

The Herald Of Christ's Kingdom

March/April 2002

Words from the Cross

In the Beginning

A man's last words are among the truest marks of his character. Frequently they leave behind a legacy for his sorrowing loved ones—one of memories most treasured resting places, and a source of comfort and consolation in time of loss.

This was true also of Jesus of Nazareth. Dying with the incomparable agony of the cross, he uttered his last expressions, often called "The Seven Words from the Cross." In fact, it is debatable whether there were six or seven different expressions, since the first of these—"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"—is not found in several of the oldest manuscripts.

Whatever the value of that discussion, this issue of The Herald examines each of these expressions in detail. The seven last words have been condensed as follows:

- "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."
- "Verily, I say unto thee, thou shalt be with me in paradise."
- "Woman, behold thy son . . . behold thy mother."
- "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me."
- "I thirst."
- "It is finished."
- "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit."

These final utterances of the Savior run the gamut of emotion from personal need, to thoughtful care for others, to a triumphant report that he had completed the work he was sent to do and was ready to commit the final judgment to his heavenly Father.

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As once again the season comes around when Christians contemplate the life and sacrificial death of Jesus of Nazareth, these words are especially meaningful. We are pleased to submit them to our readers as an aid in the Memorial mediations.

Father, Forgive Them, For They Know Not What They Do

The Preaching of the Cross

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!—Romans 11:33

The perfection of Jesus during his earthly ministry can be shown in many ways. From his physical stature and abilities to his perfect mental capacity, to the beauty of his words and truth of his teachings, he epitomized in every aspect of life that which represented human perfection, that which has been found in no other individual since Adam prior to his falling into sin. Not the least of the evidences of his perfection is how he conducted himself during times of great difficulty and trial. We need look no further than those hours surrounding his crucifixion and ultimate death to gain an appreciation of this aspect of his perfect character. During this time, both the physical and mental anguish of Jesus must have been at an extreme level. Although he had witnessed these things in man's experience with sin, suffering and death for over four thousand years during his pre-human existence as the Logos, yet he had never gone through this type of experience himself since his creation as the only begotten son of God. As much as he could have prepared himself mentally and emotionally for this experience, he could never have had a full appreciation of it until it actually came upon him.

As we contemplate and meditate upon Jesus' experience of crucifixion and death, it would seem to the human mind that during those hours upon the cross he would be focusing attention on his own plight, desperately trying to deal with the physical pain, attempting to keep a sense of sanity in his thoughts, caring little if at all about the people around him, perhaps even holding in contempt and condemnation those who were committing this act of murder against him. A general focus on self would seem to be the rule most would expect to see in someone placed in such a situation. However, what we see in Jesus upon the cross was just the opposite of all these things. He did not focus on self, his pain, anguish, or any such thing. He did not feel sorry for himself in any sense of the word. In the perfection of his thoughts, he in fact found that to focus on others, not himself, brought a sense of peace, comfort, and resolve that could not be attained in any other way. This aspect of his perfect character enabled him to be faithful "even unto the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). In harmony with this we see that upon the cross, Jesus, in various ways, actually ministered to those around him and to us, giving lessons of love, hope, and comfort. Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:18 called this "the preaching [logos: word or message] of the cross," and that to those properly exercised thereby it would be "the power of God." Although the actual recorded words of Jesus while on the cross are few compared to that of his prior ministry, yet in each one we find a sermon, a vital lesson that we each should take to heart and apply in ourselves.

Did Jesus Say These Words?

One such lesson from the cross is conveyed in the words of Jesus as recorded in Luke 23:34, "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." There is some uncertainty as to whether these words were actually contained in the earliest manuscripts. Although numerous translations include these words as part of the text, both the Revised Standard Version as well as Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott omit them. Regardless, however, of the authenticity of these exact words, the accuracy of their sentiment and teaching is indisputable. We can be certain that Jesus' attitude was one of forgiveness, not condemnation, and that he further counted that what had been done to him was out of a large measure of ignorance, not full knowledge—"they know not what they do." How can we be so sure that these sentiments, whether actually spoken or not, were accurate representations of Jesus' thoughts in this experience? Our proof lies in Jesus' own teachings found in many other places in the gospels as well as the writings of the apostles, all of which support the thoughts contained in the verse under consideration. The verse suggests two lines of thought: first, that of forgiveness toward those who had part in this act of murder; and second, the merciful verdict of ignorance directed toward the same individuals for what they had done. Both these lessons are important, and are amply dealt with throughout the Bible.

The Grace of Forgiveness

Looking first at the phrase "Forgive them," we see that the teaching of forgiveness is of paramount importance in the Scriptures. It is, in fact, a measure of the development of love in the heart of each of God's people. Forgiveness is vital and must become a part of our character, or, quite simply, we will not be found faithful. Jesus in his model prayer said, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). However, after concluding the prayer, he continues his thoughts on the importance of forgiveness, saying, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14,15). Here Jesus lays the matter squarely before us. By nature we are sinners, and the only way we can obtain a standing before God is through his forgiveness of our sins through the merit of Jesus' sacrifice. By our full faith in that merit, and through absolutely no righteousness of our own, God forgives us of our inherited sins and weaknesses, so that we can have a standing before him as "sons." Even after being "justified by faith" (Romans 5:1), we are not actually perfect, but must continue to approach God daily in prayer seeking forgiveness for those things that are amiss in our lives. In short, without God's forgiveness manifested on our behalf, we could have no relationship with him whatsoever. In his words to us, Jesus states that if we are not forgiving toward others, God will not forgive us, hence leaving us with no standing before him at all. Such is the necessity of the grace of forgiveness. It was present in Jesus, and it must be found in us as well.

But do we forgive simply from a motivation of necessity, a feeling that if we don't forgive God won't forgive us? We trust such is not the case with any of the Lord's truly consecrated, for such a motivation is not acceptable to God. True forgiveness must have

as its source a sincere attitude of self-less love. It acts upon a heartfelt desire to truly show love and compassion to others, regardless of the words, acts, or deeds they have committed against us. In addition to Jesus, we believe such was the attitude of the deacon Stephen. As he was being stoned to death by an angry mob of Jews, we read: "And he [Stephen] kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). Only forgiveness grown out of a true Godlike character of love could have prompted such words.

Truly, Jesus' "preaching" of forgiveness upon the cross was an evidence of his own development of love, even for his enemies, and serves as a continuing example to us today. We must develop this highest aspect of love, which Jesus described in his sermon on the mount: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust . . . Be ye therefore perfect [complete], even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-45,48).

"They Know Not What They Do"

The second part of Jesus message, "for they know not what they do," shows us another aspect of love, that being the quality of mercy. Additionally, we find in these words God's great wisdom in his reckoning of the Jews' responsibility regarding Jesus' death. Although the Jewish leaders themselves stated, "his blood be upon our shoulders," and seemingly took full responsibility for his crucifixion and death, God and Jesus both realized that they truly did not understand what they said, neither did they understand who Jesus really was. God, in his great mercy, had allowed their spiritual eyes to become blinded by the great adversary; God knew they were not in a sufficiently right heart condition to receive his son at that time. What seemed then to be a victory by Satan was in fact nothing less than the great mercy and wisdom of God. Shortly after the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter confirmed this. When speaking of the death of Jesus, he says: "And now, brethren, I wot [know] that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3:17). The apostle Paul speaks similarly concerning the nation of Israel and God's view toward them at that time: "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all" (Romans 11:32).

Through the prophet God said, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). By reckoning the crucifixion of Jesus as being done largely through ignorance and not a willful act with full knowledge, we see the wisdom of God's "higher" ways. God does not judge any individual or group of individuals of his human creation unless and until he sees that they have had a full and complete opportunity, with knowledge, to carry out his will faithfully in their life. He knows that because of the influence of Satan upon fallen mankind for the past six thousand years, they have not been in a position to be fully accountable for their thoughts, words, and actions. That is the reason for the coming

kingdom. Then Satan will be bound, unable to have any influence over man. The full light of truth will shine forth as never before in the earth, illuminating man's mind in a way that has not been possible heretofore. Only when these things occur, and man is given a sufficient period of time to learn and develop a heart and mind in harmony with God's plans and purposes, will he be held fully accountable for his character and actions. This time of full light and understanding is described by the prophet Isaiah: "And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering [separation from God's favor] cast over all people, and the veil [of ignorance] that is spread over all nations" (Isaiah 25:7).

The Example Jesus Left

The lesson of Luke 23:34 not only illustrates the perfect character of Jesus and his heavenly Father, but it also gives us great insight into how God's plan is based so fully on the harmonious working of his attributes of love, justice, wisdom, and power. Jesus' "preaching of the cross" provides us, his footstep followers, with an unparalleled example of how we should respond to our own experiences of a similar nature. We, like Jesus, are bearing a cross. We are "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). May we display in all our experiences, trials, and testings the same love, the same mercy, the same compassion that he showed in his most severe time of difficulty. By doing this we will be counted as fully "baptized into his death" (Romans 6:3), to then be raised as he was to "glory and honor, and immortality" (Romans 2:7).

On The Other Hand ...

This article carries some lovely sentiments. However, it is predicated on a text of scripture which is acknowledged to be spurious. In our opinion it is dubious to suppose the expressions of this text represent the thoughts of our Lord on the cross.

No doubt in his six hours on the cross he reflected on the better day of the Millennial Kingdom in which his sacrifice would bring all the blessings God intended for mankind, including blessings upon his vilest enemies who plotted the torturous death he was experiencing. But he was also well aware that these enemies were not guiltless tools of the adversary, but were greatly culpable of sin, envy, hatred, and injustice. And he knew that these sins would reap a harvest of bitter punishment in the experiences Judea would pass through in the closing troubles of that nation, just a few years distant.

Further, Jesus was aware this embittered hatred by his enemies also would spawn travesties upon his followers, making their judgment all the more sure. "I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city, that upon you may come all the righteous blood from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation" (Matthew 23:34-36).

Probably Jesus understood that this Zechariah represented himself, and that his dying words, "The LORD look upon it, and require it" (2 Chronicles 24:22), portended the retributive afflictions to come upon Judea and its leaders. Our Master's loving heart moved him to tears as he wept over Jerusalem a few days earlier, knowing of these coming judgments (Luke 19:42-44). But we doubt the Lord, in his closing hours, would have requested his Heavenly Father to spare his enemies that which he knew must justly come.

--David Rice

Thou Shalt Be With Me in Paradise

The Thief in Paradise

Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.—Luke 23:43

Lutz Ruthman

We read in the gospels of Matthew and Mark that those that passed by the cross, the priests, scribes, and elders mocked Jesus, saying "come down from the cross." It was Satan's last effort to tempt Jesus to disobey the Father's will that he give his life as a ransom for all. And we realize that the two malefactors who were crucified with him also mocked him (Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32).

But Luke, speaking of the same event, gives a different report, showing that one of the malefactors defended Jesus as a righteous man who had done nothing amiss. He tells us that this one asked Jesus: "Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

It is true that Luke, who reported this dialogue, was not an eye (or ear) witness to what happened at the cross because he was not one of the apostles who had been with Jesus. Even Matthew and Mark could not have been witnesses of this dialogue at the cross because they both testify to the fact that "all the disciples (including themselves) forsook him, and fled" (Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50).

The apostle John tells us in his gospel that Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary Magdalene, and "the disciple whom he loved" remained at the cross (John 19:25,26). The explanation for this different report may be seen in John's fervent love for his master, who defeated his fear so that he soon came back and stayed with the Lord at the cross (1 John 4:18). All these who remained at the cross and also the centurion and the soldiers became eye (and ear) witnesses about what happened there (Matthew 27:54).

Different Writers, Different Accounts

Although the gospel writers differ, they do not disagree. All four describe the Lord's life and work, but each individually from the viewpoint which seems to him important. Luke has Christ's humanity in mind. In his gospel we see Christ talking with women, Samaritans, custom agents, tax collectors, and "sinners." He is the only one who reported the Lord's parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) and the lost piece of silver, in which the Lord made the point, "I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10). And this seems to be what happened with one of the malefactors facing death at Golgotha.

For Matthew, who had Christ's Messiahship and Mark who had Christ's ministry in mind, this dialogue of the repenting malefactor might not have had the same importance as it had for Luke. Luke realized Jesus' humanity when he in his own painful agony still had a good word of hope for this sinner who showed a contrite heart and humbled himself in the very last moment of his life. It seems that this malefactor at least understood that Jesus would not come down from the cross to save his own life and the life of the malefactor. There was no hope for him to save his life, but how wonderful if in the resurrection of the dead the "king of the Jews" would remember him and his words, spoken to the defense of the Lord. So he set all his hope in the Lord, asking him: "Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!"

Let us notice that he was the only one who raised his voice to defend Jesus against the slanders of the other malefactor, the people, the priests, and scribes. He was the only one who openly confessed, "This man hath done nothing amiss." His cry to the Lord to remember him was answered by Jesus: "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

A Repentant Sinner

We do not think that this man in one moment grasped the "truth" or understood the Lord's sacrificial death. But he began to understand that he had lived an unjust sinful life for which he was being punished. And he saw, on the contrary, that Jesus who, although he had done nothing amiss, was forced to die on the cross as a malefactor. The words of his request suggest that he believed in the resurrection and that Jesus who was called the king of the Jews, would be given a kingdom. So he asked Jesus to remember him whenever he came into his kingdom. It is understandable that he might have expected that such a powerful and notable man was able to do something good for him.

The malefactor is still sleeping in the grave, waiting with all mankind for his resurrection. But Jesus Christ, after he died on the cross was only for three days in the sleep of death (Mark 8:31; Matthew 28:5,6).

After three days he rose again and all power in heaven and on earth was given to him (Matthew 28:18). Christ after his resurrection ascended into heaven to his heavenly Father (John 20:17). We know from the apostle Paul how important is the resurrection of our Lord: "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:17-20).

"Today" in Paradise

We do not know when the malefactor expected to be with Christ, but what we know is that Christ did not tell him he would be with him "today" in paradise. We do not believe that Luke, who had a clear understanding of the resurrection (Luke 24:26), reported the

exact words of Jesus as we read them here. Someone translated these words at a time when the light of truth was not as bright as it is today.

Let us also remember that the original Scriptures had no punctuation as we do. Translators use punctuation in a way they think best. The Scriptures are inspired by God, but the translators are not; they can make mistakes. Because the translator expected Jesus to go to paradise right after he was crucified, he put the comma before "to day" as it is in most Bible translations.

All that Jesus had to say or could say to the malefactor was at that moment, "today," before he died. He assured him "today," in the last moments of his life, that he would be with him in Paradise (in the heavenly Father's appointed time). So if we put the comma after the word "today," it gives a completely different understanding, one that is in harmony with the whole concept of the resurrection and the kingdom. "Verily, I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise."

What did this promise mean? Did Jesus promise him a special blessing before others because of his repentance? We don't think so. When Jesus died on Calvary for the forgiveness of the Adamic sin, his ransom sacrifice included both malefactors, who were crucified with him. He paid the ransom price for all, including sinners. In this sense it is true that both will be with him in paradise. There would be a benefit in the resurrection for the one who repented before he went into the sleep of death because of his changed heart condition. As we understand from his words he began to long for righteousness and he showed mercy to the Lord. We have a proverb that insight (understanding, judgment) is the first step to improvement. So he might have taken the first step to improvement before he went to the grave that the other still must do after his resurrection from the dead.

The Value of Repentance

When Jesus answered him "Thou shalt be with me in paradise," he did not promise him everlasting life in the earthly kingdom because of his words, which showed sincerity and honesty of heart in the very last moment of his life. He promised him what we might call "a second opportunity," one which all mankind will have if they go up the highway of holiness to the condition that Adam had before he sinned. But we may understand that his contrite heart condition and his feeling for righteousness would direct him to faster progress on this "highway of holiness."

In his answer Jesus promised the malefactor to be with him in "paradise." We find this word "paradise" just two more times in the Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 12:4 and Revelation 2:7.

The word "paradise" is of Persian origin and signifies a park or garden. In this meaning it came into the Hebrew as *pardes* and into Greek as *paradeisos*. It is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 2:8, "And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden." The Septuagint reads: "God planted a paradise in Eden." The garden of Eden is a fitting

picture of the condition of the earthly kingdom which is described so wonderfully in Isaiah 35.

When Jesus promised the repentant malefactor "thou shalt be with me in paradise," he pointed to an earthly place. But the Garden of Eden, the paradise, was lost for mankind when Adam sinned and the antitypical "Garden of Eden," the earthly kingdom, was not prepared and still future when Jesus spoke these words. If Jesus had really said, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise," where did they go?

We know all three went from the cross into the grave. The Lord was resurrected after three days, but the two malefactors still sleep in death, waiting for the "resurrection of judgment" (John 5:29, NASV).

We believe that Jesus is present as "King of kings" and that he, who died on the cross for all the malefactors of this world, is preparing the kingdom, the antitypical paradise, that was lost by Adam.

Behold Thy Son ... Behold Thy Mother

A Dying Son Provides for His Mother

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.—John 19:25-27

Leonard Griehs

John is the only gospel writer to record these words from Jesus on the cross. His reference to "the disciple standing by, whom he loved" almost certainly refers to John himself as he used the phrase frequently in his gospel when referring to himself (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7,20,24).

Sometime during the painful dying process, Jesus committed his mother to the care of this loving disciple, John. Despite intense agony, Jesus thought of those who would be left behind.

This lesson is an important one for us as we enter the Memorial season. Our tendency at times to become engrossed in our own trials and difficulties ought to give way to the more important work of being a burden-bearer for others. Our efforts should be especially directed toward the encouragement and blessing of those who in any measure are under our temporal and spiritual care. How often have we noted stalwart brethren who, while on their deathbed, gave encouragement to visitors who had come to cheer them!

Three Marys

Golgotha was a rocky hill about fifteen feet high and about 30 yards from either the west or north of the present Damascus Gate of Jerusalem, depending on which of two possible sites is correct. No stranger could mistake the fact that this was a place of execution because three upright beams (stakes) stood naked against the sky. Sometimes there were more, but never fewer than three. At the top they had been planed down so that the mortises in the crossbeams, carried by the prisoners themselves to the site, would fit across them.

A crowd would have gathered to watch the public execution, but the soldiers normally formed a perimeter line inside the roads and permitted only a small group to come through to Golgotha. Matthew says "many women were there beholding afar off" (Matthew 27:55) while Mark says there were "also women looking on afar off" (Mark 15:40).

John is the only writer to specifically list Mary the mother of Jesus as one of the women who were there. Neither Matthew nor Mark identify her in this way. Mark includes Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome. Matthew lists Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children (John's mother—see Matthew 4:21). Tradition identifies Salome as the wife of Zebedee, although from Scripture we cannot tell whether these two were the same person. It seems consistent that John's mother accompanied Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James to the tomb (Mark 16:1).

"His mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas"

Commentators note that the early copyists of the Latin manuscript from which the Authorized Version was translated erred in inserting an h into the name Cleopas. Modern and marginal translations list Cleopas as the correct rendering in the Greek form or Clopas in the Semitic form. The word "wife" is conjecturally inserted in the text; the original reads, "Mary of Clopas." It was normal to identify women by the names of their husbands or other relatives so that this Mary of Clopas might have been the mother of James the Less and Joses mentioned by both Matthew and Mark. This would require, however, that Alphaeus and Cleopas be the same person (Matthew 10:3) and would require that this James, the cousin of Jesus, be the writer of the epistle bearing his name rather than our Lord's half-brother. While it was not unusual for those living in the area to adopt Greek equivalents for their Semitic names, it was rare that one person would be known by two unrelated names.

Clopas was a rare name in Jesus' day, appearing only once in the New Testament and once in the writings of the mid-second-century A.D. historian Hegesippus of Palestine. Hegesippus gives Clopas as the name of the brother of Joseph, our Lord's putative father. If this is correct, then Clopas would have been Jesus' uncle and Mary of Clopas, his aunt; this would make her Mary's sister-in-law rather than her sister. While it is not possible to settle this matter easily, it does seem unlikely that two sisters in the same family would bear the name Mary.

It also seems reasonable to believe Mary of Clopas "followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him" (Matthew 27:55), "brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him" (Mark 16:1), and "in the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week," came "to see the sepulcher" (Matthew 28:1), and subsequently "told these things unto the apostles" (Luke 24:10).

Another interesting suggestion can be made concerning this woman's husband, Clopas. According to Luke 24:18, one of the two disciples to whom Jesus appeared on the way to Emmaus, a village about seven miles north of Jerusalem, following his resurrection, was a person named Cleopas. This Greek name is not the same as the Semitic name Clopas, but it was common for Palestinian Jews of this period to be known by both a Semitic name and a similar sounding Greek name. For example, the Greek name Simon was very commonly used as the equivalent of the Hebrew Simeon, and either name could be used for the same individual. It is quite possible that Joseph's brother Clopas also used the

Greek name Cleopas and that he was in Jerusalem with his wife for the Passover which was required under the Law for devout Jews. Luke never identifies Cleopas' companion on the road, not even by gender. The unnamed companion of Luke 24:18 may have been his wife Mary who had accompanied Jesus' mother in those difficult days surrounding the crucifixion. Jesus would have verified to her, as he did to the other women who were at his crucifixion, that he had indeed risen. As he expounded on the Scriptures while making the two-hour journey, perhaps she understood for the first time the fulfillment of prophecy in her nephew Jesus.

Mary Magdalene

Magdala, the Greek form of Migdol, or Watchtower, was the name of a town on the south side of the Plain of Gennesaret, where the hills form the base of the lake of Galilee. Today it is identified with the city known as Mejdal.

Mark 16:9 identifies Mary of Magdala as one from whom Jesus had cast seven demons, but the passage from which it is taken is not considered authentic in most modern translations. However, Luke 8:2,3, whose authenticity is not questioned, supports the same origin of Mary Magdalene's initial contact with Jesus: "And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance." Other popular portrayals of Mary Magdalene as the sinful woman of Luke 7:36-50 are part of traditions in the Latin church and likely have no basis in fact.

We can infer that Mary Magdalene was young, probably in her early twenties, from the statement in John 20:2 that upon finding the body of Jesus missing from the sepulcher, "She runneth and cometh to Simon Peter." Only a young woman could have run the one-mile distance separating the sepulcher and the house of Mark's mother where the disciples assembled.

Although she is portrayed in popular stories about Jesus as being his constant companion, she appears nowhere in Scripture between her initial contact with Jesus and his crucifixion. It is not likely that the women disciples of Jesus accompanied him and his disciples as they went from place to place. Most of them were likely married and had husbands and children to consider. As Luke 8:3 indicates, they probably extended the hospitality of their homes when the apostles were in their districts, and rendered services such as the provision and mending of clothes. Only at the tragedy of the cross do we find that the women, including Mary Magdalene, were drawn together to be with Jesus in his last hours. It is here that we are touched with the depth of Mary Magdalene's care.

She remained at the cross until the crucifixion was over and the body was taken down and laid in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. She appeared at the tomb at the earliest dawn of the first day of the week along with Salome and Mary the mother of James—those who had been witnesses at the cross with John (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2).

As Mary and the others found the sepulchre empty, she saw the angel telling her that Jesus had risen (Matthew 28:5) and ran to tell Peter and John. Returning to the sepulchre, she lingered thoughtfully, weeping at the door of the tomb. Jesus appeared to her, but she did not recognize him until he uttered the familiar "Mary." It was then that she uttered in joy, "Rabboni!" Her teacher had indeed risen and shown himself to her.

This is the last reference regarding Mary of Magdala, who then returned to Jerusalem. Perhaps she returned to the small town on the shores of Galilee and became one of the pillars of the early Christian congregation there.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

As the mother of the Savior, Mary had a role in history that set her apart from all women of the Bible. Sadly, she has become as much a subject of adoration in art, music, and poetry as her son. It is not an exaggeration to say that no woman has been so honored and adored by the world as Mary. Yet Jesus never instructed his disciples to pay her any special homage.

In Luke 1:28, the angel Gabriel announced Mary's pregnancy with the words, "Blessed art thou among women." It was every Jewish girl's desire to bear the Messiah. While much has been written and said about Mary's life following Jesus' birth, the Scriptures contain almost nothing about her life or family once Jesus begins his ministry. She is a relatively minor character in the gospels, often unnamed and usually silent. She is simply called "the mother of Jesus" at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11), when traveling with Jesus to Capernaum (John 2:12), and when standing in the crowds of followers (John 6:42). Only at the foot of the cross does John identify her by name.

It was a sorrowful gathering for those at the cross. Mary's heart was undoubtedly heavy when she saw her son nailed to the cross as a public criminal. None must have grieved more. While others jeered and taunted Jesus, she wept. "If thou be the son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40). This is not dissimilar to our own experiences. As our brethren and loved ones bear criticism and persecution for the things they believe, our hearts can only hang heavy and our eyes shed a sympathetic tear as we hear of and witness their trials. Just as our Lord had a heart-union with his Father which outward trial, persecution, and adversity could not chill, so with us his followers. Our faith and commitment allow us to endure, to gain strength, in the face of certain death. Jesus' own agony did not deter him from thinking of his mother and making provision for her comfort by entrusting her to the one disciple he especially loved, John.

The One Whom Jesus Loved

The gospel of John has many touches that must have been based on the recollections of eyewitnesses. This incident is one of those and is recorded only by John. He and his mother remained with Jesus during his crucifixion (compare Matthew 4:21 and Matthew 27:56). As one of the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17) John must have possessed great courage and strong character even before he received the holy spirit from God.

As Jesus cast his eyes upon his mother and John, he entrusted his last earthly tie to John. This closeness of Jesus and John is noted throughout this gospel. John was the one who had the special place of favor during the last supper (John 13:23). John's loving, tender disposition, his zeal for the Lord, and finally his courage to be near his dying master in his closing hours at the risk of his own life gave Jesus great confidence in him. What a fitting testimony for us to follow! Let us cultivate these same qualities in ourselves so we may be similarly trusted by the Master!

Why was it necessary for Jesus to commit his mother to John or anyone else? We are told that Mary had several other children: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him" (Mark 6:3).

In none of the passages concerning Jesus' family is Joseph mentioned (Matthew 12:46; 13:55; Mark 3:31,32; Luke 8:19,20; John 2:12; 7:3-5). As the oldest son, Jesus appears to lead the household: "After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days" (John 2:12). Mark 6:3 only notes Mary as a parent. These Scriptures seem to confirm the popular belief that Joseph had died and Mary had not remarried. John 6:42 from the Authorized Version makes it appear that Joseph was still alive: "And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" However, Rotherham indicates it is the lineage of Joseph being especially noted, not Joseph himself: "Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, of whom we know the father and the mother! How is it then that he now saith out of heaven have I come down?"

As the oldest son and unmarried, Jesus would assume responsibility for his mother's support (see Luke 7:12-15). As he began his ministry, Jesus gave up whatever family home there had been: "And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Mary apparently had traveled with him much of the time (see Matthew 12:56; Luke 8:19; John 2:12). Jesus appoints John as her surrogate son in this matter, using the expression *ho uios* with the article *ho* (the) before *uios* (son). The Greek grammarian Bechtel states that had there been another son to perform this responsibility, the expression would have omitted the article before the Greek *uios* (son). Apparently James, Jesus' younger half-brother (Galatians 1:19), was not part of the believing body until after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7) and was in no position to take the role Jesus had performed. No reason is given in Scripture for James' reversal following the resurrection. However, it is a fact from Scripture that Jesus wanted his mother in the hands of one of his followers.

"And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (John 19:27). John and his mother were both followers of Jesus (Matthew 20:20). John kept Mary close to the rest of the group (Acts 1:14). He was apparently well known by the religious leaders (John 18:13-16) and under his protection Mary would be safe from those in authority who might seek to harm her as the condemned one's mother. The Greek church has preserved

a tradition that in about 50 A.D., Mary migrated with John to Ephesus, but no one really knows for sure what happened to her following the appearance of her resurrected son in the upper room. Jesus could now put his mind at ease, knowing that she would soon see him again in his new position as a quickening spirit. Mary would be content to know her son had indeed overcome death and paid the ransom. She would soon rejoice along with other believers in the opening up of a new and living way.

My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me

Forsaken, But Not Abandoned

I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.—Hebrews 13:5

Carl Hagensick

No relationship was more precious to Jesus of Nazareth than that which he enjoyed with his heavenly Father. How often he had spent whole nights in communion with his God! How frequently he had used those familiar words, "My Father!" With what confidence he uttered, when at the graveside of Lazarus, "I knew thou hearest me always" (John 11:42)!

This was a relationship the son of God had enjoyed from the very beginning. The wise man, personifying him as wisdom, wrote of him: "When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" (Proverbs 8:29,30).

This was the closeness his Father expressed when he crowned the seven days of creation with the forming of the first human: "Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:26).

The joy of that closeness stands in stark contrast with Jesus' words on the cross: "At the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34)." Erricco said. "God was with Jesus through everything, the suffering on the cross, everything. Assyrian scholars never thought he was forsaken.">

A Quotation

These words are a direct quotation of the first portion of Psalm 22. In all probability Jesus is thus showing that this psalm is prophetic of himself and his experiences. Such an identification, however, does not make its words any less true, but rather emphasizes that they do in fact express his emotions at the time of his utterance upon the cross. Although it is a Messianic psalm, the words at the time they were penned undoubtedly were true of David's own experience. The inspired title of the psalm, "Aijeleth Shahar," is translated "The Hind of the Dawn" in the Revised Standard version and "Doe of the Dawn" in the New Living Translation. This title suggests that perhaps it is one of David's "shepherd psalms," inspired by a lone and frightened deer in the pasture where David was tending his flock. The doe became a metaphor for separation from one's mate.

Psalm 22, however, is not a song of despair, but of faith and of hope. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary remarks: "Note that the psalmist does not lose faith even while describing his intense suffering and persecution. He feels forsaken by God but knows that God is

near." Most of the balance of the verse, as found in the King James and other translations, is unsupported in the Hebrew, which merely adds "why are you so far?"

Agony of Soul

Crucifixion, even to a perfect man fully committed to the doing of his Father's will, was an excruciating experience. There is ample evidence that a spirit of heaviness was weighing upon his heart for some time even before his death. The account of his emotions as he crossed the Kidron into Gethsemane is clear: "He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. And he said to them, My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch" (Mark 14:33,34 NAS). Today's English Version translates the Greek by, "Distress and anguish came over him."

Similar emotions are attributed to Jesus in Gethsemane by the apostle Paul in Hebrews 5:7, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." The last phrase is nicely put in The Living Bible: "And God heard his prayers because of his strong desire to obey God at all times."

There have been many suggestions offered as to why Jesus was so heavily troubled. Certainly his knowledge of the bickering among his closest followers, indicating their lack of preparedness for his departure, was a contributing factor. While his total commitment to his Father's will would indicate that the fear of death was not a part of the emotion, the natural apprehension to bear up under the cruel tortures of the cross would add to his discomfort. The realization of the importance of the past three and a half years and the necessity to keep every iota of God's law perfectly may have also added to his heaviness. But such speculation as to the cause of his emotional state is irrelevant. For whatever reason, the Bible is clear he had such emotions.

The Gethsemane Prayer

There is no question that Psalm 102 is one of the Messianic psalms. The apostle Paul quotes verses 25 to 27 and applies them to the Lord in Hebrews 1:10-12. The title and first verse of this prophetic psalm appear to identify it with the heaviness that weighed down upon the master in Gethsemane: "A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee."

In the next verse we find words that anticipate the heart-rending cry of Psalm 22:1. "Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily" (Psalm 102:2).

The similarity between these two psalms suggests that the heaviness which elicited the prayer "My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?" came on gradually from the time

he was in the garden alone in his final period of communication with his Father preceding his trials and passion at Calvary.

Why the Veil Between?

It is noteworthy that this cry from the cross is the only time in the New Testament where Jesus addresses the Supreme Being of the universe as "My God." His usual method of address is the intimate "Father." This serves to further describe the veil which had fallen between him and the Father whom he so loved and on whom he leaned in all of his sacrifices.

Why was this separation necessary? Had God abandoned him in the time of his trial? Such a thought is unthinkable! Or had the weight of his agony been such that he felt a gap between him and his Father that did not in fact exist? Could it have been a matter of perception? Such an explanation is possible, but we think that such was not the case.

Keil and Delitzsch, commenting on Psalm 22:1, express this thought: "Inasmuch as he [Jesus] places himself under the judgment of God with the sin of his people and of the whole human race, he cannot be spared from experiencing God's wrath against sinful humanity as though he were himself guilty." This, we feel, comes close to the correct explanation.

Jesus came to earth to take the sinner's place. This basic truth is reiterated frequently in the Bible. Paul writes, "For he hath made him to be sin [or "a sin offering"] for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Again: "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:18,19).

And again: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21,22).

When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, he gave them one simple law—obedience—particularly as it applied to the proscription against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God clearly spelled out the penalty for disobedience: "For in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). The apostle Paul put it simply: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

But it was more than life that the first couple lost. They also lost communion with God. While in Eden they heard "the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8). The Lord's plaintive cry from the cross suggests that he also took

this burden of sin upon him when he experienced the withdrawal of Jehovah's presence with him.

Forsaken, But Not Abandoned

The feeling of separation from God was not abandonment. The thought in the Hebrew text of Psalm 22:1 is that, though the intimacy has departed, God is not far away from him. This thought fits in well with the lone deer which may have provided the metaphor for the psalmist's song. The doe he saw in the field looked forlorn, separated from the herd; yet David knew its mate was undoubtedly nearby.

So the growing feeling of separation from the Father, while evoking the sorrowful cry, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me," does not imply a lack of confidence by the Redeemer either in the rightness of his sacrifice or in an estrangement from the Father's love.

As previously noted, this is the only instance where Jesus addresses his beloved Father with the words, "My God." Not many hours later, in his next to last words from the cross, he says in humble resignation, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

What blessedness! The closeness he had enjoyed with his Father and dearest friend had returned. He had borne the full weight of the Adamic curse—both death and alienation from God. As in Gethsemane, when he prayed with "strong cryings and tears" (Hebrews 5:7), he was given an angel to strengthen him (Luke 22:43). So on the cross, his plaintive cry was heard and he was given the assurance of the Father's presence at the very end.

Jesus' Experience Unique

O, the depth of the Savior's love! When we realize the shame and ignominy he faced, the heaviness of the weight that was upon him, what a response it should invoke in our hearts. He who knew no sin, took our sin upon him, that we could be without sin.

What a blessing it is to know the comfort of our theme text! Though he was forsaken, we are assured that "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." In the Greek, this verse in Hebrews 13:5 contains five negatives. In English, a double negative cancels itself, but in the Greek it intensifies the expression. The Wuest translation phrases it, "I will never, never leave you; I will not, I will not, I will not let you down." The poet has captured the thought well:

In the dusk of the sorrowful hours,
The time of our trouble and tears,
With frost at the heart of the flowers,
And blight on the bloom of the years.
Like the mother's voice tenderly hushing,
The sound of the sob and the moan;
We hear, when the anguish is crushing,
"He trod the winepress alone."

From him, in the night of his trial,
Both heaven and earth fled away;
His boldest had only denial,
His dearest had only dismay.
With a cloud o'er the face of the Father,
He entered the anguish unknown;
But we, though our sorrows may gather,
Shall never endure them alone.

I Thirst

All Things Having Been Accomplished

*They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.—
Psalm 69:21*

Russell Marten

Of the seven utterances from the cross, the fifth marked the beginning of the end. It was the last point at which our Lord was able to fulfill prophecies by his actions. The first four of these utterances may have been spread over hours, but the last three were likely within minutes of our Lord's death. The first of these last three was a simple statement of just two words: "After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst" (John 19:28).

Hours earlier when Jesus was first placed on the cross, he rejected a mind-numbing drink (Matthew 27:34), realizing the pain associated with his death would be a very necessary part of his sympathetic high priest experience. Although this drink was commonly and readily accepted by those being crucified, our Lord was determined to experience in full consciousness every emotion and physical pain of his final hours on earth. Throughout his life on earth Jesus had disdained the needs of the flesh that he might serve God more faithfully. The human nature abhors pain and wants to avoid the experience. Because Jesus sought to triumph over the needs and the desires of the flesh, for the next several hours the pain of one of man's most cruel forms of execution would build and he would bear it fully.

But at the point of verse 28 all things were accomplished, death was near, and all the agony associated with crucifixion had been experienced. Having earlier refused drink, why did Jesus request something to alleviate the burning thirst he had? This simple statement was not just one of his physical need but was the last fulfillment of prophecy under his control: "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 69:21).

Vinegar to Drink

We have no way of knowing how much pain and anguish he was experiencing. It was no doubt near the limits of human endurance. Many, writing on the physical stresses on the body during crucifixion, describe the last stages just before death as wrought with extreme dehydration brought on by high fever and profuse sweating, which in this case were compounded by the heat of the midday sun. He was not offered the pure water that quenches thirst best, nor was he offered wine (one of the more common beverages of his day). He instead was offered vinegar. Vinegar is made from the fermenting of mild alcoholic solutions, so we might see why the translators would use vinegar, but a better translation seems to be sour wine. It was a cheap drink used by the common people

including the Roman guards. It may have been just a jug of what the guards had on hand to quench their own thirst, or it may have been explicitly brought there for the condemned.

The sponge was put on a hyssop branch and lifted to him. We often see depictions of the crucifixion where Jesus and the others are high in the air with their feet at about the height of a full-grown man. Because hyssop grows barely a foot and a half tall, a branch from it would seem inadequate to reach the lips of one on a cross by one standing on the ground. In reality, the Roman method of crucifixion was only to have crosses high enough to have a victim's feet a short distance above the ground. This would make the use of such a short branch more than sufficient to extend a sponge to his lips.

Only John records our Lord saying "I thirst," even though Matthew and Mark record the raising of the sponge of sour wine to his lips (Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:36). Reading only their accounts would give the impression that the offer of the sour wine was in response to his cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It might also give the impression that the consumption of the sour wine would ease a mind now being driven mad from the physical effects of the torture that his body was undergoing at the time. However, John's inclusion of the simple quiet request for a small relief from his burning thirst gives us the proper perspective of the events. His mind was not being incapacitated; he was fully aware of the conditions he was feeling and others were seeing. The caustic remark from the crowd—"Let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him" (Matthew 27:49)—was no doubt at the earlier indication that God had broken the intimate communication link Jesus had enjoyed throughout his human existence, so that the son would experience the separation from God that would plague the human family for over 6,000 years. It was some time later that Jesus said, simply, and quietly so only those very near him could hear: "I thirst."

Those who were close to our Lord, who braved persecution and the taunts and anger of the jeering crowd by witnessing his last few moments here on earth, were probably now struck by his request for some relief from burning thirst. Throughout his entire earthly experience he had asked nothing for himself, he had refused attempts to moderate the intensity of the experience in any way. He had instead shown more concern for his natural mother and his disciples than for any of his own needs. This subtle request was a signal that something was to change shortly. John, writing this account later and reflecting on it, realized as he wrote that at this point all things Jesus had set out to do in his consecration were accomplished and the remaining events were simply a natural consequence of them.

The pressing of the sponge with this sour drink fulfilled the last prophecy regarding our Lord prior to his death which would be just minutes away: "And in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 69:21). At this point Jesus knew this was his final opportunity to do anything else. It was somewhat fitting that for one who used all his human vitality for three and one-half years to deny the needs of his flesh that God may be glorified, would in his last act of prophetic fulfillment receive a short but welcome relief

from one of the physical assaults on his human body. How small an accommodation in light of such an incredible sacrifice.

Spiritual Thirst

Is there more of a lesson in this for his followers? Thirst and hunger are not limited to their primary application to a longing for drink and food. Often they are used to indicate the longing of a heart for things which are not yet realized but sincerely desired. Jesus himself often used this to emphasize the full devotion to his cause and to righteousness required of his followers.

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6, NASV). The child of God needs to develop and cultivate within his character that longing, that hunger, that thirst for righteousness. Is our desire for righteousness, not only in ourselves now, but for the world in the next age, the same or greater than our human desire and need of food and drink? Thirst is a symbol even more appropriate than hunger. We can give up temporal possessions and items of comfort with comparative ease for the rest of our lives. We can even go a long time without food. But our need to quench thirst, particularly for water, is such a physical need of our human bodies that we can only exist a few days without it. After just two days without water some of the internal systems of the body start to shut down to conserve what little water is left. That sensation our Lord felt there on the cross is a burning thirst that becomes so intense it dims the mind to thoughts of little else than the need for water. Have we so learned to hate evil that our longing, our thirst, for righteousness is of equal or greater intensity?

When Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for water to drink (John 4:5-26), he also brought forth a lesson about thirst. This account is only recorded by the apostle John. We know the gift of God and we ask for living water from him. Natural water quenches thirst only for a while; a natural man will thirst again. The truth symbolized by water that Jesus and the Scriptures give us are the living waters that can permanently quench thirst. As Jesus explained: "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14, NASV).

Jesus made another reference to the thirst he permanently quenches in the synagogue in Capernaum: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35, NASV). Jesus provides all the necessities of life, not with literal and imperfect food and water, but with spiritual food and the water of truth. He provides the necessities not for human life, but for life everlasting: justification, grace, truth, and the holy spirit.

All Was Accomplished

Shortly after receiving the sour wine his next utterance, "It is finished" (only recorded by John), indicates that all had been accomplished and fulfilled. He had completed the will

of the Father in every aspect. He had come to provide a ransom for Adam and his posterity. He had come to work out his own salvation and in doing so, open a way, a narrow way, for his bride.

He was now thirsting not just for a bit of liquid to quench a physical desire, but he was hungering and thirsting for home, the heavenly home. The work had been done. All had been accomplished. The final event in our Lord's life would not be in his control, nor in the hands of the Roman government. It would be in the hands of his Father. Three and one half years of complete devotion to God and seeking to do his will had reduced a perfect human man to one so completely spent that a drop of refreshment on the tongue was all he would request for the relief of his earthly body.

A man dying of thirst in the desert only has one desire, one goal, one focus for all of his remaining strength: find some water to quench a burning thirst. We too should be as single-minded. As Jesus admonished us to hunger and thirst after righteousness and truth let us thirst after being spent in his service, that we may consume the old man in seeking the glorification of the new creature. Let us thirst as Jesus did to please the Father, to be found worthy and faithful, and to join our Lord in the heavenly courts.

It is Finished

The Last Words

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit.—John 19:30, RSV

Homer Montague

Just prior to his death the Scriptures indicate Jesus exclaimed from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). What was the meaning of those notable words? Primarily it was an expression of triumph that the Savior had faithfully completed his sacrificial death in providing the ransom price to recover father Adam and ultimately the whole race of mankind who were under the death sentence because of the original transgression in the Garden of Eden.

This process took three and one half years from Jordan to Calvary. Considering the various facets of Jesus' experiences, these words probably had additional depth of meaning including these three possibilities:

First, Jesus came to this earth to carry out his Father's will and purpose as he said, "Not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). Thus, he completed the task which God had given to him and, despite the sufferings and oppositions endured, he never fell short in any particular from doing exactly what the Father desired of him.

Second, these words marked the fulfillment of Old Testament types and prophecies which pointed to the sufferings and death of Messiah. This was not something clearly understood by the disciples before Pentecost. In this regard our Lord explained the matter further to two disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Third, this expression also seems to indicate a dispensational change from the Jewish age or Law dispensation to the Gospel age in connection with the death of Jesus. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4).

For believing Jews who accepted Christ as their Savior, the Mosaic Law Covenant was no longer binding upon them. In this connection we read: "None accepting Christ as the Passover Lamb, and thus accepting the antitype as taking the place of the type, could any longer with propriety prepare a typical lamb and eat it in commemoration of the typical deliverance. . . . These henceforth must eat, or appropriate to themselves, the merits of their Redeemer—the merits of the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." (Studies in the Scriptures, vol. 6, p. 463.)

"It is finished" was a comprehensive statement by Jesus attesting to his perfect completion of everything personally required of him while on this side of the veil. During his ministry, the Lord said: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

A Personal and a Prophetic Application

This Scripture has a personal and a prophetic application. While in the flesh, Christ was engaged in teaching, healing, proclaiming the kingdom message, and demonstrating the requirements of self-denial, cross-bearing, and obedience to the Father's will. His mission was declared to the Jews in the synagogue as Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1,2. After the reading Jesus told them the Scripture was being fulfilled even as they heard his words. This was their reaction: "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way" (Luke 4:28-30).

Jesus' ministry surely was not a bed of roses, yet he continued doing the work which his Father gave him to do until the very end when he could do nothing more while in the tomb. From a prophetic standpoint, Jesus' ministry was at the end of the Jewish day or Jewish age and as a result of Israel's national rejection of him as their Savior, their house was left desolate and their night of disfavor commenced. Shortly thereafter Gentiles were able to enter in and partake of the high calling which once was limited only to Israel.

Throughout the Gospel age, each member of Christ's body has individually had the responsibility to proclaim the good news and to live a life of consecration to the very end when a night of death would occur and nothing further could be done. In John 9:4, several translations give the thought that we must work the works of him that sent us thus making the text apply to the church as well as Jesus in the flesh. If there is a future restriction regarding public dissemination of the truth, such a time would prove to be a prophetic dark night where there would be no further opportunity to work in the Lord's vineyard.

The apostle Paul was an example of someone who labored faithfully while it was yet day for himself. He was not conformed to the world and its activities; his mission was to discover for himself what was the will of God. This required an emptying of self, of ambition, and not gratifying the old creature, but rather a walking in newness of life.

A Great Fight of Afflictions

Paul endured pain, persecution, hunger, shipwreck, beatings, tauntings from false brethren, and deprivation of every sort, but he persevered to the end when he could say, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at

that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Everyone who fights the good fight, keeps the faith, and loves Christ's appearing will receive the crown of righteousness when the sacrificial course has been completed. The question Christians should ask daily, is whether they are doing the things which will merit such approval.

During his earthly ministry, the secret of the Master's success and overcoming was that he denied himself and accepted with joy his Father's will as his own and engaged in every cross-bearing activity which God permitted. Ultimately he poured out his soul unto death on a literal cross at Golgotha. His familiarity with the Scriptures as a spirit-begotten son of God would make our Lord keenly aware that Isaiah 53:12 was a picture of his own future crucifixion which had its New Testament fulfillment.

Three Examples of Discipleship

In Luke 9:57-62 Jesus gave three individuals some indication as to the rigors involved in discipleship. One man pledged to follow the Lord wherever he went but the Master indicated he had no permanent dwelling place such as the birds which had nests or foxes which had holes in which to rest. Christ was de-emphasizing the importance of earthly treasures when contrasted with obtaining a heavenly inheritance. It must have been exhilarating to be counted as one of Jesus' followers in his day, but it might be thought provoking to consider what would occur today if discipleship literally required traveling from place to place all of the time without a permanent abode or home for seasons of refreshment.

In the case of a second individual, after being invited to follow the Master, he asked to be allowed to bury his father first. This person apparently had an aged parent who needed assistance; he promised to serve the Master's cause after his father was cared for and eventually died. Many of the Lord's people presently have as a kind of mortgage the responsibility for taking care of an elderly relative. This does not suggest that such a responsibility be abandoned in the interest of serving the truth, but on the other hand brethren should not forsake the assembling together even though it may be limited in scope because of a need to provide assistance for a loved one. In such a case the Lord's will should be sought because he is able to open doors which may aid in finding opportunities for fellowship with others.

The third individual in this series was one who desired to bid farewell to those at his home before following the Lord. When Jesus answered that no man who put his hand to the plow and looked back would be fit for the kingdom of God, he was emphasizing the urgency of pressing on with one's consecrated service and an avoidance of being distracted by earthly concerns which have been given up. In each of these illustrations, our Lord was not merely giving sound counsel, but by his own life he demonstrated that he would allow nothing to hinder him from doing his Father's business. Thus he

persevered in having his sacrifice fully consumed until he could express those words from the cross, "It is finished."

A Memorial Season Lesson

During the Memorial season the Lord's people are especially drawn together in heart communion and commemorate the glorious example of the Master's pouring out his soul unto death for mankind, as well as the invitation to be joint heirs with him in the kingdom through a death baptism. An appreciation of divine providence and the privilege of being sacrificed and included as part of the one loaf that is being broken for the world should encourage believers more and more to strive to walk as the Master walked as we read, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6).

This requires a walk of holiness, a walk of love, a walk of sacrifice, a walk of devotion to godly principles and the summoning of all the Christian's energies to entertain those thoughts that are lovely, just, honorable, pleasing, and pure. There also is a need to maintain constancy in terms of being worn out in the service of the Lord, rather than to become discouraged or weary because of the difficulties connected with the Christian walk.

Were it not for the fact that brethren can share with each other the trials as well as the victories, there could be an inclination to believe that others do not experience similar difficulties according to the flesh. There are concerns which many believers have that don't relate necessarily to the new creature. These include bereavement, financial reversals, physical or mental afflictions, an unanticipated disaster which occurs, and various perplexities connected with everyday living.

Many Sources of Christian Suffering

Overcoming adversity and trial is a necessary part of a Christian's experience for we read, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Suffering is not limited to official persecution from the government or the nominal church as may be more pronounced in certain countries. Some of the Lord's dear ones suffer from their family's opposition to the truth and are ostracized by their relatives because of it. Some are suffering from physical ailments but still persevere in witnessing to the truth despite limitations of vitality. Such a one who continues to serve the truth in whatever capacity he or she is able will be given credit by God even if such an one no longer is able to do as much as formerly because of various impediments of the flesh. If one were unable to get to meetings but read Scriptures, listened to tapes, prayed for other brethren, or did something else related to the truth, it undoubtedly would take extra effort and perhaps aggravate one's physical condition. Yet that would be an example of overcoming while suffering for righteousness' sake.

Some of the Lord's people suffer because of the trials associated with raising a child. It is difficult enough to give children the proper guidance during this evil period of time. For

those who are spirit begotten, the balance between letting youngsters grow up normally while at the same time setting before them the principles of righteousness can be especially trying. This is especially true when one's son or daughter is taunted by peers or classmates because they are deemed as having a peculiar religion. When adults make a consecration, rejection or ridicule may be anticipated. But when one's offspring is subjected to such treatment, it can be a source of great anguish for both parent and child. Parents in the world also suffer when their children are in pain, but they don't suffer as a Christian since the source of their child's problems are not predicated upon the parenting influence of being raised by new creatures in Christ.

Another form of suffering may occur when the consecrated desire companionship from someone of the opposite sex but because of the lack of available prospective partners or because of a previous marriage, he or she is forced to choose between an unscriptural marriage or forever remaining alone. It is probably easy to give advice when one is not in that particular situation, but for those who are, it can be a source of tremendous anguish in trying to come to a definite decision as to what course should be taken. If such a one is guided solely by what he or she considers to be the only biblical option to follow, and it is at variance with what the individual might desire otherwise, it could result in a severe trial. Thus there are many ways of suffering by the Lord's people and a need exists for prayer, seeking out Scriptural principles, and supportive counsel from spiritually mature brethren to aid the dear ones who are being tested in these and other difficult areas.

In thinking about our Lord's final words of triumph from the cross, Christians should bear in mind that they have been called and chosen and, if faithful to their covenant of sacrifice, the same expression of victory at the end of their course, "It is finished," will also apply to them. With the anticipation that believers are living at the time when the "more than conquerors" will be changed in a twinkling of an eye, each Christian should cheerfully and patiently endure all things until our heavenly Father determines it is enough, when he says to us, "Come up higher." Nothing can compare with such a glorious prospect.

Father, Into Thy Hands I Commend My Spirit

"Into Thy Hands ..."

***Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.—
Psalm 31:5***

Frequently, the last breaths of someone who is dying include a message or testimony to those who are present. Sometimes it is an expression of love toward family and friends, or it is a request to take care of someone who is being left behind, or it is a message of instruction.

The perfect man, Jesus, gave all of these types of messages, while dying on the cross at Calvary.

Among Jesus' final words, while dying on the cross, was the expression recorded in Luke 23:46, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

These words are a quotation from Psalm 31:5, and are a climactic expression of Jesus' trust in the heavenly Father. However, Jesus prefaces this quotation from Psalm 31:5 with the word "Father."

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus continually referred to God as his Father. This is solid proof that Jesus was in fact the "only-begotten son" of God (John 3:16). Jesus never acknowledged Joseph as his natural father, nor did Jesus ever acknowledge his earthly life to be the beginning of his existence.

Jesus' words on the cross continue with the phrase, "into thy hands." Even in today's modern society, the expression "hands" is used symbolically to represent control or responsibility. For instance, one large insurance company's slogan is that they are "the good hands people," meaning that their customers could rest assured in their services. Some medical doctors, after having done all they can for their patient, have been known to say "the rest is in God's hands."

Complete Trust

But what did Jesus mean when he used the words "into thy hands I commend my spirit"?

David's words in Psalm 62:5,6,8 (NIV) help to answer this question, where he writes, "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken . . . Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." Our only true rest is in God alone.

Why can we put such trust in God? David goes on to provide an answer to this question in verses 11 and 12, where he writes: "Two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done."

A realization of both God's power and God's love should help us to develop complete trust in him, with even our very lives.

Similar thoughts are expressed in the first book of Chronicles. 1 Chronicles 21:13 says, "Let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man." God's hands are merciful. 1 Chronicles 29:12 says, "In thine hand is power and might, and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all." God's hands are also powerful and mighty.

"I Commend My Spirit"

Jesus' words on the cross continue with the phrase "I commend my spirit."

The word "commend" is Strongs 3908, -- paratithemi, and means "to place alongside," by implication, "to deposit."

In Psalm 31:5 the word "commit" is used, and in the original Hebrew it literally means "deposit." When the word "deposit" is used, it signifies that something has been left in the care of another, which has not yet been appropriated or applied.

The word "spirit" comes from Strongs 4151, pneuma, and it means the breath of life.

The Scriptures recognize man as composed of two elements, body and spirit. The term "body" applies merely to the physical organism. The term "spirit" applies to the "breath of life" or "spirit of life." These two produce soul, sentient being. Genesis 2:7 reads: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." When God created Adam he first formed him and then gave him the breath of life. The combination of a body with the breath of life, produced a soul. Man has a body and has a spirit, but is a soul.

Mankind received the spirit of life from God, the fountain of life, through father Adam. The right to this gift of life Adam forfeited by disobedience. When Adam died, his body returned to the dust as it was before creation, and the spirit of life, the privilege of living, the power or permission of living, returned to God. The spirit of life is not an intelligence, nor a person, but merely a power or privilege which has been forfeited and hence reverts to the original giver of that power or privilege.

Adam was able to transmit to his posterity a spark of vitality, but not perfection of life because he had lost all right to that. Romans 5:12 says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Verse 19 continues the same thought saying: "By one man's disobedience

many were made sinners." The psalmist says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5).

But with our Lord Jesus it was different: he had a life that was not derived from Adam, but transferred from a heavenly condition. 1 John 4:9 reads, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him." The apostle Paul, referring to Jesus, writes: "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). Jesus had a right to life, and it was this life to which he had a right that he laid down when he died on the cross on behalf of, and as a redemption price for, Adam and his race.

Jesus had received the spirit of life from God the Father as a gift. Jesus had, in obedience to the Father's plan, become a man to be man's Redeemer. When yielding up his spirit of life or vital energy, he declared his reliance upon God's promise to give the spirit of life again, by a resurrection.

When Jesus died on the cross, he there finished his baptism into death. In letting go his hold on life, he surrendered it to the Father who had already promised that his life, being thus surrendered, should entitle him to a higher life under still greater favor, and this he received when he arose from the dead on the "third day," for, as the apostle declared, he was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] by the Spirit"—a spirit being (1 Peter 3:18).

A Voluntary Sacrifice

Jesus did not forfeit his right to life as had Adam. Jesus willingly gave his life. Jesus said, "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). He also said, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (John 10:17,18).

Jesus did not surrender his life to Adam, rather Jesus merely put it into the Father's hands without specifically applying it. He has not yet made any application of his human life to Adam and his race. He has merely put it into the Father's hands. Jesus' rights to earthly life still belonged to him when he arose from the dead since he had not forfeited his right to life. Jesus does not give the church his earthly nature and earthly life rights, but keeps these to give to the world during the Millennium. The church's calling is a "heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1).

Since Jesus does not give the church earthly restitution blessings, and since he has no other merit to give, what does he do for the church? The answer is, this merit (which shortly is to be appropriated as the ransom-price for the sins of the whole world) is presently in the hands of justice. The one who owns that merit, Jesus, imputes it to all those who will accept the offer of this present Gospel age to surrender themselves in sacrifice to walk in Jesus' footsteps (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 12:1,2; Philippians 3:9).

The whole merit of Christ is mortgaged by the imputation of his merit to those consecrating during this present age. This mortgage must be released fully, completely, before the new covenant can be sealed and put into operation for giving restitution blessings to Adam and his race.

The ransom-price cannot be applied piece-meal, a little to each one. When the ransom-price is applied, it will be applied for all at the same time. Why? Because it is one life, the sacrificed life of the perfect-man Jesus, for the perfect-man Adam: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22).

What lessons can we learn from these last words of Jesus, given in Luke 23:46?

Complete faith and trust in God

Jesus had total and complete trust in the heavenly Father. The apostle writes, "When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23, NIV).

Just as Jesus had complete faith and trust in God, putting his very existence into the hands of his heavenly Father, so also must we totally and completely put our faith, trust, and reliance upon God at all times, through all experiences, and under all circumstances.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:27-30).

If we remain as faithful "sheep," following the example of our Lord Jesus, we are promised that no one can pluck us from the protective hand of our Lord Jesus, or from the hand of the heavenly Father. However, being in God's "hand" does not mean immunity from hard experiences. The apostle confirms this: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Romans 8:35-39. NIV

Complete faith and trust in a resurrection from death

Just as our Lord Jesus had hope in God's promise for a return of his "spirit of life" by a resurrection from death, so also by Jesus' ransom sacrifice, God's promises are open to all mankind. Acts 24:15 tells us "that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." At the present time, believers can for themselves (and, by a knowledge

of God's plan, for others also) commit their spirits (their powers of life) to God's hands also, as did our Lord Jesus and as did Stephen—full of faith that God's promise of a resurrection will be fulfilled.

To the world, a resurrection will mean a reorganization of a human body, and its vivifying or quickening with life—energy, the spirit of life (Greek: pneuma). To the gospel church, sharers in the "first [chief] resurrection" (Revelation 20:5), it will mean the impartation of the spirit of life or life-energy (Greek: pneuma) to a spirit body (1 Corinthians 15:42-45).

The apostle Peter writes, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19). Here the word "commit" is also Strong's 3908, *paratithemi*, the same Greek word as Jesus used in Luke 23:46.

Here is the comment for April 15 from the devotional book *Daily Heavenly Manna* which is based on Jesus' words in Luke 23:45:

"With full confidence our dear Redeemer looked up to the Father, and full of faith declared that he committed all of life and all of the blessed hopes for the future to the Father's love and to the Father's power—to be provided in harmony with the Father's plan and Word. And so must we, as followers in our Master's footsteps, look forward with faith, and in our dying hour commit all our interests to the keeping of him who has manifested his love for us, not only in the gift of his son as our redeemer, but all our journey through—in his providential care, as well as in the exceeding great and precious promises which go before us and give us strength, comfort and assurance."

May we all continue to develop total and complete faith and trust in God at all times, through all of life's experiences, and under all circumstances!

A Messianic Prophecy

To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David.—Psalm 22 (Title)

A verse-by-verse study of Psalm 22

The psalms of David cover a wide variety of subjects, but few are Messianic. Speaking of Psalm 22 Gill's Commentary says, "This passage is sometimes applied by the Jews themselves to their Messiah."

Many of the Jews observing the crucifixion of Christ may have remembered the words of the psalmist which Jesus spoke, and they would have seen that many of the prophecies of this particular psalm were then being fulfilled before their eyes. Several of the psalms were sung in their places of worship and they would have been quite familiar with the words of these verses.

No doubt David wrote of his own experiences in poetic verse and song. Perhaps there is a situation in David's lifetime which prompted him to write this psalm, though no details are recorded in the Old Testament.

While the words of this psalm may have had a literal fulfillment in this literal king of Israel, the real fulfillment is in the prophetic king of Israel, Jesus Christ the Messiah. Because this psalm contains direct prophecies of our Lord's crucifixion, death, and resurrection, its prophetic fulfillment cannot be denied.

King David, the beloved of Jehovah, a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), fulfilled the will of the Lord (Acts 13:22). It is this same Lord who guided David's expressions and made his words represent Messiah prophetically years before their fulfillment (Acts 13:33-36).

"Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me"—Verses 1 and 2

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent."

The opening words are the exact words uttered by Jesus when he was on the cross (Matthew 27:46). The person in this psalm cries out three times for help in hopelessness and despair, yet there was apparently no help. There are three different Hebrew words to express the appeal in this psalm: a crying out in distress (verse 1); a calling out for help (verse 2); and a crying out in need (verse 5).

David must have felt a deep agony when writing this psalm, and perhaps similarly when he wrote Psalm 142 while hiding in a cave: "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but

there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (Psalm 142:4).

Perhaps the psalmist's cry in the night refers to Jesus' Gethsemane prayer the night before the crucifixion. Jesus uses the term "My God" only on the cross and before his ascension (Matthew 27:46; John 20:17).

What does "forsake" mean? Either Jesus was actually forsaken on the cross because he needed to feel exactly what it was like so he could be our merciful high priest, or he was calling attention to the psalm so those around him would see him as the suffering servant, the Messiah, who was prophesied about in this psalm.

This is a prophetic psalm which foretells the events which surrounded our Lord's life and contains a description of his feelings. He apparently felt forsaken by the heavenly Father as also did David who wrote this psalm. There simply is not enough information in either the psalm or the gospels to determine whether Jesus actually felt forsaken by God, as David did, or whether he was truly forsaken by the Father so he could understand mankind's plight and relationship with God.

Implicit Trust—Verses 3-5

"But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded."

This language is reminiscent of the praises in the tabernacle of the wilderness after the deliverance from Egypt. The presence of God dwelt there. He was surrounded by all those who praised him.

Even though the psalmist asks why God has forsaken him, he still trusts in his God: "He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him" (verse 8).

David felt that even though he was suffering and could not unite in the lofty praises of God, yet God was worthy of all the praises which should be addressed to him, no matter what circumstance one may be in. Even though he asked God why he was forsaken, he remembered that while Israel was in the wilderness, they cried out for deliverance, and deliverance was given. He expected a similar deliverance.

"A Worm and No Man"—Verses 6-11

"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I

was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help."

The Chaldee paraphrase renders the word "worm" in verse 6 as "weak worm." A humble man has lower thoughts of himself than others may have of him. Even though David was king of Israel, he described himself as a lowly "worm."

The Hebrew word describes the worm from which scarlet dye was obtained. This also is prophetic of Christ in the way he was mocked with a scarlet robe and in which his body was covered in blood when he hung upon the cross and cried out the first words of this psalm. Alternatively it may refer to the blood he shed for all (Colossians 1:20).

The language of this section of the psalm is very much like that of Isaiah 53, which has been viewed by both Jews and Christians as a Messianic prophecy. This reinforces the thought that such an interpretation is not "forced."

Although they shook their heads at him (Psalm 22:7; Matthew 27:39), scorned, and ridiculed him, he trusted that the LORD would deliver him (Psalm 22:8). The true sense of the Hebrew phrase, "He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him," contains the idea of being under the pressure of a heavy burden and rolling it off, or casting it off, onto another. This should encourage us to "Commit [our] way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5; see also Proverbs 16:3).

The psalmist reminds himself that God had not abandoned him while he had been in the womb. He owed his life to God. Jesus was with his Father from the beginning of the world; from the time he was a youth he had always been faithful to his heavenly Father. Perhaps Jesus thought of these words as he saw his mother standing near while he was on the cross (John 19:26).

In verse eleven he once again requests help, although he realized that no human could help him. No one could understand what loneliness he felt, or what burden he bore. God had helped him in the past, and again he asked God to be near him in his most desperate hour.

The Bulls of Bashan—Verses 12, 13

"Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion."

The bulls surrounded him—Chief Priests, Elders, Scribes, Pharisees, the crowds, Herod, Pontius Pilate—in his arrest, arraignment, trial, and condemnation. They were like bulls in their rage and accusations against Christ. The bulls of Bashan (a territory on the east of Jordan, north of Gilead) were known for their size, fierceness, and strength. The suggestion of verse 12 is that Jesus' persecutors were full of fury comparable to these bulls of Bashan.

This description is of roaring lions surrounding him with teeth bared, mouths open, preparing to attack. This scene is quite reminiscent of the crowd as they cried, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

"All My Bones are Out of Joint"—Verses 14-18

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."

Now we move from a description of those around him to what he feels. David describes his utter weakness, like being poured out like water. His bones are described as being "out of joint," words also literally true of crucifixion. This was one of the most severe pains of crucifixion, the weight of a victim pulling bones out of their sockets. Vitality leaving him is depicted as a heart that melts like wax within his bowels, or in other words, within him.

His tongue can no longer do its work. The dogs continue to circle waiting for his death. They pierce his hands and feet. They look and stare at him and they part his garments and cast lots for it (Mark 15:24). At this point in the psalm he feels his lowest and closest to death, yet he continues to trust in the Lord even though he feels forsaken and alone.

Saved from the Unicorns—Verses 19-21

"But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns."

Again the Lord is appealed to for help with a request for deliverance. It is remarkable that through all the things the servant in this psalm suffers, he still describes the Lord as his strength. This should also be true of us for we should rely on the Scriptural promise that we should "take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake" (2 Corinthians 12:10) for when we are weak, then we are strong.

He asks to be saved from the lions who earlier were ready to attack him. This could be a reference to the devil, who as a roaring lion seeks "those whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8), or it might refer to the civil magistrates (2 Timothy 4:17) such as the chief priests and elders who were mainly responsible for Jesus' crucifixion.

Regarding the words in verse 20, Martin Luther writes:

"'My darling' had better be rendered 'my lonely, or solitary one.' For he wishes to say that his soul was lonely and forsaken by all, and that there was no one who sought after him as a friend, or cared for him, or comforted him: as we have it, Psalm 142:4, Refuge failed me; no one cared for my soul; I looked on my right hand, but there was no one who would know me; that is, solitude is of itself a certain cross, and especially so in such great torments, in which it is most grievous to be immersed without an example and without a companion. And yet, in such a state, everyone of us must be, in some suffering or other, and especially in that of death; and we must be brought to cry out with Psalm 25:16, Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me, for I am desolate and afflicted."

He desired to be delivered from what he called "the horns of the unicorns." He felt surrounded by enemies from all sides and as the wild beasts, dogs, and unicorns, were seeking his life he cried out for his Lord.

The meaning of the Hebrew word translated "unicorn" is undetermined. Gesenius and Dewette's lexicons render the word as "buffalo" rather than the mythical creature. However, the horns of buffalo are curved, and are not known for their strength. Whatever this animal was, it was distinguished for its power (Numbers 23:22) although it was not used to till the soil (Job 39:9,10). Since buffalo can be trained to till the soil, we do not know which animal this was. We do know it was a wild, untrained animal with strength in its horns (Deuteronomy 33:17), horns which attracted attention as some sort of majesty or dignity (Psalm 92:10).

Praise for Deliverance—Verses 22-26

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever."

The writer of Hebrews applies verse 22 to Jesus (Hebrews 2:12). In his plight, he attempts to encourage his brethren and even while in his distress his thoughts were for his church. God had heard his prayer and his immediate concern was not for himself, but for his brethren. As the prophetic suffering servant of this psalm, he dedicates himself anew to fulfill his vows to the Lord. He declares to his brethren that God's purpose was not to hide his face or to despise the afflicted and that they were to trust in him, and praise him in the entire congregation. He encourages the meek to likewise fulfill their vows to the Lord. This encouragement was not only for his brethren, but for all worshippers of Yahweh. The term "seed of Israel" is synonymous with "seed of Jacob."

The Lord has spread a table for the meek to eat and only the meek will eat and be satisfied for they are the ones who seek, trust, and praise the Lord. The word "meek" in this passage refers to those who are afflicted. The suffering servant of this psalm now relies on the promise that those who will praise the Lord will live forever. We too should remember this when we go through our own difficult experiences. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

A Lesson for Future Generations—Verses 27-31

"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this."

In these verses we have a prophetic prediction of the conversion of the Gentiles, for all those who have gone to the dust will return and bow before him. In all parts of the earth, and all the ends of the world, all those resurrected, all the kindreds of the nations, all the nations of the earth that were to be blessed through the seed of Abraham, will remember and return to the Lord. Those nations who have forgotten the Lord will remember him and they will worship him as their king. For when God's judgments are in the earth, "the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9). "For this is right and acceptable before God our Savior, who doth will all men to be saved, and to come to the full knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3,4, Young's Literal Translation).

Again we find a similar thought in the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah. "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand" (Isaiah 53:10).

This psalm applies entirely to Jesus Christ without stretching or forcing any interpretation or application. The events of the crucifixion were told in explicit detail more than a thousand years before they happened. These things included not only the actions which surrounded Messiah on the cross, but also his feelings, his fears, and his hopes, as well as encouragement for his followers. May we be faithful to the vision and continue running this race: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

"That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6:18).

In his Treasury of David Spurgeon makes this comment about the ending words "that he hath done this":

"It is finished. Salvation's glorious work is done, there is peace on earth, and glory in the highest. It is finished: these were the expiring words of the Lord Jesus, as they are the last words of this psalm. May we by living faith be enabled to see our salvation finished by the death of Jesus!"



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Pastoral Bible Institute News

Date of Annual PBI Meeting

The annual meeting of PBI Members and Directors will be held on Friday, July 19, at the University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The General Convention of Bible Students will begin on Saturday, July 20, at the same location and end the evening of July 25. Those who are interested in the Pastoral Bible Institute, whether members or not, are encouraged to attend this meeting. Contact the Institute's secretary for details concerning accommodations.

World News

Religious

The radical Islamic group, Laskar Jihad, has been attacking village after village, burning houses and destroying Christian churches. Laskar Jihad militants attacked and burned a half dozen villages in Central Sulawesi [Indonesia], bringing to at least 21 the number of Christian villages pillaged in recent weeks. The “Holy War Troops” are armed with AK-47s, grenades, bombs and homemade weapons. As many as 7,000 Laskar Jihad terrorists have gathered in Central Sulawesi and are now surrounding the predominantly Christian city of Tentena, inhabited by around 63,000 people, including many who fled from surrounding villages before the advancing Jihad troops. Before the Laskar Jihad attacked Maluku Province last year, the area was about 37 percent Christian and 57 percent Muslim. Some say the region was nearly 50 percent Christian before President Suharto began his “transmigration” program, subsidizing Muslims to move from Muslim-dominated areas to regions heavily populated by Christians. Now the area is virtually 100 percent Muslim because Christians have either been forced to flee for their lives, or have been forced to convert to Islam. In the violence in Maluku—and now Sulawesi—an estimated 9,000 people have died.

—Crosswalk.com, 12/20/2001

Persecution Project Foundation (PPF) founder Brad Phillips returned from a relief outreach into the oil region of western Upper Nile. During an emergency food and medical distribution in the heart of Sudan's oil region PPF teams heard the sounds of heavy artillery shelling as Sudan Peoples Liberation Army rebels defended their ground against a National Islamic Front onslaught only a few miles away. “Two Government of Sudan Hind Helicopters chased and pursued a relief plane after it took off from an airstrip near Bentiu and in close proximity to where we were doing our food distribution,” said Phillips. “This is an unprecedented event, the first incidence of any air-to-air interference with relief groups by the Government of Sudan. When news of this event reached Loki on the morning of Dec. 13, all flights into the area were immediately suspended. It

saddened us, because there were many more tons of relief supplies waiting in our stores ready to be flown in.” The Government of Sudan is now employing the use of sophisticated weaponry, such as the Hind helicopters purchased with oil revenues, in attempts to thwart the efforts by non-governmental organizations to assist the victims of state-sponsored terror in the region,” commented Phillips.

—Crosswalk.com, 12/24/2001

Social

Today leprosy is close to elimination. Until recent years, no treatments were known. Victims suffered ostracism, inability to work and forced separation from their families. They had virtually no hope of cure or of a return to normality. But the development of new antibiotics that target the leprosy bacterium changed the situation. In 1991, the World Health Organization set a goal of eliminating leprosy from the world within 15 years. The group recently announced that it had met the first major milestone in its quest, the elimination of 90% of all leprosy cases. The United States had 108 cases of leprosy in 2000, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. With the newest antibiotic treatments, leprosy can be cured with a one-day treatment provided it is caught in its earliest stage.

—Los Angeles Times 12/24/2001

In the days of 19th-century eugenics, scientists who had supped at the table of social Darwinism would construct evolutionary trees that had twigs within the species *Homo sapiens*. Each twig was a racial group. The top twig was, of course, the white Caucasian one—since the scientists who did this work were themselves white Caucasians. Modern genetics has shown the error of their ways. Systematic genetic differences between people from different parts of the world, though they exist, are small compared with variations between people from the same place. The visible differences, such as skin color, are the result of a mere handful of genes. Under the skin, humanity is remarkably homogenous.

—The Economist.com, 12/13/2001

Medical experts from the World Health Organization flew to central Congo to investigate the deaths of 17 people with Ebola-like symptoms, state radio said. The deaths began Nov. 17 in Dekese, a village about 450 miles east of Kinshasa, the capital. It was the second feared outbreak of Ebola in one week. Six people died of a mysterious illness in Gabon, another Central African country. Ebola struck the town of Kikwit in 1995, killing 245 people. An Ebola outbreak in Uganda killed 173 people [in 2000]. The mortality rate is 90%. There is no known cure and no vaccine.

—Los Angeles Times, 12/7/2001

Scientists said they have deciphered the third human chromosome which contains a treasure trove of information about diseases ranging from obesity and eczema to dementia and cataracts. With more than 727 genes and nearly 60 million DNA letters, chromosome 20 is the largest human chromosome to be finished so far. Thirty-two of the genes are linked to genetic illnesses including the brain wasting Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, severe immune disorders and illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and dermatitis. Scientists from The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute in Cambridge, England, led by Dr. Panos Deloukas, completed the sequence which is reported in the science journal Nature. Chromosome 20 is the first chromosome to be deciphered since scientists from Britain, China, France, Germany, Japan and the United States working on the Human Genome Project sequenced all the estimated 40,000 or more genes in humans earlier this year. "In two years time we should see the sequence of the remaining chromosomes being finished," Deloukas added. Any two humans are 99.9 percent similar. The 0.1 percent difference in DNA is what makes an individual unique.

—Reuters, 12/19/2001

1,118 Number of airplane occupants worldwide who died in multiengine-airliner crashes in 2001; the 30-year average is 1,451 fatalities.

—Time, 1/14/2002

Financial

Europeans said good-bye to their old currencies in history's most ambitious currency swap, one which the euro's architects hope will bolster ambitions of a united Europe. The euro takes physical form as notes and coins a decade after it was conceived with the Maastricht Treaty and three years after it began its ethereal life underpinning the exchange rates of the mark, peseta, drachma, lire, franc and other national currencies that it permanently displaces. Though continental Europe's vision of a tighter political union are bound with the euro, it first became legal tender at midnight on January 1, 2002. The 12-nation euro zone represents one-sixth of the world's economy, and is set to grow as the European Union expands eastward.

—Associated Press, 1/1/2002

According to a recent report by the U.N. Drug Control Program, the [Taliban's ban on poppy cultivation] brought raw opium production in Afghanistan to a virtual halt, dropping from 3,276 tons to only 185 tons in just one year. But now . . . there is eagerness among farmers . . . to plant poppy seeds that will be harvested next April, processed into heroin in neighboring Pakistan, and delivered to overseas markets. "We know we are creating addicts," [a farmer] said. "The only reason we are doing this is because we are poor. If I could find another job, I would stop growing poppies."

—Los Angeles Times, 11/23/2001

More than 600,000 Moldovans are working abroad. That is about one-third of the people of working age—the highest proportion in Europe. UNICEF, the United Nations children's organization, says growing numbers of children are abandoned by their parents and have to live with other relatives or even alone. Such problems exist throughout the former Communist bloc, but they are particularly acute in Moldova, a small country wedged between Ukraine and Romania. In Communist times it was reasonably prosperous, exporting food and wine to the rest of the Soviet Union. But in the past decade, exports have collapsed, reducing gross domestic product by two-thirds and leaving the average annual GDP per head at just over \$300, less than 20 per cent of neighboring Romania's. The root cause of Moldova's difficulties is the political and economic disruption of the end of the Soviet Union. The country was divided by a civil war in the early 1990s which has left authority split between Chisinau in the west and a self-proclaimed Republic of Transdnestr centered on Tiraspol in the east. The division has undermined government functions, blocked economic reforms and allowed the flowering of one of Europe's most extensive black [market] economies.

—Financial Times, 12/19/2001

Civil

The sea level has risen from 12 to 20 inches along Maine's coast and as much as 2 feet in Nova Scotia during the last 250 years, according to a team of international researchers. It's the biggest rise in the last millennium, and global warming is to blame, said Roland Gehrels of the University of Plymouth in England. "Sea level today is rising faster than at any time in the past when it was subject to natural climate change," the lead researcher said. The findings were presented at the Geological Society of America's annual meeting last week in Boston.

—Los Angeles Times, 11/13/2001

The Commonwealth signaled that it could suspend Zimbabwe's membership within weeks if the country continued its slide towards anarchy. Suspension would prevent Zimbabwe's president, Robert Mugabe, attending the Commonwealth heads of government summit in Australia in March. The group reiterated its deep concern about the ongoing situation in Zimbabwe especially the continued violence, occupation of property, actions against the freedom and independence of the media, and political intimidation. The statement came after repeated criticism that the Commonwealth had failed to act against Mr. Mugabe since his supporters invaded white-owned farms early in 2000. Over the past two years Mr. Mugabe's supporters have unleashed a campaign of violence against white farmers and the Movement for Democratic Change, the main opposition party.

—Financial Times, 12/21/2001

For the first time since 1990, Iraq has warned that it could launch a missile attack against Israel if the United States attacks the regime of President Saddam Hussein. "We always

expect evil and aggression from the American administration,” Iraqi Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan told the Doha-based Al-Jazeera satellite television. “Our preparations are always in place. Any nation that has been attacked has the right to defend itself by any means. This is a legitimate right.” Ramadan did not mention Israel, but when asked whether Iraq would attack Israel, the vice president said Baghdad would not rule out any target.

—Middle East News Line, 11/30/2001

Israel

Israeli unemployment is nearing the ten-percent level and one in four Israeli children are now classified as living below the poverty line. This is happening at a time when the number of tourists to Israel has dropped by more than fifty percent, to levels last seen a quarter century ago. At the same time, it is clear that the Palestinians have been hurt economically much more than Israelis. For example, their unemployment is estimated at between 50-80 percent. The strains in Palestinian society have prompted some of Arafat's aides, according to American sources, to ask the United States to put greater diplomatic pressure on Arafat because of the damage his war is causing Palestinian society. At the beginning of this year, Government economists expected annual GNP growth of five to six percent, but it looks like Israel will be lucky to finish the year with more than two percent annual growth. The outlook for 2002, if present trends continue, is worse.

—BridgesforPeace.com, 12/11/2001

More than 60 new Palestinian Authority (PA) textbooks have been translated and excerpted by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, whose web site is located at www.edume.org. The PA continues its policy of educating its students to liberate all of Palestine as its schools prepare their students for an independent Palestinian state. There is no mention of a two-state solution in the 60 new textbooks of the Palestinian Authority. They fail to teach the youth to see Israel as a neighbor with whom peaceful relations should be desired; the Jewish connection to the Holy Land is confined to antiquity. Jews' return to Palestine is described as “infiltration”; the State of Israel, a member state of the UN since 1949, is not recognized. By contrast, the State of Palestine is often referred to and its name appears with the official emblem of the Palestinian National Authority on the cover and the front page of many textbooks. Palestine stretches from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea and is exclusively Arab. The 5.5 million Jewish inhabitants are not counted; The maps that appear in the textbooks continue to disregard the existence of the State of Israel; Jerusalem is presented as belonging to the Palestinians alone, and as the capital of Palestine; there is no attempt to encourage reconciliation with Israel.

—Israel Resource News Agency, 11/23/2001

Dr. Zvi Zameret, director of the Ben-Zvi Foundation, presented a dismal view of the future of Israel. Zameret, an accomplished educator, headed a task force that spent nearly a year examining the state of national education in Israel. The findings show that within a few years the majority of children in Israel will be educated in non-Zionist institutions which are funded but not supervised, by the state. This year, 30 percent of first-grade children in Israel are enrolled in Arab schools. "Arab education is growing at a dizzying pace, and we're not asking ourselves enough to what extent we are educating for Israeliness," said Zameret. . . . In other words, in a few years the majority of children in Israel will be getting a non-Zionist education."

—Jerusalem Post, 12/24/2001

Israeli scientists have completed ten years of research and testing in a secret laboratory in the Nes Tziona Biological Center, and are about ready to begin mass-production of their newly-developed vaccine against anthrax. The vaccine has been tested and found to be effective, and unlike the American vaccine, causes no side effects. In addition, the American vaccine must be taken in six doses, while the new Israeli version takes effect after only one injection.

—Arutz-7, 12/20/2001

The military wing of the Islamic militant Hamas group said that poisonous chemicals planted on bombs its activists exploded recently have spread terror among Israelis even more effectively than its earlier attacks. Israel's Health Ministry revealed this week that nails and bolts packed into explosives detonated by a Hamas suicide bomber Dec. 1 in a Jerusalem pedestrian mall had been dipped in rat poison. The report unnerved many Israelis who already live with the fear of a biochemical attack from Iraq.

—Associated Press, 12/13/2001

Book Review

***Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII.* John Cornwell, Penguin Books, New York NY, 1999. 411 pages.**

It has been well reported that leading Jewish Nazi-hunters have been openly critical of the Catholic Church's intention to canonize Pope Pius XII who served as Pope from 1939 to 1958. Before WWII, the Pope condemned the Nazi glorification of race, nation, and state as a perversion of the divine order. During the war he remained silent about the mass murder of European Jews. In answer, those leading the effort for canonization of the Pope within the Catholic Church say they will not be stopped or delayed by the "unjustifiable and calumnious attacks against this great and saintly man."

John Cornwell is a journalist and author with a lifelong interest in Vatican affairs. He profiled Pope John Paul II for *Vanity Fair* magazine and the London *Sunday Times*. His previous book on the Vatican, *A Thief in the Night: The Death of Pope John Paul*,

became a bestseller around the world. In 1995 he won the Independent Television Authority award for services to religious journalism. From 1990 to 1996, Cornwell was a research fellow at Jesus College in Cambridge, England.

In *Hitler's Pope*, Cornwell documents the life and rise to the Papacy of Eugenio Pacelli, later to be known as Pius XII. Cornwell says that he began research for the book with the intention to portray a favorable picture of a remarkable man in church history who was now receiving his due. Given Cornwell's previous documents detailing favorably the work of the Catholic Church, he was given unprecedented access to Vatican and Jesuit archives. After researching documents in both Vatican City and Germany (where Pacelli spent a good part of his church career), Cornwell came to the conclusion that Eugenio Pacelli, Pope Pius XII, was instrumental in negotiating an accord that helped the Nazis rise to unhindered power and sealed the fate of the Jews in Europe. He tells the full story of how political and spiritual ambition, combined with a long-standing hatred for the Jews, combined to make Pius the most dangerous Pope in history.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Pacelli was a brilliant Vatican lawyer who helped shape a new ideology of unprecedented papal power. As papal nuncio in Munich and Berlin, in 1933 he negotiated a treaty with Hitler, the Reich Concordat. This created mutual support between Nazi Germany and the Holy See. At the time a cardinal and the Vatican Secretary of State, Pacelli was the chief architect of the agreement. Because of his efforts, the Vatican signed the agreement stating that German Catholics would “put themselves without reservation at the service of the new Nazi State.” Hitler, in return, agreed to tolerate Catholic organizations. The agreement ensured that the Nazis would rise unopposed by the most powerful Catholic community in the world, sealing, by Hitler's own admission, the fate of the Jews in Europe.

Most Bible students are familiar with the popes of the fifth through the twelfth centuries and the world power they controlled. Some hold the view that the Papacy of the near future may become as powerful as that of the past. This book documents how cooperation with the state led the Catholic Church to have such a powerful position with the most corrupt government known to the modern world. For those who may not hold this same view of future Papal power, the book still provides intriguing insights into what may arguably be the most important religious office in the world today.