

JANUARY — FEBRUARY 2002

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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PUBLISHING THE TRUTH SINCE 1766

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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Editorial

I KNOW Christians who are facing death; it may be through cancer or some other cause. Others will be sitting reading this, knowing they have but few years left here, whilst yet others face the death of someone they love. Whether you are Christ's or not, if you will obey His voice, he offers you rest and peace.

Words by outsiders are not very helpful, but listen to the One who speaks within you saying, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". How can you be sure those words mean you? Start by asking yourself, do they fit me?

He is calling, "Come unto me". Then have you come to Him? Nothing is added about worthiness, so do not let the memory of shortcomings dim your expectancy. Here you are, you have come.

Do the words "all ye that labour" match your condition? He literally means all you who are beat out, weary and faint. Are you on life's anvil being beaten flat by pain, doubt, fear and bodily weakness? Are you weary and struggling? Then come closer, for you are exactly the one Christ means.

Are you "heavy laden", unable to bear the load of your sin and suffering? Remember, Christ Jesus welcomes sinners and the great mark of all His dealings when on earth, was to enter wrong situations and put them right. He has not changed. No sin whatever need keep you back from coming now. No circumstance can forbid your coming, not even unbelief. Come to Him with your insupportable load. You need "rest", and Christ means that He will cause you to desist, stop you carrying the burden any further. The word is not "and you can go away and rest yourself". That is not what He means. He gives rest, and causes you

to rest. The One who does it is not you, but Christ Jesus. He means as soon as you come, then I will rest you.

We, His ministers and servants, ask you to do this simple thing, and nothing will again remove that rest, not even death. Rest may be interrupted, but always there. How can you come? In simple faith tell Him you have come to Him for His promised rest, eternally.

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Come unto me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon my breast.'

I came to Jesus as I was —
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting place
And He has made me glad."

— • —

When Bad News is Good News

A SERMON BY THE EDITOR

"But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions" (Obadiah 17)

THERE were two sons born to Isaac, Jacob and Esau. God said through the prophet Malachi, "I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau". God uses these words in Romans to prove, as neither had yet been born or done good or bad, "that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth". The election of God is "without repentance", unchangeable. So the utter destruction of Edom, "red", the descendants of Esau with his red stew, is prophesied in the 21 verses of Obadiah, "the servant of Jehovah", in the shortest book in the Old Testament. "But" this will bring great blessing to the Jews. Terrible events bring good for believers.

After 16 verses describing how Edom will be wiped out, our verse is full of good for God's people. When God comes out to punish His enemies, He also comes to bless His friends. Thus what is happening in the world today is a blessing to us. When the angel of death kills all the first-born of Pharaoh's people, God saves Israel. "The acceptable year of the Lord", the fiftieth year of release of slaves and debtors, is also "the day of vengeance of our God". The Psalmist says "I will sing of mercy and judgment".

God's enemies pride themselves upon the impregnable strength of their position

They were economically strong. Edom was given Mount Seir by God, and through its mountains south west of the Dead Sea wound the "King's Highway", the great trade route, making the Edomites rich and powerful. Do not God's enemies today control the riches, whilst God has seen fit to choose as His people the poor of the earth?

They had almost perfect defences, their cave dwellings being hidden in rocky fastnesses like eagle's nests. Their great city was Petra, entered through a 2-mile fissure in the mountain where tradition said Moses struck the rock. Petra is at times referred to as Sela or "the rock". Its amphitheatre seated 3,000 and its buildings and monuments were carved out of the solid rock. No wonder Obadiah says "thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock". God's enemies today believe themselves to be impregnable, beyond God's reach. They are not the first to think that.

They had allies, "the men of thy confederacy", who were at peace with them. The great aim of the world today is to join together and become massively strong. When Jesus was in bonds in front of those two enemies, Pilate and Herod, they at once became friends. That is exactly what is happening on earth today. Ancient enemies are making peace by getting rid of the one thing that really divided them in the past: Our Lord, His Book, and the God of strict truth. These they cannot abide, and find them a nuisance, a bar to unrighteous pleasures and friendship. This explains what we see happening on every hand. What has to go when Romanism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism are welcomed as one with Christianity? Why, our Lord, of course. He refuses to fit in. Our children are taught "artifact Jesus", with altars, fonts, robes and buildings. Nothing is said of His claims, or His estimate of this evil world.

They were famed for their wise men. The wisest of Job's three friends was Eliphaz the Temanite, and the prophets and ancient literature speak of Teman's wisdom. Teman was the name for the southern part of Edom. Thus they relied on wise counsellors for safety. Modern man prides himself above everything else in his philosophy and science, his theories about his origins, make-up and future. He speaks in certainties about these things, and brooks no correction. He is sure he can conquer every obstacle to human progress by wisdom. Show him God's estimate of him in the Bible as a fallen, lost sinner, blind and helpless, and he rejects it in measured tones of scorn.

God has good reason for rejecting and punishing those who appear to be in the right

God's choice looks unreasonable. Jacob does not give a good impression, appearing dishonest, mean and unmanly. Esau, however, appears a brave and admirable figure, a real man. Yet God chooses Jacob. I could stop to show you that first impressions of Jacob and Esau are incorrect, and when one digs down a little, Jacob's character improves, whilst his brother's less attractive side becomes apparent. However, let us look at their descendants.

Edom behaved unnaturally to his brother Jacob. Instead of brotherly love, he refused to allow Israel coming from Egypt to pass through Edom, even when the Jews offered to pay for all the water and food they needed, and to keep to the road. So they had to skirt round Edom, a long trail through some of the most trackless, rock-strewn hot desert.

God still told the Jews not to abhor their brother, but Edom repays the kindness with "violence" and injury. The day that Israel, because of her sins, is punished by God and Jerusalem taken, then what do the Edomites do? They stand on the other side, first in malicious unconcern, then speak proudly, or literally, "make wide the mouth" – mocking.

From that they turn to active hostility. As the Jews are carried away captives, Edom helps divide them up into slavery. God says you should not forget brotherhood in the day of your brother's calamity. After plundering Jerusalem, Edom stands in the crossroads and makes it their business to catch the few Jews who had escaped and drag them back, including also seizing those few who the invaders had spared. They then triumph in drunken revelry. "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said rase it, rase it, even to the foundations thereof."

So God says when His "day of the Lord" comes upon Edom, then as they have done, it shall be done to them. Retribution will come upon Edom's head. They shall drink a full cup, and "they shall be as though they had not been". The prophet feels for them as he says, if gleaners had come to you, they would have left a grape here and there, but this wholesale destruction will leave you nothing. You will cease to exist.

Some are shocked when they read "Esau have I hated", and add, it "does not mean God was actually antagonistic towards Esau". When God wants us to take note of a teaching in His Book, he repeats it. This utter destruction of Edom is repeated in Jeremiah 49:7-22, in equally terrible terms. Ezekiel, Joel and Amos all denounce Edom.

The way God carried out this prophecy is instructive

The Edomites said, "Who shall bring us down?" Measuring themselves by man, they deluded themselves by the comparison. Because they were superior to one, they imagined themselves superior to all. Believing themselves to be above the reach of human enemies, they imagined themselves beyond God's reach. The pride of their heart deceived them. God says, "I will bring thee down".

This is how God does it. First, their friends turn against them – the very people they are at peace with and allied to. It seems by the reference to bread, that it was treachery and desertion. Certainly the Nabataeans, some 300 years BC, took Petra. Then in 165 BC, when Judas Maccabeus subdued them, and in 126 BC when John Hyrcanus destroyed them, was fulfilled this prophecy: "The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them, and there shall not be any remaining

of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it." The Herod family were Edomites, but when Jerusalem fell to the Romans in AD 70, Idumea disappeared. The Jews recovered, but the Edomites were "as though they had not been".

How then are we blessed whilst the nations are being judged?

The Lord adds a *but*, and three promises. It is certain that these words have already been fulfilled, but God's Word is not then useless. It is capable of further fulfilments, because God's promises are changeless, and what He does to one people, He does to another, for God never changes. So we may read His future actions from His dealings in the past. The first fulfilment was a small affair, the restoration of a few Jews from captivity, but that does not exhaust the promise. The Lord can do the same again on a vast scale for all who trust in Him. We are being blessed by the very events destroying the nations.

The blessing of election is ours, for "upon mount Zion shall be deliverance", or "an escaped remnant". Weak, few and unimportant as we look to a despising world, we have been completely rescued. We are the remnant of all the many Christians who have lived in these islands for almost two thousand years. Do not mourn over it. Thank God for opening your eyes and saving you. Do not be shaken by the loss of faith around. Glory be to God! We are the saved in Mount Zion! We can proclaim it from the walls. We call to the lost of this world to join us. God ordained us to this deliverance, so if it is part of His plan that only a few should survive, then how privileged you are to be one of the happy chosen few. No wonder the doctrine of election is so hated by the unsaved, for it is our strength. God has a destiny for me. What or who can then stand in my way? "The remnant hath obtained it."

"There shall be holiness," or Mount Zion shall be a sanctuary, where the heathen shall not come. The Lord's people are saying, "the world is in the church". No! There is a sanctuary known to God where the heathenism of our age shall not enter. This is God's promise, and we may rely on it being as firm as the rest of the prophecy. No stranger could approach the temple to profane it. The world has invaded the outward church, but be an individualist. Today they say "church", where we used to say "believer" – "the temple of the Holy Ghost are ye". The saved on Mount Zion are the one true Church of God, one by one together.

How can we be so sure? Because our Lord Jesus is Israel, the only true Israelite who ever lived. He is the ideal Israel, the true Temple and the God of Israel who Himself made this promise. As long as the Lord Jesus is the same, there will be one area of this wicked world forever inviolate, pure, where holiness reigns alone. We, the living stones in His body the temple, are being purified. God says He will destroy all who desecrate His temple, so as they are being destroyed, we are being blessed.

Then make holiness your burning obsession. Total consecration overcomes men's prejudice against Christ. Use the Holy Bible. Many preach politics, social

issues and good deeds. None of those things convert souls. Preach God's Holy Gospel with holy lips, uplifting holy hands in prayer.

"And the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." The land had been given to them in family lots, never to be removed. However, through their sins they had been carried away captive and could no longer possess their possessions. Now Obadiah brings them God's promise: what they lost they shall again possess.

When the devil dazzles us with sin, we lose our possessions of salvation, the new birth, the Holy Spirit's presence, and we feel unable to make these things our own. We do not take what God has given us. Without faith it is impossible to accept eternal life, yet it is promised. Faith, however, opens the eyes to see there is cleansing, forgiveness and every blessing we need, once we trust Christ's death in our place when He took our sins on Himself.

Believers can live without what they already possess. We can live in the coal cellar on crusts, when above our heads is a well-stocked larder, comfort and plenty. Do we use our privileges in Christ? How often do we use our access by prayer into the presence of God? Do we feel the Holy Spirit's peace and joy?

And we can half-enjoy what ought to be firmly our own. An old minister once said to me that most ministers leave the church they are in far too soon, so never see the results of their work, but others gather it. We hold in a slack, half-hearted way. George Müller was right when he said he prayed a little longer than others (see article on pages 32 and 33). He went on until he received his answer, when we despair too soon and cease from prayer.

It is also true of the future. Much is promised us ahead: the resurrection, heaven, and being with Christ. We are not yet dead so need faith to possess these treasures. We already sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Much which passes for faith is but imagination. And imagination is merely making fiction into fact. Hope, however, is born of faith, and makes heaven ours now.

Believers will possess the whole world

Obadiah enlarges his prophecy to the very ends of the world. Now it is easy to misinterpret this. The Jewish rabbis made Edom to be the Christians, by imagining France and Spain especially to be direct descendants of Edom. The Jews thus rejoiced over the coming utter destruction of their tormentors, for the Christians treated them abominably. However, it shows how easily wishful thinking can distort Scripture. What is plain is that a day is coming when believers will possess the gate of their enemies. There is some imperfect fulfilment today as the nations turn to Christ as never before. That blessing is not the utmost bound of this grand prophecy. We will judge mount Esau. The whole earth will be ruled and judged by believers. That faithful servant shall rule over ten towns. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ, and we shall reign with Him. Know ye not that the saints shall judge the earth? Yet here is a mystery, so let us withdraw reverently. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

EARS TO HEAR

WE are surrounded today by all sorts of noise. In the home we can often hear the sound from the washing machine, the vacuum cleaner or radio. In the town the constant hum of the car engine or the screech of brakes or hooting horns mean that it is never silent. Even in the quiet countryside we hear the birds singing or a sheep bleating or a river trickling over the stones.

In the midst of all that noise, do we ever stop to think of the wonderful gift of hearing that God has given us. What pleasure we receive in hearing beautiful music or the laughter of a little baby. What a blessing it is to hear the warning sound of a fire alarm or a big lorry reversing. How good it is to hear the loving voice of your mother or father.

It is vitally important that we use the ear that God has given us to hear His Word. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," said Jesus.

It is a great blessing to hear God's Word read and to hear his Word preached. The promise of salvation is given to those who call on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13.) "But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14).

The hearing of God's Word preached is a vital part of what God uses to bring sinners to himself. But even those who are dull of hearing or deaf can still "hear" God's Word as He communicates the good news of Jesus Christ to their understanding.

It is important to remember too that God who formed our ear also hears. When Hezekiah had a big problem he brought it to the Lord in prayer. "Lord," he said, "bow down thine ear and hear."

Nehemiah prayed, "Let thine ear now be attentive . . . that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant". God heard and answered their prayers.

How good to be like young Samuel who heard God's voice speaking to him and replied, "Speak, for thy servant heareth". May we be hearing what God the Lord speaks to us.

BIBLE SEARCH

Find the missing words from the verses.

1. Jesus said, Harken unto me _____ one of you, and understand (Mark 7:14).
2. Go thou near and hear _____ that the Lord our God shall say (Deuteronomy 5:27).

3. Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a _____ (Matthew 7:24).
4. Then Samuel answered _____ for thy servant heareth (1 Samuel 3:10).
5. Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I _____ (Psalm 143:8).
6. If that thou hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day, to _____ and to do them (Deuteronomy 28:13).
7. The _____ ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them (Proverbs 20:12).
8. Come near ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the _____ hear and all that is therein (Isaiah 34:1).
9. All the people were very _____ to hear him (Luke 19:48).
10. Be more _____ to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

The initial letters of your answers will spell out the words missing from the following verse: He that hath _____ let him hear (Matthew 11:15).

The Hope of the Lord's Return

DAVID N. SAMUEL

THE hope of the Lord's return is a very important and real part of the Christian faith, though often neglected and abused. It is confessed in the three great creeds of Christianity. "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead" (The Apostles' Creed). "He shall come again with glory to judge the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end" (The Nicene Creed). "From whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; and shall give account of their own works" (Athanasian Creed).

The hope of our Lord's return occupies a very prominent part in the New Testament. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). "For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work,

and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh. . . .”

When Christ ascended up into heaven from Mount Olivet, the angels said to the apostles: “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). He went up in a cloud, He will return in clouds. “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen” (Revelation 1:7). Many more texts could be quoted, but enough has been done to show that the hope of the Lord’s return permeates every part of the New Testament. It is redolent with this hope and expectation. And so also should be the heart of the Christian. The second coming of Christ is an essential and integral part of the Christian faith. It is not something optional, added on by those who might have a particular interest in prophecy.

But what kind of event is it? Is it a real event? Something that is going to take place in the history of the world? Or is it some kind of mythological happening that has merely symbolical significance? These questions must be asked because there are people who claim to be Christians, who believe in the return of Christ, but in a symbolic way, not as something that will happen in the real world.

I find this quite strange, because it is out of kilter with the rest of Scripture. In the Bible we see history and religion intertwined, in fact they are inseparable. The whole of the Old Testament is religion communicated through the medium of history. The mighty acts of God – the calling of Abraham out of Ur of Chaldees; the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt; their entry into the Promised Land; the exile in Babylon and their return – what is that but history, and the mighty acts of God in history? God acting in the real world of men and things? The two are inseparable. Judaism is a historical religion; Christianity is likewise a historical religion.

Our Lord saw and understood His work and ministry in those terms. It would be a most extraordinary thing if suddenly, when we enter into the era of the Church, this religion should change its character, and cease to be historical and concerned with the real world, and become a kind of free-floating entity, detached from the world of things and events. Yet, that is what some people think when we come to talk about the ascension into heaven and the return of Christ. That is what some people think about the Book of Revelation, namely, that what it has to say has some spiritual significance, but that it is all rather removed from the real world. But the Book of Revelation explodes that view of itself straight away, for it says in the very first verse of chapter 1: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass. . . .” So it is about the world of time and space, and about the history of the world.

I am perfectly content to hold the historicist view of the Book of Revelation, which has been held in the past, generally, by Protestants. I believe it is the safest guide to its interpretation. It is the view that in the Book of Revelation we have

foretold the history of the world from Christ's first advent to His second coming, and that if we study it humbly and prayerfully we shall be given light for the last times. Here we are dealing with the stuff of real history and of the real world. If we want to know what happened in the beginning of the world, where do we turn? We must go to the Book of Genesis. It is no good going to the scientist for this, for none of them were there to witness it. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38:4). If we want to know about these things we must turn to the testimony of God. There is no other. Similarly, if we would know what will happen at the end of the world, we must turn to the Scriptures, to the Book of Revelation, in particular, for none can predict these things but the Spirit of God. Of course, there are other parts of Scripture that throw light on the last times, but the Book of Revelation occupies a special place in these matters. For this we have the testimony of a wise and godly man, H. Grattan Guinness, who, in his book *History Unveiling Prophecy*, wrote the following:

"It is a deep satisfaction to the author to remember that whatever may be the views of a modern section of sceptical or speculative interpreters of the Apocalypse, who either see no reference to definite historical events in the prophecy, or relegate its fulfilment to future times; in accepting and advocating its historical interpretation, in regarding it as the story told in advance in symbolic language of the events of the Christian centuries, he is treading in the steps of the greater part of Apocalyptic interpreters from the earliest times, of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Victorinus, Lanctantius, Eusebius, Athanasius, Jerome, and Augustine among the Fathers; of Bede and Anspert, Andreas and Anslem, Joachim Abbas and Almeric of the Middle Ages; of the Albigenses and Waldenses, of Wycliffe and the Lollards, of John Huss and Jerome of Prague of pre-Reformation times; of the Reformers, English, Scottish and Continental; of the noble army of confessors and martyrs who suffered under pagan and papal Rome; of the Puritan theologians; of the Pilgrim Fathers of New England, of Mede and Moore, and Sir Isaac Newton, and Jonathan Edwards, that greatest of American theologians, of Bengel the learned German exegete, of Alford and Wordsworth, of Birks and Bickersteth, of Faber and Elliott in England, and a host of other men distinguished for their ability, their assiduity, their spirituality, their deep study of the prophetic Word, in short what appears to be the greatest and best expositors of this book.

So you see we are in good company! And we are treading on safe ground. What I propose to do, then, is first, to give the briefest of outlines of the historicist position and interpretation of the Book of Revelation. Secondly, to speak of some of the signs that will precede the Lord's return; and lastly, consider how Christians should live and act and conduct themselves in anticipation of the Lord's return.

FIRST, THE HISTORICIST VIEW OF REVELATION

The first three chapters of the Book of Revelation consist of the letters to the seven Churches of Asia Minor. You are familiar with these, ending with the memorable words to the Church of Laodicea spoken by our Lord Himself: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

After that, in chapters 4 and 5, we have John's wonderful vision of heaven, of the host of heaven worshipping God and the Lamb. The significant thing in chapter 5 is this: that there is only One in heaven and earth who is worthy to open the book of God's secret purposes for the history of the world, and that is Christ Himself. And as He opens the seals of that book, so the purposes of God unfold.

So the chapters that follow, that is 6-18, contain a threefold division. They are divided into three groups of seven – the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven vials or bowls. These successively reveal the purposes of God in history. They suggest a long period of time rather than a short one. They cover the period between Christ's first coming and His coming again in power and glory. They cover the whole period of the history of Christendom, of the Church of God until the saints of God are glorified. So let us look briefly at this developing story.

The first group, the seals, record the history of the Church up to the time of the Emperor Constantine. Constantine was converted to Christianity, paganism was overthrown, and Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire. This period is depicted by seals because in it God was bringing about the sealing or the establishment of the Church. Starting with 120 disciples at Pentecost, the Gospel of God's salvation spread with such amazing power that after three centuries it had overthrown paganism in the greatest empire of the day, and God had sealed Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire.

The second group which come next upon the scene are the trumpets. The trumpets follow upon the establishment of the Church under Constantine. Trumpets are used to warn people of danger when the enemy is attacking. We read in Ezekiel 33:3: "Blow the trumpet, and warn the people." These trumpets in Revelation contain warnings from God to His people, telling them that following the establishment of the Church they would have to face great dangers, without and within. We know from history that this took place.

First, they had to face the ruthless attack of pagan armies, including the Huns and the Vandals (chapter 8). Then, following that time there came the rise of the two great apostasies, Romanism and Islam (chapters 9-13), both of which proved to be persecuting antagonists of Christianity. They have both lasted over 1,200 years and have put millions of Christians to death. So in the trumpets we have God's warnings to His people of these powerful enemies.

The third and last group are the vials or bowls (chapter 16). The prophecy of Zechariah gives us the key to understanding the symbol of the vials, for in Zechariah 9:14-15, when God is sending severe judgments, we read: "They shall

be filled like bowls." The vials or bowls, therefore, speak of the outpouring of God's judgments upon these two great apostasies, Romanism and Islam, and eventually on all wickedness prior to the setting up of our Lord's Kingdom on earth, for the seventh and last vial leads right up to our Lord's return to establish judgment and justice in the world.

Both these apostasies have, to a very great extent, had their power and influence curtailed since the Reformation. Severe judgments came upon the Roman Catholic nations and the Papacy through the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and later the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. In 1870 Italy dethroned the Pope and removed his temporal power. In 1907 France separated the Roman Catholic Church from the state, appropriated her estates, and expelled thousands of priests, monks and nuns from their country. In 1910 Portugal confiscated the estates of the Roman Catholic Church, and likewise drove priests, monks and nuns from the country.

The Moslem power has also been greatly weakened by the decay and fall of the great Turkish Empire, which was the seat of its power during the First World War, and the subsequent secularisation of Turkey under Attaturk in the 1920s and '30s. Despite the acts of terrorism perpetrated by Moslems, Islam is a power which is radically weak, and on the defensive in face of the secularism of the West. Its wild acts of violence are really the spasms of its death throes.

These, then, are the three main historical divisions of the Book of Revelation – the seals, the trumpets and the vials. The first two, the seals and the trumpets, have been fulfilled; we are now in the era of the vials or bowls of God's wrath. If we are right in thinking that the vials depict the modern age, then where exactly are we today? The first five vials depict the losses and sufferings that came upon the Papacy and the Roman Catholic countries, to which we have already referred. All this greatly weakened the power of the Papacy which was the dominating apostasy of the West.

At verse 12 of chapter 16 of Revelation, we come to the sixth vial: "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared." Here we are taken from the Roman apostasy in the West to the Moslem apostasy in the East. The Bible gives us the key to the symbol used here. An invasion of the Assyrians is depicted in Isaiah 8:7 as a river overflowing its banks. So the drying up of the river Euphrates symbolises the downfall of the Moslem Empire.

In the 19th century the Turkish Empire, then Moslem, became "the sick man of Europe". In the 20th century it was overthrown. Verses 13 and 14 therefore bring us right up to the present day. We read: "And I saw three unclean spirits . . . working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." Here is a prediction of the extraordinary and demonic uncleanness which is so evident in the world today. Evil powers are at work spreading impurity, violence and corruption. These spirits come from three sources – the dragon, which is

paganism, now revived in this godless age; the beast, which is the papacy; and finally, the false prophet, which is Islam. This superfluity of wickedness manifests itself prior to our Lord's return for His people, for the next verse, 15, reads: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." This brings me to the second point which is –

THE SIGNS THAT PRECEDE THE LORD'S COMING

Let me run through some of these briefly.

1. *We are told in Matthew 24:14 of one unmistakable sign.* "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." The words are those of Christ Himself. From the earliest days the apostles sought to obey the Lord's command to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. The Word was preached in the ancient world by the apostles. But Paul was still conscious of the "regions beyond", that had yet to be reached. Gradually the Gospel penetrated to the distant tribes of Europe, under the old Roman Empire, and even here to Britain. It spread also to the east and to Russia. But it was not until the 18th century that the mission of the Church received a new impetus, through the modern missionary movement begun by William Carey, to take the Gospel to India and China and the more remote parts of the world.

We can now say, at the beginning of the 21st century, that this mission has been accomplished, and that the Gospel has been preached in all the world, and that the sequel to that is to expect, in our Lord's words, that the end will soon come. God's purpose in the Word being preached in all the world is not to save all, but to call out His elect people, chosen in Christ, and when that has been done, then to hasten the coming of His kingdom.

2. *What is happening to the Jewish people?* A fixed period is foretold in Scripture, during which Jerusalem was to be given over to the Gentile rulers, and the Jews were to have no dominion over their ancient city. A fixed period was also foretold which was to be the times of the Gentiles' visitation, a time during which they were to enjoy privileges and to occupy a position something like that of Israel in ancient times. Both periods were one day to end.

Jerusalem would once more be restored to its ancient inhabitants, and the Gentiles, because of their hardness and unbelief, would be stripped of their privileges, and suffer the just judgment of God.

What are we to make of the astonishing events of the six-day war in 1967, when the Jews re-occupied Jerusalem after a period of some 2,000 years? "Jerusalem," said our Lord, "shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Nothing could be more plain. Notice has been served; the times of the Gentiles are at an end. If we are in doubt about this, we have only to look about us, and see how the spiritual privileges are being withdrawn from the nations that have formerly been known as Christian. We are witnessing the

closure of churches and chapels on a grand scale; and in those that remain the Gospel is being replaced by a thinly veiled humanism.

But this does not mean that the times of the Gentiles are to end abruptly. God does not withdraw His gracious influences suddenly from any man or nation. He pleads with them and reasons with them, and gives ample warning of what is soon to come to pass. Think of our Lord's parable of the unfruitful fig tree. The gardener pleads for it, that it might be spared a little longer, one more year, to see if it will respond. Even though the sentence has gone forth, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?", it is permitted a further short probationary period. Such is the longsuffering and mercy of God. My point, however, is that the sentence has gone forth, the process has been initiated, the times of the Gentiles are at an end, and men should seize the opportunity, as never before, to hear and obey the Gospel, for the sands of time are fast running out.

3. *There is another thing associated with the times preceding our Lord's return, and that is lawlessness.* "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). And Paul declares: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." He then goes on to describe more fully what he means. "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." All the types of behaviour listed here by Paul are reflected in our present-day, lawless society.

But there is another kind of lawlessness manifesting itself today also, and that is the rejection of the law of God by civil bodies and even by Parliament itself. And this is much worse than the criminal behaviour of individuals, for it is the corporate and calculated defiance of God's law by society as a whole. It is, in effect, the nation shaking its fist at God and saying, "We will not have You to rule over us". In recent times there has been legislation passed by Parliament on divorce and remarriage, abortion, the Lord's Day, gambling, homosexuality, and so forth, all of which is in open rebellion against the law of God.

The lawlessness within nations, and the lawlessness of nations, is vividly expressed in symbolic language by our Lord Himself in the verses immediately following His prediction regarding the ending of the times of the Gentiles. "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26).

"The sea and the waves roaring" is often in Scripture a figure of peoples and nations in tumult, rebellion and lawlessness. "The powers of heaven being shaken" is also in Scripture a figure of the toppling of rulers and governments.

4. *I turn now to another sign which will manifest itself prior to our Lord's return, and that is the resurgence of the old Roman Empire.* The Roman Empire

covered and also unified the whole of Europe, and what we are witnessing today is the revival of it in the form of the European Union. The Roman Empire is depicted in the Book of Revelation by a beast which has seven heads and ten horns. The beast appears, following the pouring out of the seventh vial or bowl of God's wrath (see Revelation chapter 17).

The sixth bowl was poured out upon the River Euphrates, and signified the drying up of the Moslem Empire. The seventh vial is of great significance for the number seven denotes in Scripture completeness, so with this vial the purposes of God in history are drawing to a conclusion. The pouring out of the seventh vial initiates a great earthquake. In Scripture an earthquake is the symbol of revolution. This earthquake is the greatest that has ever been known.

It is impossible here in the compass of this paper to go into all the details but the picture appears to be this: That the nations of Europe come together in a political union representing the revival of the old Roman Empire, signified by the beast with the seven heads and ten horns. John sees riding upon the back of this beast a woman, a harlot, dressed in purple and scarlet. The figure of the harlot in Scripture always stands for a degenerate, backsliding and apostate church. In this case it is the Church of Rome, which seeks to take advantage of the confederation of European nations, and so rides upon its back. But John sees in his vision that the time comes, when the beast turns upon the woman and tears her to pieces and devours her; which means that the time will come when the godless, infidel European Union will turn upon the hypocritical Church of Rome and destroy her.

The great earthquake signifies the disastrous social and political upheavals that must attend the attempt to construct a political, social and monetary union in Europe.

5. *There is yet one other sign I must mention, given in Scripture as presaging the Lord's return.* In the closing words of the Book of Daniel we read: "Shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Daniel 12:4). Many have remarked on these words before, but if we think today of the astounding development of information technology and the astonishing speed of travel, we do seem to have a remarkable fulfilment of this prophecy, which is meant to describe the condition of things in the end time. It also reminds us of the words of Revelation 16:20, "Every island fled away, and the mountains were not found", which are intended to signify not the literal removal of mountains and islands from the face of the earth, but rather that seas and mountains, which had hitherto been obstacles to communication, will no longer count, and will be as if they had been removed from the face of the earth. Time and space are now as nothing; mountains and seas as if they did not exist. The Bible foretells such a time, and it is one that presages the end of time.

Such, then, are some of the signs that indicate the nearness of the Lord's return. We are not amongst those who ask for signs, yet we must not neglect those signs that are given. When the Scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign of His authority,

Jesus rebuked them for their unbelief. But when the disciples asked Him what would be the signs of His coming and of the end of the world, He told them of those signs. We have a duty, therefore, to observe the signs of the times in which we live, and to look for the Lord's return.

CONCLUSION

Now, finally, these things being so, how should the Christian and the Church conduct themselves in the present time?

1. *These things that we have spoken of should give them a different outlook from the world.* Let me explain what I mean by this. Since the advent of the theory of evolution the outlook of people generally has been altered in a very significant way. They have been taught to think in terms of millions of years, past and future. People take it for granted that life will go on on this planet for millions of years. This has become the common currency of thought of many inside as well as outside the Church. The apostle Peter predicts the emergence of this kind of thinking: "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

The signs of the end serve to shatter this refuge of lies for all except those who remain wilfully ignorant of them and of God's purpose in history. They dispel the dream of timelessness, and bring home dramatically the fact that the Church exists "between the lightning flash of the Incarnation and the thunder-clap of the Second Coming", and that thunder-clap cannot be delayed indefinitely. The present order is passing away.

2. *What we have been considering ought to give an urgency to the preaching of the Gospel.* "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near." Again, "Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation". This is the message of the Bible. It is never divorced from crisis, for it is delivered to those "upon whom the ends of the world are come". Men may not trifle with religion for ever, God's Spirit will not always strive with them. Our Lord's ministry to the people of Israel was for three short years. In that time their destiny was decided. He gave them warning in the parable of the barren fig tree: "Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down" (Luke 13:8-9). Likewise the times of the Gentiles are running out. While we have the light, let us walk in the light. The time shall come when the door shall be shut and the opportunity past. This note of urgency must never be absent from our preaching, but it takes on an added urgency in the present time, in view of the lateness of the hour.

When will the end of the world come? When God's elect have been gathered in from all the nations by the preaching of the Gospel. We pray in the service for the burial of the dead: "That it may please Thee, of Thy gracious goodness, shortly to

accomplish the number of Thine elect, and to hasten Thy kingdom." Every Gospel sermon is a hastening of the end. "The harvest," said Jesus, "is the end of the world." We do not know how near that is, but every soul gathered into the kingdom brings it nearer, for the number of the elect is finite.

3. *These matters we have been dealing with also give an immediate relevance to the Gospel message.* The great question that has been exercising the minds of Christian leaders in recent times has been, "How can religion be made to engage with people's lives today, in the modern world?" Well, here surely is a very important part of the answer. The things we have been talking about are in everybody's newspapers. They are daily reading about the Middle East, about Israel, about Islam, Europe and the Papacy. And the Bible has something to say about all these things, and gives the only true and proper interpretation of the events surrounding them. All these things impinge upon the lives of most people today, and have immense spiritual consequences for every man and woman. They tell them unmistakably that "it is time to seek the Lord".

4. *And, lastly, these things inspire hope.* "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). The only hope of the Christian, and indeed of the world, is the Second Coming of Christ. Why? For only then will wars and rumours of wars cease. Only then will there be universal peace, and justice, and equity. Now the world lurches from one "peace process" to another. As soon as a truce or ceasefire is achieved in one part of the world, hostility breaks out in another. Man is unable to establish peace, because he is not at peace with himself, nor is he at peace with his Maker. But when Christ returns "the government shall be upon his shoulder" and "of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end".

May we keep this hope constantly before us, so that it sustains us in these troubled times.

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A Letter to a Nobleman (Lord Dartmouth)

(From *Cardiphonia*, by John Newton, Volume 1, 1807)

My Lord,

Olney, March 24th, 1774

What a mercy is it to be separated in spirit, conversation, and interest, from the world that knows not God! where all are alike by nature. Grace makes a happy and unspeakable difference. Believers were once under the same influence of that spirit who still worketh in the children of disobedience, pursuing different paths,

but all equally remote from truth and peace; some hatching cockatrice eggs, others weaving spiders' webs. These two general heads of mischief and vanity, include all the schemes, aims, and achievements of which man is capable, till God is pleased to visit the heart with His grace. The busy part of mankind are employed in multiplying evils and miseries; the more retired, speculative, and curious, are amusing themselves with what will hereafter appear as unsubstantial, unstable, and useless as a cobweb. Death will soon sweep away all that the philosophers, the virtuosi, the mathematicians, the antiquarians, and other learned triflers, are now weaving with so much self-applauded address. Nor will the fine-spun dresses, in which the moralist and the self-righteous clothe themselves, be of more advantage to them, either for ornament or defence, than the product of a spider. But it is given to a few to know their present state and future destination—These build upon the immoveable Rock of Ages for eternity: These are trees springing from a living root, and bear the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God: These only are awake, while the rest of the world are in a sleep, indulging in vain dreams, from which likewise they will shortly awake; but, O with what consternation, when they shall find themselves irrecoverably divorced from all their delusive attachments, and compelled to appear before that God to whom they have lived strangers, and to whom they must give an account!

O for a thousand tongues to proclaim in the ears of thoughtless mortals that important aphorism of our Lord, "One thing is needful"! Yet a thousand tongues would be and are employed in vain, unless so far as the Lord is pleased to send the watchman's warning, by the power and agency of His own Spirit. I think the Poet tells us, that Cassandra had the gift of truly foretelling future events; but she was afterwards laid under a painful embarrassment, that nobody should believe her words. Such, with respect to the bulk of their auditories, is the lot of gospel-ministers: they are enlightened to see, and sent forth to declare, the awful consequences of sin; but alas, how few believe their report! To illustrate our grief and disappointment, I sometimes suppose there was a dangerous water in the way of travellers, over which there is a bridge, which those who can be prevailed upon may pass with safety. By the side of this bridge watchmen are placed, to warn passengers of the danger of the waters; to assure them, that all who attempt to go through them inevitably perish; to invite, intreat, and beseech them, if they value their lives, to cross the bridge. Methinks this should be an easy task: Yet if we should see in fact the greater part stopping their ears to the friendly importunity; many so much offended by it, as to account the watchman's care impertinent, and only deserving of scorn and ill treatment; hardly one in fifty betaking themselves to the friendly bridge, the rest eagerly plunging into the waters, from which none return, as if they were determined to try who should be drowned first: this spectacle would be no unfit emblem of the reception the gospel meets with from a blinded world.

The ministers are rejected, opposed, vilified; they are accounted troublers of the world, because they dare not, cannot stand silent, while sinners are perishing

before their eyes; and if, in the course of many sermons, they can prevail but one soul to take time warning, and to seek to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, they may account it a mercy and an honour sufficient to overbalance all the labour and reproaches they are called to endure. From the most they must expect no better reception than the Jews gave to Jeremiah, who told the prophet to his face: "As to the word thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee at all; but we will certainly do whatever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth." Surely, if the Lord has given us any sense of the worth of our souls, any compassion towards them, this must be a painful exercise; and experience must teach us something of the meaning of Jeremiah's pathetic exclamation, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people". It is our *duty* to be thus affected. Our relief lies in the wisdom and sovereignty of God. He reveals His salvation to whom he pleases, for the most part to babes; from the bulk of the wise and the prudent it is hidden. Thus it hath pleased Him, and therefore it must be right. Yea, He will one day condescend to justify the propriety and equity of His proceedings to His creatures: then every mouth will be stopped, and none will be able to reply against their Judge. Light is come into the world, but men prefer darkness. They hate the light, resist it, and rebel against it. It is true, all do so; and therefore, if all were to perish under the condemnation, their ruin would be their own act.

It is of grace that any are saved, and in the distribution of that grace, He does what He will with His own: a right which most are ready enough to claim in their own concerns though they are so unwilling to allow it to the Lord of all. Many perplexing and acrimonious disputes have been started upon this subject; but the redeemed of the Lord are called, not to dispute, but to admire and rejoice; to love, adore, and obey. To know that He loved us, and gave Himself for us, is the constraining argument and motive to love Him, and surrender ourselves to Him; to consider ourselves as no longer our own, but to devote ourselves, with every faculty, power, and talent, to His service and glory. He deserves our all; for He parted with all for us. He made himself poor – He endured shame, torture death, and the curse for us, that we through Him might inherit everlasting life. Ah! the hardness of my heart, that I am no more affected, astonished, overpowered with this thought!

I am, etc.,

John Newton

Live in hope, then, in a lively hope, that since Christ is risen from the dead, He lives to make intercession for thee; and thou shalt reap the blessed benefit of this two-fold salvation that is wrought, and that is working out for thee, by Jesus Christ our Lord.

John Bunyan

Luther's Christmas Sermon

Part 2

SECOND EVIL – WORLDLY LUSTS

THE other evil in man Paul terms "worldly lusts." Therein is comprehended all disorderly conduct the individual may be guilty of, touching himself and his neighbour; whilst the first evil – ungodliness – comprehends all wrongs toward God. Observe Paul's judicious choice of words – "lusts", "worldly lusts". By the use of "worldly" he would include all evil lusts, whether it be for goods, luxuries, honour, favours or aught of the world wherein one may lustfully sin. He does not say, however, we must deny ourselves worldly goods, or must not make use of them. They are good creatures of God. We must avail ourselves of food, drink, clothing and other necessities of life. No such thing is forbidden, it is only the lust after them, the undue love and craving for them, that we must deny, for it leads us into all sins against ourselves and our neighbours.

In this expression is also condemned the conduct of godless hypocrites, who, though they may be clad in sheep's clothing, and sometimes refrain from an evil deed through cowardice or shame or through fear of hell's punishment, are nevertheless filled with evil desires for wealth, honour and power. No one loves life more dearly, fears death more terribly and desires more ardently to remain in this world than do they; yet they fail to recognize the worldly lusts wherein they are drowned, and their many works are vainly performed. It is not enough to put away worldly works and speech; worldly desires, or lusts, must be removed. We are not to place our affection on the things of this life, but all our use of it should be with a view to the future life; as follows in the text: "Looking for the . . . appearing of the glory," etc.

Observe here, the grace of God reveals the fact that all men are filled with worldly lusts, though some may conceal their lustfulness by their hypocrisy. Were men not subject to such desires, there could be no necessity for the revelation of grace, no need for its benefits, no occasion for its manifestation to all men, no need it should teach the putting off of lusts. For whosoever is not subject to lusts is not called upon to forsake them. Paul's statement here has no reference to such a one. Indeed, he cannot be a human being; hence he has no need of grace, and so far as he is concerned its manifestation is not essential. What then, must he be? Unquestionably, a devil, and eternally condemned, with all his holiness and purity. Could the hypocrites, however, wholly hide their worldly lusts, they could not conceal their ardent desire to hold to this life, and their unwillingness to die. Thus they reveal their lack of grace, and the worldliness and ungodliness of all their works. Nevertheless they fail to perceive their graceless condition and their perilous infirmity.

Further, Paul speaks of “denying”, or renouncing. Therein he rejects many foolish expedients devised by men for attaining righteousness. Some run to the wilderness, some to cloisters. Others separate themselves from society, presuming by bodily flight to run away from ungodliness and worldly lusts. Yet others resort to tortures and injuries of the body, imposing upon themselves excessive hunger, thirst, wakefulness, labour, uncomfortable apparel. Now if ungodliness and worldly lust were but something painted upon the wall, you might escape them by running out of the house; if they were knit into one red coat, you might pull off the coat and don a gray one, did they grow in your hair, you might have it shaved off and wear a bald pate; were they baked in the bread, you might eat roots instead. But since they inhere in your heart and permeate you through and through, where can you flee that you will not carry them with you? What can you wear under which you will escape them? What will you eat and drink wherein they will not be with you? In a word, what can you do to escape yourself, since you cannot get out of yourself? Dear man, the great temptations are within you. To run away from them would necessitate, first, fleeing from yourself. James says (1:14): “Each man is tempted, when he is driven away by his own lust, and enticed.”

The apostle means, not simply that we must flee the outward temptation to sin, but, as he says, that we must “deny” them, must mortify the lusts, or desires within ourselves. Our lusts being mortified, no external temptation can harm. By such subjection do we truly flee. If we fail to mortify our desires, it will not avail to flee outward temptations. We must remain amidst temptations and there learn through grace to deny lusts and ungodliness. It is written (Psalm 110:2), “Rule thou” – or apply thyself – “in the midst of thine enemies”. Conflict and not flight, energy and not rest, must be the order of this life if we are to win the crown.

We read of an ancient father who, unable to endure temptation in a cloister, left it that he might in the wilderness serve God in peace. But in the desert one day his little water-jug overturned. He set it up, but it overturned a second time. Becoming enraged, he dashed the vessel in pieces. Then saying within himself, “Since I cannot find peace when alone, the defect must be in myself”, he returned to the cloister to suffer temptations, from that time forward teaching that we must obtain the victory, not by fleeing worldly lusts, but by denying them.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Paul goes on to show another thing wherein we are instructed of grace – the Christian’s manner of life after ungodliness and worldly lusts are denied: “We should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.” What an excellent general rule of life he gives us! One adapted to all conditions. He offers no occasion for sects. He introduces no differing opinions of men, as the case is with human doctrines.

First, he mentions “sobriety”, wherein is indicated what should be the nature of man’s conduct towards himself in all respects. It calls for the subjection of the

body, the keeping of it well disciplined. In every place of our text where the term "soberness" is used, Paul has the Greek word "sophron," which signifies, not only soberness, but temperance in every recognition of the body, in every ministration to the flesh; in eating, drinking and sleeping, for instance; in apparel, speech, manner and movement. Such soberness represents what is known in German as honourable living and good breeding. The sober man knows how, in all physical relations, to conduct himself temperately, discreetly and bravely; not leading a wild, shameless, unrestrained, disorderly life, lax in regard to eating, sleeping, and to speech, manner and movement. In the earlier part of the chapter Paul devises that aged women teach the young women to be "sober minded" and chaste.

Excessive eating and drinking truly does greatly impede our efforts to lead an honourable life. On the other hand, temperance contributes much to accomplish it. The moment one indulges his appetite to excess, he loses perfect control of himself; his five senses become unmanageable. Experience teaches that when the stomach is filled with meat and drink, the mouth is filled with words, the ears with the lust of hearing, the eyes with the lust of seeing. The whole system either becomes indolent, drowsy, dull, or else it grows wild and dissolute, all the members overleaping the bounds of reason and propriety, until no discipline nor moderation remains. In Greek the word "sophron" is the opposite of "asotos", just as drunkenness and soberness are contrasting terms. We Germans also call that individual "sober," who, though he may have eaten and drunk, is not intoxicated, but has perfect control of himself.

You see now the manner of good works advocated by the apostle. He does not require us to make pilgrimages; he does not forbid certain foods; nor does he prescribe a particular garb, nor certain fast days. His teaching is not that of the class who, in obedience to human laws, separate themselves from men, basing their spirituality and goodness upon the peculiarity of their garb and diet; their manner of wearing the hair, their observance of times; who seek to become righteous by not conforming to custom in the manner of clothing, diet, occupation, seasons and movements. They are given an appropriate name in the Gospel — "phariseaei", meaning "excluded" or "separated". In Psalm 80:13, the Psalmist calls them "monios", signifying "a solitary one". The name primarily is applied to a wild hog of solitary habits. We shall hereafter designate this class as "solitary". As the psalmist complains, they make terrible havoc of God's vineyard. These Pharisees, or solitary ones, make great show with their traditions, their peculiar garb, their meats, days and physical attitudes. They easily draw away the multitude from the common customs of life to their ways. As Christ tells us (Matthew 24:24), even the elect can scarcely resist them.

Let us learn here from Paul that no meats, drinks, apparel, colours, times, attitudes, are forbidden, and none are prescribed. In all these things, everyone is given freedom, if only they be used in soberness, or moderation. As said before, these temporalities are not forbidden. Only the abuse of them, only excess and disorder therein, is prohibited. Where there is distinction and emphasis on such

matters, there you will surely find human laws; not evangelical doctrine, not Christian liberty. Without soberness, or moderation, the ultimate result must be dissimulation, and hypocrisy. Therefore, make use of all earthly things, when and where you please, giving thanks to God. This is Paul's teaching. Only guard against excess, disorder, misuse and licentiousness relative to temporal things and you will be in the right way. Do not permit yourself to be misled by the fact that the holy fathers established orders and sects, made use of certain meats and certain apparel, and conducted themselves thus and so. Their object was not peculiar eminence – therein they would have been unholy – but their conduct was of preference, and as a means of exercising moderation. Likewise do you exercise moderation as you see fit, and maintain your freedom. Confine not yourself to manners and methods, as if godly living consisted in them. Otherwise you will be solitary and deprived of the communion of saints. Diligently guard against such narrowness. We must fast, we must watch and labour, we must wear inferior clothing, and so on; but only on occasions when the body seems to need restraint and mortification. Do not set apart a specified time and place, but exercise your self-denial as necessity requires. Then you will be fasting rightly. You will fast every day in denying worldly lusts. So the Gospel teaches, and they who follow this course are of the New Testament dispensation.

Secondly, Paul says we should be "righteous" in our lives. No work, however, nor particular time is designated as the way to righteousness. In the ways of God is universal freedom. It is left to the individual to exercise his liberty; to do right when, where and to whom occasion offers. Herein Paul gives a hint of how we should conduct ourselves toward our neighbour – righteously. We owe him that righteousness which consists in doing to him as we would have him do to us; in granting to him all we would have him grant us. We are to do our neighbour no bodily harm, no injury to his wife, children, friends, possessions, honour or anything of his. Rather we are obligated, wherever we see he needs our assistance, to aid him, to stand by him, at the risk of our bodies, our property, our honour and everything that is ours. Righteousness consists in rendering to each one his due. What a little word to comprehend so much! How few walk in the way of righteousness, though otherwise living blamelessly! We do everything else but what saving grace reveals to us as our duty to do.

The word "neighbour" must be construed to include even an enemy. But the way of righteousness is entirely obliterated. It is much more overgrown in neglect than the way of moderation, which itself is almost wholly untrodden and effaced because of the introduction of certain meats and apparel, certain movements and display. These things have been superabundantly, more than profusely, insinuated. We ape after set forms and make fools of ourselves with rosaries, with ecclesiastical and feudal institutions, with hearing of masses, with festivals, with self-devised works concerning which is no divine command. O Lord God, how wide hell has opened her mouth (see Isaiah 5:14); and how narrow the gate of heaven has become in consequence of the accursed doctrines and devices of these

solitary and pharisaical persons! The prophets unwittingly painted the picture of present-day conditions. They represented hell by the wide open mouth of a dragon, and heaven by a closed door. Oh, the wretchedness of the picture.

It is not necessary to inquire what outward works you can perform. Look to your neighbour. There you will find enough to do, a thousand kind offices to render. Do not suffer yourself to be misled into believing you will reach heaven by praying and attending church, by contributing to institutions and monuments, while you pass by your neighbour. If you pass him in this life he will lie in your way in the life to come and cause you to go by the door of heaven as did the rich man who left Lazarus lying at his gate. Woe to us priests, monks, bishops and Pope! What do we preach? What teach? How we lead the pitiable multitude from the way! The blind leading the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Such doctrines as Paul declares at the conclusion of this lesson – these are what we should teach.

In the third place, we are taught we must live “godly” lives. Here we are reminded of how to conduct ourselves toward God. Now we are fully instructed concerning our duty to ourselves, to our neighbours and to God. As before said, impiety signifies wickedness, ungodliness, lack of grace. Piety, on the other hand, means having faith, godliness, grace. Godly living consists in trusting God, in relying on His grace alone, regarding no work not wrought in us by Him, through grace. If we are godly, we will recognize, honour, adore, praise and love God. Briefly in two words, to live godly is to fear and trust God. As it is written (Psalm 147:11): “Jehovah taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his lovingkindness.” See also Psalm 33:18. To fear God is to look upon our own devices as pure ungodliness, in the light of His manifest grace. These being ungodly, we are to fear God and forsake them, and thereafter guard against them. To trust in God is to have perfect confidence that He will be gracious to us, filling us with grace and godliness.

The individual yields to God when he gives himself wholly to God, attempting nothing of himself, but permitting the Lord to work in and to rule him; when his whole concern and fear, his continual prayer and desire, are for God to withhold him from following his own works and ways, which he now recognizes as ungodly and deserving of wrath, and to rule over and work in him through grace. Thus the individual will obtain a clear conscience and will love and praise God. Observe, they are pious and filled with grace, who do not walk by reason, do not trust in human nature, but rely only on the grace of God, ever fearful lest they fall from grace into dependence upon their own reason, their self-conceit, good intentions and self-devised works. The theme of the one-hundred-and-nineteenth psalm is trust in God. In every one of its hundred and seventy six verses, David breathes the same prayer. Reliance upon God is a subject of such vital importance, and so numerous are the difficulties and dangers attending human nature and reason and human doctrine, we cannot be too much on our guard.

The way of God does not require us to build churches and cathedrals, to make pilgrimages, to hear mass, and so on. God requires a heart moved by His grace, a

life mistrustful of all ways not emanating from grace. Nothing more can one render God than such loyalty. All else is rather His gift to us. He says (Psalm 50:14-15), in effect: "Think not, O Israel, I inquire after thy gifts and offerings, for everything in heaven and earth is mine. This is the service I require of thee: to offer unto me thanksgiving and pay thy vows. Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." In other words: "Thou hast vowed that I should be thy God. Then keep this vow. Let me work; perform not thine own works. Let me help thee in thy need. For everything, look to me. Let me alone direct thy life. Then wilt thou be able to know me and my grace; to love and praise me. This is the true road to salvation. If thou does otherwise, performing thine own works, thou wilt give thyself praise, wilt disregard me and refuse to accept me as thy God. Thou wilt prove treacherous and break thy vow."

Note, such obedience to God is real, divine service. For this service we need no bells nor churches, no vessels nor ornaments. Lights and candles are not necessary; neither are organs and singing, images and pictures, tables and altars. We require not bald pates nor caps, not incense nor sprinkling, not processions nor handling of the cross; neither are indulgences nor briefs essential. All these are human inventions, mere matters of taste. God does not regard them, and too often they obscure with their litter the true worship of God. Only one thing is necessary to right service – the Gospel. Let the Gospel be properly urged: through it let divine service be made known to the people. The Gospel is the the bell, the true organ, for divine service.

Further, Paul says we are to live as he describes "in this present world". First: the perfect life cannot be accomplished by works; our whole life, while we remain here, must be sober, righteous and godly. Christ promises (Matthew 10:22): "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." Now there are some who, it must be admitted, occasionally accomplish good; but occasional accomplishment is not a complete life of goodness, nor does it mean endurance to the end. Second, no one can afford to leave this matter of a godly life until death, or until another world is reached. Whatever we would have in the life to come must be secured here.

Many depend upon purgatory, living as it pleases them to the end and expecting to profit by vigils and soul-masses after death. Truly, they will fail to receive profit therein. It were well had purgatory never been conceived of. Belief in purgatory suppresses much good, establishes many cloisters and monasteries and employs numerous priests and monks. It is a serious drawback to these three features of Christian living: soberness, righteousness and godliness. Moreover, God has not commanded, nor even mentioned, purgatory. The doctrine is wholly, or for the most part, deception; God pardon me if I am wrong. It is, to say the least, dangerous to accept, to build upon anything not designated by God, when it is all we can do to stand in building upon the institutions of God which can never waver. The injunction of Paul to live rightly in this present world is truly a severe thrust at purgatory. He would not have us jeopardise our faith. Not that I, at this late day (when we write 1522), deny the existence of purgatory; but it is

dangerous to preach it, whatever of truth there may be in the doctrine, because the Word of God, the Scriptures, make no mention of purgatory.

Paul's chief reason, however, for making use of the phrase "in this present world" is to emphasise the power of God's saving grace. In the extreme wickedness of the world, the godly person is as one alone, unexampled as it were, a rose among thorns; therefore he must endure every form of misfortune, of censure, shame and wrong. The apostle's thought is: He who would live soberly, righteously and godly must expect to meet all manner of enmity and must take up the cross. He must not allow himself to be misled, even though he has to live alone, like Lot in Sodom and Abraham in Canaan, among none but the gluttonous, the drunken, the incontinent, unrighteous, false and ungodly. His environment is world and must remain world. He has to resist and overcome the enticements of earth, censuring worldly desires. To live right in this present world, mark you, is like living soberly in a saloon, chastely in a brothel, godly in a gaiety hall, uprightly in a den of murderers. The character of the world is such as to render our earthly life difficult and distressing until we longingly cry out for death and the day of judgment and await them with ardent desire as the next clause in the text indicates. Life being subject to so many evils, its only hope is being led by grace. Human nature and reason are at a loss to direct it. "Looking for the blessed hope."

With these words the apostle makes the godly life clearly distinct from every other life. Here is the text that enables one to perceive how he measures up to the life of grace. Let all who presume to think that they live godly step forward and answer as to whether or no they delight in this hope as here pictured; whether they are so prepared for the day of judgment that they await it with pleasure; whether they regard it as more than endurable, as even a blessed event to be contemplated with longing and with cheerful confidence. Is it not true that human nature ever shrinks from judgment? Is it not true that if the advent of that day rested upon the world's pleasure in the matter it would never come? And particularly in the case of hypocritical saints? Where then does human nature stand? where reason? where the free-will so much extolled as inclined to and potent for good? Why does free-will not only flee from good but shrink from that honour to the God of salvation which the apostle here refers to as a "blessed hope" and in which we shall be blessed? What is to prevent the conclusion here that they who shrink from the judgment lead lives impious, blamable and devoid of grace, the evils and ungodliness of which they might, but for the approach of that day conceal? What is more ungodly than to strive against God's will? But is not that just what the individual does who would flee from the day wherein the honour of God shall be revealed, who does not await the event with a loving and joyful heart? Mark you, then, he who desires not that day and does not with delight and with love to God await it, is not living a godly life, not though he is able even to raise the dead.

"Then it must be," you say, "that few lead godly lives, particularly among those solitary spiritual ones who above all men flee death and judgment." That is just what I have said. These separated individuals simply lead themselves and others

from the true path, obliterating the ways marked out of God. Plainly we see now how little reason and nature can accomplish; they but strive against God. And we see how necessary is saving grace. For when our own works are abandoned, God comes and alone works in us, enabling us to rise from ourselves, from our ungodly conduct, to a supernatural, grace-filled, godly life. Then we not only do not fear the day of judgment, but cheerfully, even longingly, await it, contemplating it with joy and pleasure.

True godliness, you note, is not taught by human nature or mortal reason, but by the manifest grace of God. By grace we are enabled to deny worldly lusts, even to feel aversion to them, to desire liberation from them, to be dissatisfied with our manner of life in general. More than that, it creates in us a disposition essential to godliness, a disposition to entreat God, with perfect confidence and to await with pleasure His coming. So should we be disposed.

Now, let us carefully weigh the words "blessed hope". A contrast is presented to that miserable, unhappy life wherein, when we attempt to walk uprightly, we are only harassed by misfortune, danger and sin. All in this life serves but to vex, while we have every reason to be encouraged in that hope. Such is the experience of them who earnestly endeavour to live soberly, righteously and godly. The world cannot long endure this class; it soon regards them as repulsive. Paul testifies (Romans 5:): "We also rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh steadfastness; and steadfastness approvedness; and approvedness hope; and hope putteth not to shame?" Thus our eyes remain closed to the worldly and visible and open to the eternal and invisible. All this transformed condition is the work of grace, through the cross, which we must endure if we attempt to lead a godly life, the life the world cannot tolerate. "And appearing of the glory."

Paul's word for "advent" here is "epiphany", "appearing" or "manifestation". Similarly he spoke above of the "appearance" or "manifestation" of grace. The word "advent", therefore, does not express all. The apostle would make a distinction between the first appearing and the last. The first appearing was attended by humility and dishonour with intent to attract little attention and occasion no manifestation but that made in faith and through the Gospel. Christ is at present not manifest in person, but on the day of judgment He will appear in splendour, in undimmed honour; a splendour and honour eternally manifest to all creatures. The last day will be an eternal day. Upon the instant of its appearing every heart and all things will stand revealed. Such is the meaning of "the appearing of glory" mentioned, the appearance of Christ's honour. Then there will be neither preaching nor faith. To all men everything will be manifest by experience and by sight as in a clear day. Hence Paul adds, "Of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ". Not that another and lesser God exists; but that God has reserved unto the last day the display of His greatness and majesty, His glory. We behold Him now in the Gospel and in faith – a narrower view of Him. But in the last appearing He will permit us to behold Him in His greatness and majesty.

The words of this verse afford comfort to all who live soberly, righteously and godly. For the apostle therein declares the coming glory not of our enemy or judge but of our Saviour Jesus Christ who will at that time give us perfect happiness. For the day of that glorious appearing He will make the occasion of our liberation from this world wherein we must endure so much in the effort to lead a godly life in response to His will. In view of His coming and our great and glorious redemption, we ought to firmly and cheerfully bear up under the persecution, murders, shame and misfortunes the world effects and to be courageous in the midst of death. With these joys before us we ought the more steadfastly to persevere in a godly life, boldly relying upon the Saviour Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, the words of this verse are terrible to the worldly-minded and wicked who are unwilling to endure, for the sake of godliness, the persecutions of the world. They prefer to make their godliness go no farther than to live without friction in the world and thus avoid incurring enmity and trouble. But the dissolute, the reckless, the obdurate, utterly disregard these words. They never give a thought to the fact of having to appear on the final day. Like frenzied animals they run blindly and heedlessly on to the day of judgment and into the abyss of hell. You may ask, "How shall I obtain the godliness fitted to enable me to confidently await that day, since human nature and reason flee from a godly life and cannot accomplish it?" Observe what follows: "Who gave himself for us."

The things the apostle has been so carefully presenting are laid before you to enable you to perceive and acknowledge your helplessness, to utterly despair of your own power, that you may sincerely humble yourself and recognise your vanity, and your ungodliness, impiety and unsaved state. Note, the grace appearing through the Gospel teaches humility; and being humbled one desires grace and is disposed to seek salvation. Wherever a humble desire for grace exists there is open to you the door of grace. The desire cannot be without provision for its fulfilment. Peter says (1 Peter 5:5), "God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble." And Christ frequently in the Gospel declares: "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted."

So the blessed Gospel is presented to you. It permits saving grace to appear in and shine forth from you, teaching you what more is required to keep you from falling into despair. Now, the Gospel, the appearance of the light of grace, is this which the apostle here declares, namely, that Christ gave Himself for us, etc. Therefore hearken to the Gospel; open the windows of your heart and let saving grace shine forth to enlighten and teach you. The truth that Christ gave Himself for us is the message spoken of as proclaimed to all men. It is the explanation of what is meant by the appearing of grace.

Banish from your mind, then, the error into which you may have fallen of thinking that to hear the epistles of Paul and Peter is not to hear the Gospel. Do not allow yourself to be misled by the name "epistle". All Paul writes in his epistles is pure Gospel. He says so in Romans 1:1 and in 1 Corinthians 4:15. In fact I venture to say, the Gospel is more vividly presented in the epistles of Paul

than in the four books of the evangelists. The latter detail the life and words of Christ which were understood only after the advent of the Holy Spirit who glorified Christ. Thus the Saviour Himself testifies. Paul, though he records no account of the life of Christ, clearly explains the purpose of our Lord's coming, and shows what blessings His advent brings us. What else is in the Gospel but the message that Christ, who gave Himself for us, to redeem us from sin, and that all who believe it will surely be saved?

So we are to despair of our own efforts and cleave to Christ relying on Him alone. Gracious, indeed, and comforting is this message, and readily welcomed by hearts despairing of their own efforts. Gospel implies a loving, kind, gracious message, fitted to gladden and cheer a sorrowing and terrified heart.

Take heed to believe what the apostle, through the Gospel declares – that Christ gave Himself for you for the sake of redeeming you from all unrighteousness and of purifying you for a peculiar inheritance. It follows that in the first place you must believe and confess all your efforts, impure, unrighteous, and that your human nature, reason, art and free-will are ineffectual apart from Christ. Unless you so believe you make void the Gospel; for, according to the Gospel, Christ did not give Himself for the righteous and pure. Why should He? With righteousness and purity existent, He would be giving Himself in vain. It would be a senseless giving.

In the second place, you must believe that Christ gave Himself for you, to put away your impurity and unrighteousness and make you pure and righteous in Himself. If you believe this, it will be so. Faith will accomplish it. The fact that He gave Himself for you can make you pure and righteous only through faith on your part. Peter (Acts 15:9) speaks of the cleansing of hearts by faith. Observe, Christ is not put in your hand, nor given you in a coffer, nor placed in your bosom nor your mouth. He is presented to you through the Word, the Gospel; He is held up before your heart, through the ears He is offered to you, as the Being who gave Himself for you – for your unrighteousness and impurity. Only with your heart can you receive Him. And your heart receives when it responds to your opened mind, saying, "Yes, I believe". Thus, through the medium of the Gospel, Christ penetrates your heart by way of your hearing, and dwells there by your faith. Then are you pure and righteous; not through your own efforts but in consequence of the guest received into your heart through faith. How rich and precious these blessings!

Now, when faith dwelling within you brings Christ into your heart, you cannot think Him poor and destitute. He brings His own life, His Spirit – all He is and commands. Paul says the Spirit is given, not in response to any work of man, but for the sake of the Gospel. The Gospel brings Christ, and Christ brings the Spirit – His Spirit. Then the individual is made new; he is godly. Then all his deeds are well wrought. He is not idle; for his faith is never inactive. It continually, in word and act, proclaims Christ. Thus the world is roused against Christ; it will not hear, will not tolerate Him. The result is crosses for the Christian, and crosses render

life loathsome and the day of judgment desirable. This, mark you, explains the Gospel and the appearing of the saving grace of God.

How can death, and the day of judgment, terrify the heart that receives Christ? Who shall injure such a one when the great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who orders the day of judgment, stands by with all His glory, greatness, majesty and might? He who gave Himself for us, He and no other, will control that day. Assuredly He will not deny His own testimony, but will verify your faith by declaring that He gave Himself for your sins. And what have you to fear from sin when the judge Himself owns He has taken it away by His own sacrifice? Who will accuse you? Who may judge the Judge? Who exercise authority over Him? His power outweighs that of all the world with its sins innumerable. Had He purchased your salvation with anything but Himself, there might be great error in this doctrine. But what can terrify when He has given Himself for you? He would have to condemn Himself before sin could condemn the souls for which he died.

Here is strong, unquestionable security. But our connection with it depends upon the steadfastness of our faith. Christ certainly will not waver. He is absolutely steadfast. We should then, urge and enforce faith by our preaching and in our work and suffering, ever making it firm and constant. Works avail nothing here. The evil spirit will assail only our faith, well knowing that upon it depends all. How unfortunate our failure to perceive our advantage! For we ignore the Gospel with its saving grace. Woe unto you Pope, bishops, priests and monks! Of what use are you in the churches and occupying the pulpits? Now let us analyse the words, "That he might redeem us".

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A Warning and a Challenge

J. C. RYLE

WE cannot withhold our conviction that the professing Church is as much damaged by laxity and indistinctness about matters of doctrine within, as it is by sceptics and unbelievers without. Myriads of professing Christians nowadays seem utterly unable to distinguish things that differ. Like people afflicted with colour-blindness, they are incapable of discerning what is true and what is false, what is sound and what is unsound. If a preacher of religion is only clever and eloquent and earnest, they appear to think he is all right, however strange and heterogeneous his sermon may be. They are destitute of spiritual sense, apparently, and cannot detect error. The only positive thing about them is that they dislike distinctiveness and think all extreme and decided and positive views are very imprudent and very wrong!

LIVING IN A FOG

These people live in a kind of mist or fog. They see nothing clearly, and do not know what they believe. They have not made up their minds about any great point in the Gospel, and seem content to be honorary members of all schools of thought. For their lives they could not tell you what they think about justification, or regeneration, or sanctification, or the Lord's Supper, or baptism, or faith, or conversion, or inspiration, or the future state. They are eaten up with a morbid dread of controversy and an ignorant dislike of party spirit; and yet they really cannot define what they mean by these phrases. And so they live on undecided; and too often undecided they drift down to the grave, without comfort in their religion, and often without hope.

The explanation of this boneless, nerveless, jelly-fish condition of soul is not difficult to find. To begin with, the heart of man is naturally in the dark about religion – has no intuitive sense of truth – and really needs instruction and illumination. Besides this, the natural heart in most men hates exertion in religion, and cordially dislikes patient, painstaking inquiry. Above all, the natural heart generally likes the praise of others, shrinks from collision, and loves to be thought charitable and liberal. The whole result is that a kind of broad religious “agnosticism” just suits an immense number of people, and specially suits young people. They are content to shovel aside all disputed points as rubbish, and if you charge them with indecision, they will tell you: “I do not pretend to understand controversy; I decline to examine controverted points. I daresay it is all the same in the long run” – Who does not know that such people swarm and abound everywhere?

DANGER OF INDECISION

Now I do beseech all to beware of this undecided state of mind in religion. It is a lazy, idle frame of soul which, doubtless, saves man the trouble of thought and investigation but it is a frame of soul for which there is no warrant in the Bible. For your own soul's sake, dare to make up your mind what you believe, and dare to have positive, distinct views of truth and error. Never, never be afraid to hold decided doctrinal opinions; and let no fear of man and no morbid dread of being thought party-spirited, narrow, or controversial, make you rest contented with a boneless, tasteless, colourless, lukewarm, undogmatic Christianity!

Mark what I say. If you want to do good in these times, you must throw aside indecisions, and take up a distinct, sharply-cut doctrinal religion. If you believe little, those to whom you try to do good will believe nothing. The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology; by telling man roundly of Christ's vicarious death and sacrifice; by showing them Christ's substitution on the cross, and His precious blood; by teaching them justification by faith, and bidding them believe on a crucified Saviour; by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the

Spirit; by telling men to look and live – to believe, repent, and be converted. This – this is the only teaching which for centuries God has honoured with success, and is honouring at the present day both at home and abroad.

It is doctrine – doctrine, clear, ringing doctrine – which, like the ram's horns at Jericho, casts down the opposition of the devil and sin. Let us cling to decided doctrinal views, whatever some may please to say in these times, and we shall do well for ourselves, well for others, and well for Christ's cause in the world!

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The Proof of the Living God

as found in the prayer life of George Müller, of Bristol

(from *The Fundamentals*, Volume I)

REV. ARTHUR T. PIERSON, D.D.

IN Psalm 68:4 we are bidden to, “extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him”, and in the next verse, He is declared to be “a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows . . . in his holy habitation”.

The name “Jah”, here only found, is not simply an abbreviation of “Jehovah”, but the *present tense* of the Hebrew verb *to be*; and expresses the idea that this Jehovah is the *Living, Present God*; and as the heavens are always over our heads, He is also a present Helper, especially to those who, like the widow and orphan, lack other providers and protectors.

George Müller, of Bristol, undertook to demonstrate to the unbelieving world that God is such a living, present God, and that he proves it by answering prayer; and that the test of this fact might be definite and conclusive, he undertook to gather, feed, house, clothe, and also to teach and train, all available orphans, who were legitimate children, but deprived of both parents by death and destitute.

Sixty-five years of proof

This work, which he began in 1833, in a very small and humble way, by giving to a few children, gathered out of the streets, a bit of bread for breakfast, and then teaching them for about an hour and a half to read the Scriptures, he carried on for 65 years, with growing numbers, until there were under his care, and in the orphan houses which he built, 2,200 orphans with their helpers; and yet, during all that time, Mr. Müller's *sole dependence was Jah, the Living, Present God*. He appealed to no man for help; and he did not even allow any need to be known before it had been supplied, even his intimate co-workers being forbidden to mention any existing want, outside the walls of the institution. His aim and purpose were to effectually apply the test of prayer to the unseen God, in such a

way as to leave no doubt that, in these very days in which we live it is perfectly safe to cut loose from every human dependence and cast ourselves in faith upon the promises of a faithful Jehovah. To make the demonstration more absolutely convincing, for some years he withheld even the annual report of the work from the public, although it covered work *already done*, lest some should think such a report an indirect appeal for future aid.

A human life thus filled with the presence and power of God is one of God's choicest gifts to His Church and to the world.



Book Reviews

***Let's Study 1 & 2 Thessalonians.* Andrew W. Young. The Banner of Truth Trust. pp. 194, paperback. £5.95. ISBN 0 85151 798 6.**

This is one of the *Let's Study* series designed for group Bible study with a scheme that covers 13 weeks, with helpful guide material for the group leader. The series seeks to combine explanation and application. Its concern is to help ordinary Christian people by encouraging them to understand the message of the Bible and to apply it to their own lives. There is an introduction to the book and to the founding of the Church at Thessalonica during Paul's second missionary journey, after his vision of the man of Macedonia (Acts 16:9), while Paul was at Troas. "Come over and help us."

The Church at Thessalonica was an enthusiastic Church with signs of vigorous growth in spiritual life and Paul and Silas called to mind their work produced by faith, their labour prompted by love and their endurance inspired by hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith and hope are the essence of the Christian life. Through faith we come to know God and are brought into the sphere of His empowering grace that expresses itself in a life of God-like love. Where the two exist together they are sure tokens of the saving power of the Gospel.

Each study contains eight questions to encourage discussion and give guidance. For example: Study 7 – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-14. Aim: To learn more of how the second coming of Christ will affect people when it takes place. Question: Why will Christians not be surprised in the same way as others by the return of the Lord? Answer (to be found in the text of the book): Because they are not in "darkness" as other people are, i.e. spiritual ignorance and insensitivity. People who are in darkness do not know God and do not obey the Gospel. The day of the Lord will come upon them with the suddenness and unexpectedness of a thief because they have no idea at all about Jesus and God's purposes in Him.

This is a profitable book for both group study and for private meditation and I heartily recommend it.

T.M.B.

***Making the Most of Your Devotional Life.* Derek Thomas. Evangelical Press. pp. 215, paperback. £7.95. ISBN 0 85234 481 3.**

In his introduction, the author lays down a challenge to the reader – to not only complete this two-week study of the Psalms of Ascent, but to go on to apply the disciplines learnt to all future Bible study.

Each chapter begins with the Psalm to be studied for the day (New International Version), and the reader is instructed to make notes on their own understanding of the passage before going on to read the explanative text. A number of questions are posed at the conclusion of each chapter, and the reader is asked to record their responses in a journal. There are a number of blank pages at the end of the book designed for this purpose.

As outlined by the author, this study guide is intended to be challenging. Each chapter is around ten pages in length, and the reader is required to look up numerous cross references and answer various questions each day. This is an ideal devotional book to take on a two-week holiday.

E.H.M.

***Heaven and Hell.* Edward Donnelly. The Banner of Truth Trust. pp. vii + 127, paperback. £4.95. ISBN 0 85151 811 7.**

This book is a clear restatement of the biblical doctrine of heaven and hell. It is written in an evangelistic style, seeking to draw the reader to the obvious conclusion that heaven is promised to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The biblical data is examined, Scripture being compared with Scripture.

Where this book scores particularly is in addressing two commonly held misapprehensions. The first concerns the nature of the resurrection body. Many actually believe that it is not body but spirit; the author shows what the Bible teaches on the new body. The second concerns the location and nature of heaven. Again, many expect to remain "up there". The author shows that the biblical teaching on the new creation should lead us to expect to live for ever on a restored earth which is the dwelling-place of God.

This book would benefit all believers, for it encourages us to look forward to the reward. It would also help unbelievers, for the warnings of hell are contrasted with the promise of the Lord Jesus. There is a spelling error on the back cover.

E.J.M.

***Exodus Volume 2 (An EP Study Commentary).* John Currid. Evangelical Press. pp. 416, hardback. £14.95.**

I've waited a year to read John Currid's second volume on Exodus – and I'm not disappointed! Both volumes are based on the author's own translation of the Hebrew and other quotations are from the New American Standard Version. In this second volume the author comments on Exodus 19-40 in seventeen chapters. These chapters are broken down into smaller sections, each ending with helpful application.

The application is often made by using an illustration from history. For example, the section on the anointing oil (Exodus 30:22-33) ends with an incident from the life of General Gordon. After death a medal given to him because of his work in China could not be found. "He had melted it down and the proceeds given to the poor children of Manchester during a particularly severe famine. He wrote in his diary: 'The last and only thing I have in this world that I value I have given over to the Lord Jesus Christ.'"

This book, written by a professor at the Reformed Theological Seminary at Jackson in Mississippi is very readable and beautifully produced by Evangelical Press.

S.K.E.

***Dare to Stand Alone. Daniel Simply Explained.* Welwyn Commentary Series. Stuart Olyott. Evangelical Press. pp. 168, paperback. £5.95. ISBN 0 85234 163 6.**

First published in 1982 this is the fifth impression of a book for our day. With the Church being attacked from all sides, especially in our own country, the book of Daniel is essential reading for all Christians. This commentary is particularly easy to read, encouraging us to apply the

principles to our own life. In the introduction, Mr. Olyett says his book is written to "excite you to read Daniel . . ." because it is full of practical help.

The book of Daniel naturally falls into two sections. Chapters 1-6 are narrative and in chapters 7-12 the author deals with the symbolism. As we read through the incredible experiences of Daniel and his compatriots there is a sense of being there with them. The 14-year-old boy taken from his family, learning to live in a foreign land under an alien culture, becomes a real person. The prayer life of Daniel is also brought out with equal clarity as the secret weapon Daniel had against the enemies of Jehovah.

Our generation may well descend into a time when Christians have to *stand alone*, with false religion and pagan practices around us. Daniel lived for 70 faithful years in such a society because he knew his God. This was the secret and the commentary encourages us to pursue "the narrow way, till Christ we view". We highly recommend this luminary volume.

P.S.K.

***Turning Back to God – Hosea and Obadiah Simply Explained.* Welwyn Commentary Series. Michael Bentley. Evangelical Press. pp. 256, paperback. £7.95. ISBN 0 85234 450 3.**

This book deserves its place in the *Bible Simply Explained* series as it does exactly that. It also does so without assuming that the reader knows all the historical allusions in the text, for a great deal of biblical historical background is supplied. Application is made continuously, so that the message of each Book is made clear, both in its original context and in the present situation.

The author takes the view that Gomer is a real person, and does not shy away from the difficulties this may present. He is plain in his application of Hosea's home life, while being sensitive to the fact that it may not be so different from the home life of some today.

Repentance is taught throughout; heart-felt repentance, based upon real conviction of sin. The "You need Jesus" gospel that is available today is shown to be inadequate, because our motivation for coming to Christ is not what we can get out of Him, but a recognition of our truly sinful state.

Most quotations are from the NIV – but at times the AV reading is supplied for clarity!

We assume the author's pen slipped on page 22; it was *not* Elijah who lit the fire under the sacrifice on Mount Carmel.

E.J.M.

***Can We Pray for Revival?* Brian H. Edwards. Evangelical Press. pp. 224, paperback. £7.95. ISBN 0 85234 465 1.**

This volume could be thought of as a companion to the author's earlier work titled, *Revival – A People Saturated with God*. While the earlier work was more historical in nature this is more theological. As with all theologies of revival the author is forced into the Old Testament for the vast bulk of his biblical data, with only one chapter covering the New Testament evidences. In seeking to derive a scriptural basis for revival, Mr. Edwards has first clearly demonstrated the appropriateness of using Old Testament evidence. As his basis he has largely used the classic reference found in 2 Chronicles 7:14 as a springboard; and has certainly convinced this reviewer in the process. The question that is now burning in my heart is, What is the connection between our fulfilling the conditions set in this text and God's fulfilment of His promise? It is surely the Church's failure to take words like this as seriously as they demand that is largely responsible for the general state of things.

For me the most helpful section of the book dealt with the close conformity of Christian experience between both New and Old Testaments. This is vital for those who would

ignorantly deny the possibility of revival. Sadly this is immediately followed by the book's weakest section where the differences between Christian experiences in the Old and New Testaments was mentioned but practically avoided. This book will repay the effort required to read it and the reader can fully expect to be thrilled by the mini-expositions in the final chapter and surprised by the closing comments.

In closing, I quote the author on page 140: "... whether it was David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Isaiah, Daniel or Ezekiel, they all longed for an expected revival in their own time. They looked for immediate revival. They did not always get it, but they looked for it and expected it. The possibility of it was a living reality with them. They knew that if they repented and turned to God, at any time He might turn to them and revive them again because it was the nature of His promises and character to do so."

J.I.

A Sad Little Dog. Jim Cromarty. Evangelical Press. pp. 176, paperback. £7.95. ISBN 0 85234 463 5.

A Sad Little Dog is the seventh and concluding volume in a series designed to provide families with sufficient material for a year's worth of family prayers.

Each of the 52 chapters begins with a short Bible reading (New King James Version) and anecdotal explanation from the author's own experience. A verse from Psalms is included in each chapter, and while not specifically intended as such, could be used as a memory verse. A number of questions conclude each study, as a basis for further family discussion. As each chapter deals with a different subject, and is complete in itself, topics can be selected to suit particular occasions or events, such as birthdays or illnesses.

The book is well illustrated with black and white line drawings, and combined with the author's straightforward style has broad appeal for all children up to (but not including) teenage.

E.H.M.

Please obtain any books reviewed or advertised from your local Christian bookshop, as we regretfully are not in a position to supply your requirements.

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

REQUEST FOR PRAYER

The Trustees bring to your attention the work of the Secretary. The current holder has asked to be released from this important position in the near future.

The Secretary is responsible for all the administration of the Trust, including the accounts. The records are currently held on a home computer running Microsoft Works database software. Please pray that the Trustees will be led to someone who has a heart for the Gospel and the Magazine's long history. ANYONE INTERESTED SHOULD CONTACT THE SECRETARY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

The Secretary, "Holme Regis", Old School Lane, Stanford, Biggleswade, Beds. SG18 9JL, United Kingdom.