved to choose and *see* the path'?" At least that is the purport of some translations. That lesson of the parable needs to be taken sincerely to heart.

Another of Jesus' parables, that of the sparrows and the falling hair, was given that all might be assured that our heavenly Father is not like the "unjust judge" who feared this widow might "stun" him with the blows of her continual attack. Instead, the heavenly judge has his ear open to the cries of "his own elect," coming up to him "day and night." It is by his invitation, amplified and exemplified by our Lord and his messengers, that they are thus persistent. (See Isa. 62:6, 7; 1 Chron. 16:11; Eph.

6:18; etc.) The clause, "though he bear long with them," found in the seventh verse (Luke 18:7), others render so as to give the thought of patience as regards the world and the Church. *Douay*: "Will he have patience in their regard?" *Riverside*: "Will not God do justice for his elect, who are calling to him day and night, even though he is long-suffering with their adversaries?" *Twentieth Century*: "Will not God see that his own chosen people, who cry to him night and day, have justice done them while he bears with their impatience?" *Clark* sees in it the thought of compassion. Those who accept the invitation to come freely to the throne of grace find none of these thoughts out of harmony with their experience. The renderings of the *Revised Versions*, in the text and in the margin, are also verified in their experience: "He is long-suffering over them," and "He is slow to punish on their behalf," as he was slow to punish typical Egypt though Israel cried to him day and night. Since all these thoughts are valuable to the new creature, it would not be unwarranted to think that the Lord has left the scholars in doubt that we might have in one short clause all these truths.

A contrast is found in the next sentence where we are assured "he will avenge them speedily." Here are two events, stated in the order of their occurrence -- two thousand years of being "slow to punish on their behalf"; but the judge "will avenge them speedily" when the Kingdom has arrived, and he takes his power. The arrival of this Judge upon the scene is heralded by "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation," reminding one of the avenging of "all the righteous blood shed from Abel to Zachariah" upon the generation in Jerusalem in the year A. D. 70 -- a time of trouble that will destroy all institutions in opposition to his Kingdom, a trouble so severe that except for its being cut short there would be no flesh saved. In fact there is no intimation of *any* individual being saved out of it except those who seek meekness and righteousness--those in harmony with the class the widow of the parable represents.

No one who knows the compassionate heart of our God can suppose that the tribulations of either A.D. 70 or recent years on "his chosen people," natural Israel, were mere vindictiveness. Rather, such recognize this as God's bearing long with them and their adversaries, and by faith's vision they see a new covenant to be established with them, made necessary by past failures, but assuring that this time "he will speedily do them justice." However, since the context indicates that Jesus was addressing this discourse to his disciples, and had previously been warning them to expect opposition (Luke 17:1, 2), at least the principal application of it must be anticipated in the experiences of the disciples, "when the Son of man comes." But the question Jesus asks is not a logical one to connect with the parable, nor does it seem appropriate to address to those who will at that time be so faithful as to draw down persecution on their heads--if the King James rendering is the best one: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" As regards the world in general and lukewarm Christians in particular, this is indeed a very proper question, and the negative answer implied is clearly taught in other Scriptures, as for instance, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." (Matt. 24:12.) For those who are faithful to the Lord and the Word, there is, however, a much more valuable and more helpful translation of Luke 18:8, in the *Diaglott* rendering: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find *this* belief on the earth?" *Rotherham*, by a footnote, gives the same rendering: "I tell you he will execute their vindication, quickly! Nevertheless though the Son of Man do come will he, after all, find *this* faith on the earth?" Will the Christians of that time manifest their faith in the Lord by being willing to leave to him the time and method of vindicating their name; will they be willing to be spoken against "as evil doers," knowing that in his due time the maligners "shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead; believing, too, his assurance that these same individuals will many of them some day praise God on their behalf. (1 Peter 2:12; 4:5.) (The use of "this" in the *Diaglott* translation is justified by many passages in the *King James Version*, such as Matthew 14:15; 15:12; etc.) The *Variorum Bible* cites J. B. McLennan and F. Godet as favoring this translation.

Barnes comments: "Though this is true that God will avenge his elect, yet will he find his elect *faithful*? The danger is not that *God will* be unfaithful--he will surely be true to his promises; but the danger is that his elect--his afflicted people--will be discouraged; will not persevere in prayer; will not continue to have confidence in him; and will, under heavy trials, sink into despondency. The sole

meaning of this phrase, therefore, is, that *there is more danger that his people would grow weary, than that God would be found unfaithful and fail to avenge his elect*. For this cause Christ spoke the parable, and by the *design* of the parable this passage is to be interpreted.... There is a close connection in what Christ says, and it should be understood as referring to what he said before. The truth that he had been teaching was that God would deliver his people from their calamities and save them, though he suffered them to be long tried. He asks them here whether, when he came, he should find *this faith*, or a belief of *this truth*, among his followers? Would they be found persevering in prayer, and *believing* that God would yet avenge them; or would they cease to pray *always*, and *faint*?"

The comment of *Ellicott* is similar: "The English, which suggests the thought that God bears with, i.e., tolerates his elect, is misleading. What is meant is, that he shows himself *slow to anger 'over them,' i.e.*, where they are concerned. They implore that 'longsuffering' for themselves. They are tempted to murmur when it is extended to others. (2 Pet. 3:9.) ... The question implies, it is obvious, an answer in the negative. When St. Luke wrote his Gospel, men were witnessing a primary, though partial, fulfillment of the prophecy. Iniquity was abounding, and the love of many was waxing cold. And yet in one sense he was near, even at the doors (James 5:8, 9), when men thought that the wheels of his chariot drove slowly. So has it been, and so will it be, in the great 'days of the Lord' in the Church's history, which are preludes of the final Advent; so shall it be in that Advent itself. The Greek noun for 'faith' has the article, possibly as implying the special kind of faith of which the Parable of the Widow had been an illustration."

"Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord." (Heb. 10:30.) "The word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward." (Heb. 2:2.) "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." "We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a *manifest token* of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer." (2 Thess. 1:4-8.) Let us then if we have the privilege of suffering for righteousness' sake, or are companions of those that are so used, rightly evaluate our experience, "*rejoicing* that we are *counted worthy* to suffer shame for his name." (Acts 5:41.) "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye *take it patiently*, this is acceptable with God." (1 Peter 2:20.) "If ye suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled." "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are ye." - 1 Peter 3:14; 4:14.

- P. E. Thomson.

*Zion stands with hills surrounded --
Zion, kept by Power Divine;
All her foes shall be confounded,
Though the world in arms combine.
Happy Zion!*

*What a favored lot is thine!
In the furnace God may prove thee,
Thence to bring thee forth more bright,
But will never cease to love thee,
Thou art precious in His sight.
God is with thee --
God, thine everlasting Light!*

Recently Deceased

Sr. Josephine Boyce, Lake Mills, Wis. - (Dec.)

Bro. Wm. K. Brewer, Detroit, Mich. - (Nov.)

Sr. Lena Clement, Winnipeg, Man. - (Dec.)

Sr. Cora B. Fiss, E. St. Louis, Ill. - (Dec.)

Sr. Frances Glinkman, Chicago, Ill. - (Dec.)

Sr. Fanny R. Newell, Kirkwood, Mo. - (Jan.)

Sr. Mary E. St. Aubin, St. Louis, Mo. - (Jan.)

Bro. H. Silloway, Benton Harbor, Mich. - (Oct.)

Bro. Isaac H. Tate, Marianna, Ark. - (Dec.)

Bro. Edward M. Whan, Miami, Fla. - (Dec.)