

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



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NEWS

Gone From Us - Ruth Sylvia Hill

With great sadness we report the death of Ruth Hill on Monday 17th August, at the age of ninety-one. Ruth, along with her four sisters and brother, were brought up by their mother, Mrs. Coles, a dedicated Christian lady. Ruth followed her mother's commitment to Christianity, to Christian morals and ethics as set out in the Bible. Ruth remained faithful all her life through the many trials she experienced, including the loss of three husbands and continuing health problems.

Ruth is survived by her four children: Lynette, Pamela, Elizabeth and Stephen; her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She will be greatly missed by all of us, her brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

She was laid to her final resting place in Springvale Botanical Cemetery on Monday 24th August, following a memorial service in the Renowden Chapel.

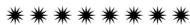
Russell Collins



THE NEW COVENANT NEWS

The New Covenant News is produced by an editor responsible to the Christian Bible Students (Melbourne). The thoughts expressed do not necessarily represent the opinions of all of the members of the group, and readers are requested to heed the words:

“Prove all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).



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JOSEPH

Paper given by Linton Roe at the 2015 Conference

I think everyone I know loves the story of Joseph. As a boy, I enjoyed performing in the Andrew Lloyd Webber production, 'Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat', which brought the Biblical account to life on the stage. I learnt that Joseph was the young boy who was so loved by his father that he was given a special coat. He was a dreamer and an interpreter of dreams. He was the young boy who was hated and sold by his brothers to be a slave in Egypt. He was the young boy destined to become the second-most powerful man in Egypt.

But how well do we really know Joseph, and what can we learn from his life? Were our Sunday School lessons an accurate reflection of the Joseph of the Bible? In this talk I plan to revisit some aspects of Joseph's story, and hopefully bring to remembrance some of those things written in the past for our learning.

As I prepared this talk, I found that I had a few misunderstandings of the story, and some questions arose in my mind. Perhaps you already have an answer to some of these:

- Why did Jacob love Joseph more than his other children?
- What was Joseph like as a person? Was he arrogant and proud, or just honest and naïve?
- What was Joseph's famous coat really like?
- Should we see Joseph's story as an allegory for Jesus' life?
- What are we to make of dreams and their symbolism?
- Is there symbolism in the whole story?
- What encouragement can we gain from Joseph's life?

So where does Joseph's story start? I found that to really appreciate the story, I actually had to go back into the life of Jacob and re-examine his journeys. Jacob's story begins in Genesis 25, so nearly half of the book of Genesis has a bearing on the life of Joseph.

You may recall that Jacob fled from his brother Esau and met his wife-to-be, Rachel, in Paddan Aram. Having been deceived into marrying Leah, Jacob was eventually able to marry his beloved, though it cost him fourteen years of his life while he worked for his Uncle Laban. During that time, Jacob had eleven sons through Leah, Bilhah, Rachel and Zilpah.

The first time Joseph is mentioned is in Genesis 30:24. The Bible tells us that his mother, Rachel, named him Joseph, and said, "*May the Lord add to me another son*". The name Joseph apparently means 'may he add'.

After the birth of Joseph, Jacob took his family back to Canaan, and there are a number of interesting and exciting details in the story of that journey. What is significant to our story today is that Rachel gave birth to her second son, Benjamin, on the way to Canaan, but died after childbirth near Ephrath (Bethlehem).

After listing details about Jacob's sons, mentioning the death of Isaac and chronicling the descendants of Esau, the Scriptures then continue with the story of Joseph, commencing in Genesis 37. The setting was Canaan, which Joseph in his later years acknowledged as the land that was promised to his fathers (Genesis 50:24,25). At age seventeen, though, we read that Joseph took unfavourable reports of his brothers' conduct to his father. Chapter 37:4 gives a possible answer to my question 'Why did Jacob love Joseph above his brothers?' It reads: *"Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age"*. That is all that it says, that he was more loved because of when he was born. I suspect, however, that it also had to do with Rachel being Jacob's first love, and that Joseph was Rachel's first son, born after so many other children. The Scriptures do not state that this was a reason why Joseph was more loved, but that is my suggestion.

Genesis 37:3 to 4 goes on to tell us that Jacob *"made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him"* (NIV). I think these verses are quite important to our understanding of the story.

The first thing I noticed was that different versions of the Bible use different adjectives to describe Joseph's coat. The KJV and ASV have *"a coat of many colours"*, whereas the Amplified has *"a [distinctive] long-sleeved tunic"*. The NRSV has *"a long robe with sleeves"* and, as we have seen, the NIV has *"a richly ornamented robe"*.

For those who are interested in word study, the Hebrew word translated "colours" in the KJV is Strong's #6446 – 'pac, pas; from 6461; properly the palm (of the hand) or sole (of the foot); by implication (plural) a long and sleeved tunic (perhaps simply a wide one; from the original sense of the root, i.e. of many breadths):- (diverse) colours.' As I reflected on the Genesis story and my memory of Lloyd Webber's 'Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat' version, I thought that Jacob probably would have given his son a beautiful and well-made coat, but possibly not a coat with all the colours of the rainbow.

The second thing I noticed was that the brothers' jealousy was aroused by Jacob's gift. I wondered how the young man would have felt when his own brothers could not speak a kind word to him. The next few verses of Genesis 37 record Joseph's dreams, which further exacerbated his brothers' hatred.

Do you remember the dreams? The first was when Joseph saw his brothers' sheaves of grain bowing down to his. The second was even more specific, with the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down before him.

In verse 10, Jacob rebuked Joseph for telling his family about the dreams, but he also kept the matter in mind. This passage raised a number of thoughts and questions in my mind. Was Joseph actually arrogant and overbearing towards his family, or was he simply innocent and honest? The fact that his father rebuked him might be a clue that his timing and diplomacy were suspect, but I don't think we can draw any solid conclusions from the Scriptures.

Another thought that came to me was that the Bible often uses natural things, like the sun, moon, stars and grain, as symbols. However, we need to look at the Scriptures themselves for the interpretation of these symbols. Clearly, in the story of Joseph the grain and the stars are indicating Joseph's brothers, and the sun and moon his father and mother. To me, that is completely different symbolism from other uses of the sun, moon, and stars or grain elsewhere in the Bible.

I was reminded of the old hymn 'God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain' (BSH 99), and of the words of Peter: *"No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."* (2 Peter 1:20,21). A lesson I drew from this observation was that we, too, need to take care to apply symbols in a way that is consistent with how they are interpreted in the Bible.

The last thing that I found interesting in this passage was that Jacob kept the matter in his mind, perhaps in a similar way to Mary, who reflected on the words of the angel and *"kept all these things in her heart"*, as Luke recorded (Luke 2: 19 and 51). Jacob's reflection became important later in the story.

Let's look at the next section of Joseph's life from Genesis 37. Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers and their flocks and it was then that the brothers saw him coming and plotted to kill him. *"Here comes that dreamer,"* they said to each other. Reuben managed to prevent Joseph's murder, but the brothers still stripped his robe from him, threw him into a cistern (well), and then sold him to some passing Ishmaelite traders, who took him to Egypt.

Judah seemed to have supported Reuben when he suggested selling, rather than killing their brother; nevertheless, he still seemed to condone the sale for 20 shekels of silver, the slaughtering of the goat for its blood, and the returning of the torn and bloodied garment to Jacob.

The effect on Jacob was devastating, further emphasizing the place he had in his heart for Joseph. He believed that Joseph had been torn by a wild animal, refused to be comforted, and told the family, *"In mourning will I go down to the grave to my son."* (Genesis 37:35).

The story then shifts to Joseph in Egypt, where Potiphar, the captain of the guard, had purchased him. Having seen that God was with Joseph, Potiphar placed him in charge of his entire household.

I find this quite remarkable for a number of reasons. Firstly, Joseph was a slave, and I wondered what the Egyptians' attitudes were to slaves. Secondly, Potiphar was the captain of the king's guard, which I presume was a fairly high position, yet he allowed a Hebrew slave to run his household and everyday affairs. Thirdly, Potiphar recognized that Joseph's God was with him, which in turn brought blessings to his household. This made me wonder whether the Egyptians were actually quite respectful of different gods, and whether Potiphar had comfortably added Joseph's God to his belief system.

The next chapter in Genesis, chapter 38, concerns Judah, but chapter 39 continues the story with the next challenge to Joseph's faith. Seeing that Joseph was *"well-built and handsome"*, Potiphar's wife invited him to sleep with her. I find it difficult to fully understand this situation, since we live in a completely different time and place, but I can imagine that the temptation could have been severe. Joseph was living away from his people, in a polytheistic, permissive society, and he had full control of everything belonging to Potiphar, relative autonomy and little accountability. Yet I admire Joseph's courage when he answered: *"How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"* (Genesis 39:9).

Note that Joseph's behaviour was in contrast to Judah's in the previous chapter. Judah left home, married a woman, had a daughter, then sought out a prostitute to sleep with. He later found out that he had slept with his own daughter, Tamar. So again we see the comparison between Joseph and his brothers, and that Joseph's faith appears to have been strengthened by his isolation and hardships.

Things seemed to go from bad to worse for Joseph in chapter 39, as Potiphar's wife accused him of making sport with her, and he was thrown into prison. There is no record that Potiphar even took the time to listen to Joseph's side of the story (Genesis 39:19,20). Nevertheless, a key repeated phrase gives us comfort; *"The LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden"* (Genesis 39:21). The Bible does not tell us whether Joseph knew or even felt that God was with him, but it reassures us that He was. I find this heartening, as we may sometimes feel that things happen to us that are negative or discouraging, and we may be unsure as to whether God is guiding us at such times.

Despite being in prison, we again see Joseph rise rapidly in position. He was placed in charge of all the prisoners, because the warden, as Potiphar had done, soon noticed that “*the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.*” I wondered at this point whether Joseph was one of those people who was just naturally 'good at everything'. Was this God's gift of encouragement to him, that he was able to use his wide range of talents, regardless of his trying circumstances? The Bible does not specifically say that, but I was reminded of the New Testament principle, that whatever gifts or talents we have, we still have to choose to use them in God's service. (See, for example, Luke 19:26 or 1 Corinthians 4:7).

In prison, Joseph met the chief cupbearer and the chief baker. Again, dreams were used to demonstrate God's power. As you may recall, Joseph interpreted the dream of the grape vine with its three branches, and the three baskets of bread. Again, I am reminded of how critical it is for us to pay attention to how the Bible provides us with the interpretation. Left to us, we would possibly come up with a range of interpretations, yet the Scriptures show us that the three branches and baskets indicate three days. They further show that the wine and the bread are not significant in themselves, except to indicate the normal occupations of the men. The fact that Pharaoh drank the wine, indicating a favourable outcome, is contrasted with the birds eating the bread, indicating an unfavourable outcome, and those seem, to me, to be the key lessons from the dreams. Joseph's response to the men's request to interpret is telling: “*Do not interpretations belong to God?*” (Genesis 40:8). Joseph later makes a similar remark before Pharaoh.

Despite his plea to the cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh, it was to be two more years of prison before Joseph was finally remembered, another enormous test of his faith. How despondent he must have been, languishing in prison. How many of us, having done something good for someone else, would patiently suffer, waiting for the person to remember us?

Eventually, as Genesis 41 tells us, Pharaoh himself had a dream, and Joseph's skills were once again required. It seems significant that none of Pharaoh's magicians and wise men could interpret his dreams. This reminded me of the account of the Exodus, where some of the miracles performed by Moses were replicated by the Egyptians, while others were not.

In Pharaoh's dreams, seven fat cows were eaten up by seven thin ones, and seven healthy heads of grain were swallowed up by seven thin ones. Joseph informed Pharaoh that seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph told Pharaoh that these dreams “*are one and the same*” (Genesis 41:25). In other words, God wanted us to understand that He was saying the same thing but in two different ways. It struck me that this repetition was often used in the Bible for emphasis, but that we sometimes try to place two different interpretations onto two different phrases. One possible example of this might be when God promised that Abraham's

descendants would be as numerous as the “*sand on the seashore*” and “*stars in the sky*” (Genesis 22:17), though there are many others.

I also found it interesting that each time dreams are mentioned in Joseph's story, they come in twos. Joseph dreamt first of sheaves, then the sun, moon and stars. The cupbearer's and baker's dreams came together. Pharaoh had two dreams with the same meaning. Are we to draw any significance from the number two? I would say 'not necessarily'. Elsewhere in the Scriptures, many dreams are recorded only once. However, in this case, Joseph's subsequent words in Genesis 41:31,32 are enlightening: “*The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt.*”

I could not help wondering whether Joseph was thinking of himself as the candidate as he spoke these words. What I found fascinating, though, was Pharaoh's answer: “*Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God? Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.*” (Genesis 41:38 to 40). Pharaoh actually acknowledged God and the fact that God's spirit was at work in Joseph, and he gave Joseph effective control of the whole country. This is contrasted starkly later when we meet the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

So by age 30 (Genesis 41:46), despite many hardships, Joseph's original dreams had begun to be fulfilled. He had a gold chain placed around his neck, was given a chariot and was put in charge of the whole land of Egypt. He was given a wife and a new name and went throughout Egypt, collecting grain into the cities. We are told that “*Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.*” (Genesis 41:49).

During these years of bounty, Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Then the years of famine arrived, and Joseph's brothers were forced to come to Egypt to buy grain. Initially only ten brothers came and bowed down before him, not recognizing him. I found it interesting that Joseph remembered his dreams about them, and decided to test them. Was this an act of retribution on the part of Joseph, or was God motivating Joseph to ensure that the whole family was brought to Egypt? The Scriptures do not specifically tell us.

Joseph then decided on a plan to bring Benjamin to Egypt. The brothers' words at this point in the story are noteworthy: “*Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded*

with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us. Reuben replied, Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood." (Genesis 42:21,22). In a way I find it comforting that there is remorse in their words. In another way I find it remarkable to see how God's prophecy came true, even though it seemed that all parties had suffered in the short term.

The Bible tells us that Simeon remained in Egypt while the other brothers returned home, only to find on the way that their silver had been returned to them. What must they have thought? Genesis 42: 28 records that *"Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, What is this that God has done to us?"* On returning to their father, they brought him the bad news, and again Jacob was despondent. *"You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!"* he said (Genesis 42:36).

As you may recall, Jacob initially refused to allow Benjamin to go to Egypt, but was later compelled to send him when their food ran out again. Genesis 43 records the brothers' second journey to Egypt. There must have been considerable debate and dissention in the family, as Judah commented that *"If we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice"* (Genesis 43:10). This time the brothers, accompanied by Benjamin, were received quite differently. They were invited to a feast, but initially they were afraid of some further trick. The steward of Joseph's house reassured them: *"It's all right," he said. "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver. Then he brought Simeon out to them."* (Genesis 43:23).

When Joseph arrived, the brothers again bowed down to him. I was interested to note that the Scriptures record that the brothers bowed down to Joseph three times (Genesis 42:6, 43:26, 44:14), but it is not recorded that Jacob or his wives ever bowed down to his son. I can only assume that the dreams symbolized Joseph being placed above his family rather than that each member of the family would literally bow to him.

There are some deeply moving verses in the next few chapters, as the process of reconciliation began. The first example was when Joseph saw his own little brother, Benjamin (Genesis 43:30): *"Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there."* At least four times (Genesis 42:24; 45:2; 45: 14 to 15; 46:29) the Scriptures record Joseph weeping, perhaps giving us an insight into his character, and the depth of feeling that he experienced after so many years of hardship. Joseph then saw to it that Benjamin, despite being the youngest, received five times as much food as any of the other brothers.

Yet despite the feasting, Joseph still had in mind to test his brothers, and he instructed his steward to place his silver cup into Benjamin's sack and to return the brothers' money once again. Once again, the brothers were on their way home when they were challenged. This time Benjamin was thought to be guilty of the theft of the cup, and they were forced to return to the city to be questioned. Interestingly, despite his faith in God, Joseph commented to the brothers, *"Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"* (Genesis 44:15, also mentioned in 44:5).

Judah then pleaded for Benjamin's life, offering himself as Joseph's slave in the place of his younger brother. This offer of self-sacrifice appears to have been proof enough for Joseph that his brothers had reformed, and chapter 45 tugs our heartstrings as he reveals his true identity to them. It is recorded that Joseph, having made himself known to his brothers, *"wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him and Pharaoh's household heard about it"* (Genesis 45:2).

One of the most crucial passages in the whole story of Joseph is Genesis 45:5 to 8, when Joseph spoke words of comfort to his brothers: *"And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt".*

Here I see two fascinating pieces of information. Firstly, God was saving the people whom He had chosen, even though the way it was to come about was completely unexpected by all of them. Secondly, the idea of a remnant is recorded for the first time. Though many would perish in the years of famine, God desired that Jacob and his immediate family would survive. This concept of a remnant is taken up in many other places in the Scriptures.

Having explained God's mercy to them, Joseph exhorted his brothers to bring their father back to Egypt. Pharaoh not only approved of this but went out of his way to provide everything they needed, including land to settle in when they arrived. On the way down to Egypt, God spoke to Israel in a vision, reassuring him: *"Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes."* (Genesis 46:3,4).

As the family, all sixty-six people, approached Egypt, Joseph went out to meet his father. What a reunion that must have been! Pharaoh received them all favourably and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

The last few chapters of Genesis record how Joseph oversaw the people's survival during the last years of the famine. They record the last years of Jacob's life, his blessings of his sons and Ephraim and Manasseh. Many of the blessings of chapter 49 have much depth and, as I see it, a prophetic element. (See the article, 'Jacob the Prophet', available on request.) Finally in the last chapter of Genesis, Jacob died and was embalmed by the Egyptian physicians and mourned by the Egyptians for seventy days.

The final notes of family reconciliation are recorded in chapter 50. Jacob's sons had some last misgivings after his death, that Joseph might still try to punish them, yet Joseph's words to them were humble and healing: *"Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children. And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them."* (Genesis 50:19 to 21).

The book of Genesis closes with Joseph's prophecy and assurance that God would aid the children of Israel, that in a future time He would take them up out of Egypt back to the promised land. Stephen's speech in Acts 7 accurately testified to the Old Testament events. What an inspiring story. What remarkable providence from God. What a challenge to us.

I would like to summarise the main points I learned from preparing this talk, and hopefully provide an answer to some of my original questions.

- Jacob loved Joseph because of his great love for Rachel, and the fact that Joseph was born in his later years.
- Joseph appears to have been both talented and sensitive. Although the Bible does not specifically say whether he was proud and pompous, it is clear that he trusted in God and showed great love and mercy to his family.
- Joseph's coat was presumably a very special and well-made garment though it is unclear whether it was a coat of many colours.
- I didn't really address the question as to whether Joseph's story was an allegory for Jesus' life, though on the surface it is clear to me that there are many similarities (e.g. being taken to Egypt, being shunned by the family, being an instrument of God's purposes).
- Dreams are an important way in which God has spoken to people and they are often used to predict the future.
- We need to be careful to observe Biblical symbols that are interpreted for us, and to be wary of interpreting symbols that are not interpreted.
- Finally, I learnt that there is great encouragement in Joseph's story, as it is an example of faith, of hardship, of patience and of love, but is ultimately an example of God's overarching care for His people.

I wish you God's blessing as you further consider these thoughts.

JUDGEMENT AND JUSTICE

Paper given by Colin Giles at the 2015 Conference

It is always a challenge to speak on a subject that may reveal the intent of our hearts. The difficulty is compounded by finding the right words and expressing them in the right manner to convey the correct meaning. Also, my knowledge of scripture is not perfect, so you, as hearers, need to consider what I say and decide whether it is true. Those of us who would aspire to preach the word and instruct others, have the burden of dealing honestly with the scriptures. The instructions that Paul gave to Timothy come to mind. *“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.”* (2Timothy 4: 1,2).

The text that I intend to use to introduce my subject is Matthew 7 verse 1, which is spoken by Jesus as part of the sermon on the mount. *“Judge not that you be not judged.”* I do not consider that the meaning of this verse can be determined without some careful consideration. It would seem to be that Jesus directed these words in particular to His disciples, although the multitude also heard them. His purpose, I suggest, was to train His disciples in the laws of God, that they in their turn were to teach the people. It is recorded that the people were astonished at His doctrine, for He taught as one that had authority. The power of His words then brought conviction, as it does to us, and I would understand that it was part of putting the laws in the minds of the people and writing them on their hearts.

The words in Matthew 7:1 could be understood a number of ways. They could mean:

- (a) Avoid making any judgements at all of another person's actions because we are imperfect and not capable of making true judgements;
- (b) The word 'judge' here could have the sense of pronouncing a sentence or passing a judgement on someone's action. The most dramatic statement that shows this mindset is when people say, 'You'll burn in hell' (even though this is unscriptural).
- (c) This verse is giving a standard by which we should make our judgements. In other words, we should not make hasty, or ill-considered or unfair judgements of some other person's actions because of the reasons given in the next verse; *“For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you”* (Matthew 7:2).

The first option, of not making any judgements at all, does not seem to be a reasonable understanding, as it would prove to be unworkable. It is often necessary for us to make an assessment of other people's actions, whether

they are honest. This examination of other people's motives is in agreement with the advice in Matthew 10:6; "*Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*" So discernment is required of us, so that we are not misled.

It would also be appropriate to remind you of Paul's advice to the church at Corinth when he rebuked the members of that church for not being able to settle disputes between themselves (1 Corinthians 6: 2 and 5). "*You know that the saints will rule the world, don't you? And if the world is going to be ruled by you, can't you handle insignificant cases? I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?*" These verses, I think, provide good advice and guidance and wisdom in our dealing with others when we need to weigh up the facts and make a judgement about matters.

Other verses that also provide guidance at such times are Luke 12: 57 and 58. "*Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? For example, when you go with your opponent in front of a ruler, do your best to settle with him on the way there. Otherwise, you will be dragged in front of the judge, and the judge will hand you over to an officer, and the officer will throw you into prison.*" These words of our Lord provide sound advice to try to resolve matters in dispute and also to exercise the power of judgement.

I am sure that there are other verses that have similar thoughts that indicate that we have the ability to discriminate in matters, and that we should use our wisdom in deciding the truthfulness of people's statements. It is a sad reflection on the fallen state of human affairs that we need to be warned about false prophets and people that would lead us astray.

My second option for understanding how to not judge others was to limit the meaning of the word 'judging' in that it should not include that of determining what punishment another will suffer. This meaning, I think, has merit as the right understanding of judging in some cases. The most graphic example of passing such a sentence is when someone says, 'You'll burn in hell'. Even if such an outcome was true, and I don't believe it is, we are not to stipulate the punishment in such matters. For a start, we are not in possession of all the facts, and our ability to judge the appropriate sentence is flawed. There is also the danger that we may want to pay back in greater measure, especially if we have suffered hurt. We need to keep in mind the principle, "*Vengeance is mine I will repay, says the Lord.*" (Romans 12:9), knowing that He will mete out punishment in the proportion that is due. I always find it a sobering thought that we must all stand before the judgement seat of Christ.

This leads me on to the third way of understanding the injunction of not judging another, in that it is giving the standard by which we should set our practice, especially if we consider the next verse in Matthew; "*For with what*

judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you” (Matthew 7:2). The connecting word ‘for’ indicates that what follows has reference to the previous verse and explains in what way we should not judge.

To obtain a fuller meaning of these verses we need to define what we mean by ‘judge’. Vines dictionary of New Testament words lists three Greek verbs that are translated by the English word ‘judge’, but they are variations of the one Greek word ‘krino’. It is defined as separate, select, choose, hence to determine and so to judge, pronounce judgement. With such a broad range of meanings to the word ‘judge’, we need to consider each occurrence of the word to decide what variation in the meaning is the right one in the context. This breadth of meaning to the word is also indicated by the fact that the English word ‘condemn’ is sometimes used for this Greek word where the preferable word would be ‘judge’. For example consider the well known text John 3:17 to 19. I am sure you could quote me the KJV. *“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”*

The meaning has not always been clear to me as to why a person should be condemned if he has not believed. Surely our understanding is that Satan has blinded the minds of unbelieving people and God has allowed them to remain in unbelief so that He can have mercy upon all. If we refer to some other translations we find that the word ‘judgement’ has been substituted for condemn. I will quote Weymouth’s version, as it makes this point more clearly than other versions, but you may want to examine other translations. *“For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who trusts in Him does not come up for judgement. He who does not trust has already received sentence, because he has not his trust resting on the name of God’s only Son. And this is the test by which men are judged--the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness more than they loved the Light, because their deeds were wicked.”* We could spend some time in considering what the condemnation, or sentence in Weymouth, of verse 18 means, and what the prospect is for them so sentenced. However, my purpose for the moment is about the word ‘condemn’ or ‘condemnation’ in the KJV and ‘judge’ or ‘judgement’ in Weymouth. In verse 17 the sense is of God’s Son having the office of a judge, while in verse 18 the sense of the word is of the process of a trial. I will take a few moments to consider the background to this verse.

These words were spoken to Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, but he, like others in Israel, considered that it was the people of the Jewish nation that

were going to be blessed, while the heathen were going to be punished. What Jesus was telling Nicodemus was that this was not so. The purpose of the coming of Christ was to bring salvation to all people. The other point to understand is the meaning of the sentence (or condemnation) of verse 18. I would understand that it means a sentence has been given by their attitude. It would not be acceptable now, but was any one in your school class made to wear a dunce's hat? The wearing of this indicated their own lack of ability. The sentence in John 3:19 is by the self-evident fact that men loved darkness rather than they loved light.

For a different sense of the word judgement I will refer to Acts 15: 19, where James is addressing the Church at Jerusalem. Here a decision had to be made as to whether the Gentiles were to keep the practices of the Law. *"Wherefore my judgment is, that we trouble not them that from among the Gentiles that turn to God;"* (ASV). In this case the meaning of judging is the result of analysing the facts and deciding on a suitable course of action. Here the KJV uses the word 'sentence' instead of judgement, the reverse of what occurred in John 3:17. This illustrates the fact that as the Greek has a wide range of meaning, so the context decides the word to be used. Another verse that illustrates this fact is Matthew 5:40, where the Greek word for judging is translated as sue you. *"If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat as well."* (KJV).

The verses that first attracted my attention to the subject of judging and prompted me to give this exposition were Hebrews 9: 27 and 28. In these verses it is not so much the word 'judgement' that needed an explanation, but rather an understanding of the meaning of the verses that I desired. *"Indeed, just as people are destined to die once and after that to be judged, so the Messiah was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. And he will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to bring salvation to those who eagerly wait for him."* (NIV). It was not clear where the correspondence was between the first part, verse 27, and the last part in verse 28, nor why use the human experience as an example to prove the writer's point of view.

The line of thought in these verses seems to be that as men die and after that there is a judgement which each must abide, so the Christ has died once and what remains is His return for judgement which He Himself administers, giving salvation to His people. There is also an emphasis in these verses on the word 'once', but an understanding of this requires some further consideration.

The other part of my topic is "justice", which I decided to include at a late stage, as it seemed to me to complement the subject of 'judgement'. Indeed I considered the outcome or purpose of judgement, that is the examining of the facts would be to bring justice. When the merits of a case are decided we expect some penalty or duty may be required to satisfy our sense of fairness if an injury has been done or a good deed rewarded.

Is not Psalm 89:14 giving us the standard that God applies? *“Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.”* That this character is expected of children of God is shown when the Angel of the Lord met Abraham as they were on their way to visit Sodom and Gormorrah. Genesis 18:17 and 19; *“And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”*

However, we need to be careful in defining the meaning of our words as the word ‘justice’ has different shades of meaning.

The Queen of Sheba could also testify to the gracious God-given gift that Solomon received, as in 1 Kings 10:9; *“Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.”*

However, when I referred to my concordance of the King James version for examples of verses in the New Testament with the word ‘justice’ in them, I found that there were not any, although the words ‘just’ ‘justify’ and ‘justification’ are found. It seems that there could be a preference by other translators to bring the meaning of ‘rightness’ or ‘uprightness’ into the word.

Vines Dictionary of New Testament Words lists the primary meaning of the Greek word for ‘justice’ as ‘what is right, then a judicial hearing, hence the execution of a sentence.’ The places where it is used in the New Testament are of no help in understanding the meaning of the word, but they do indicate the range of meaning that the word can have.

The word is used in Jude verse 7; *‘Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.’* (KJV). Also in 2 Thessalonians 1:9; *“They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, being banished from the presence of the Lord and from His glorious majesty,”* (KJV).

So the word is quite severe in its application. Another place where the word is used, but with an interesting connection is Acts 28:4; *“And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.”* If you refer to other translations, you will find the word ‘vengeance’ is translated ‘justice’ and it personifies and denotes the goddess Justice or Nemesis. It indicates more the belief of the inhabitants of the country rather than a statement of truth.

To sum up what I have found about the meaning of these two words, Judgement and Justice. Generally I have shown that they have a variety of meanings and the context will have to be examined to find the sense that is applicable. The connection of the word justice with righteousness needs to be further explored to find why the latter word is the one found in the New Testament.



JOY

Devotion given by Dorothy Grinsted at the 2015 Conference.

I want to begin our devotion by playing the introduction to Bach's Cantata, 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring'. It is about JOY, and it begins and ends with Jesus.

Joy is more accessible than you might have thought. It comes from God through Jesus Christ.

It is easy to be joyful in the peaks of life, but what about the valleys, trials and sorrows? Jesus, our Shepherd, went before us and led the way. *"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finished of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:2).

He had an incentive, a goal, a reason to go through so much: to fulfil His Father's plan to redeem, save and reconcile Adam and all his descendants, the human family, to Himself, that *"God may be all in all"* (1 Corinthians 15:28). Out of love and obedience, Jesus was pleasing His Father.

According to Dr. Strong, 'joy', in Greek, 'chara, means calm delight. Not just brief happy events which we have all enjoyed. It is the second fruit of the Spirit, between love and peace. It is meant to be part of the development of the Christian character.

The Adelaide Sunday class is studying Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul is continually telling them to *"rejoice, and again I say, rejoice"*. I counted eighteen times that joy is mentioned. What I hadn't observed is that we are to rejoice ceaselessly. The word 'always' follows 'rejoice' in Philippians 4:4. This sounds unreasonable to rejoice under all difficulties and sorrows but, and I quote from Watchman Nee's book 'Twelve Baskets Full'. 'God knows that it is impossible to human nature to rejoice under adverse circumstances, but what He has required of us is not that, in reliance on our natural resources we rejoice, nor that we rejoice in our circumstances, but that we rejoice "in the Lord". When our circumstances cause us nothing but grief, we can still be glad because our joy is not based on fluctuating circumstances, but has its source in the one who loves us and is the object of our love'.

The following is the most commonly heard English version of Bach's Cantata. It was written by the poet laureate Robert Bridges. It is not a translation of the stanzas used within Bach's original version, but was inspired by the stanzas of the same hymn composed in 1642 by Johann Schop that Bach had drawn upon, 'Jesu, meiner Seelen Wonne', the lyrics of which were written in 1661 by Martin Jahn (c. 1620 to c. 1682).

JESU JOY OF MAN'S DESIRING

Jesu, joy of man's desiring,
Holy wisdom, love most bright;
Drawn by Thee, our souls aspiring
Soar to uncreated light.

Word of God, our flesh that fashioned,
With the fire of life impassioned,
Striving still to truth unknown,
Soaring, dying round Thy throne.

Through the way where hope is guiding,
Hark, what peaceful music rings;
Where the flock, in Thee confiding,
Drink of joy from deathless springs.

Theirs is beauty's fairest pleasure;
Theirs is wisdom's holiest treasure.
Thou dost ever lead Thine own
In the love of joys unknown.

The original German text does not correspond to the most common English version. Following is a close-to-literal translation of the original German.

Well for me that I have Jesus,
O how strong I hold to him
That He might refresh my heart,
When sick and sad am I.
Jesus have I, who loves me
And gives to me His own,
Ah, therefore I will not leave Jesus,
When I feel my heart is breaking.

Jesus remains my joy,
My heart's comfort and essence,
Jesus resists all suffering,
He is my life's strength,
My eye's desire and sun,
My soul's love and joy,
So will I not leave Jesus
Out of heart and face.



IFS

Paper given by Mervyn Buckmaster

INTRODUCTION

“If you can keep your head when all about you.
Are losing theirs, and blaming it on you....”

These words are the opening couplet of a once well-known poem by Rudyard Kipling: a poem that he titled

“IF”.

If you can keep your head when all about you.
Are losing theirs, and blaming it on you....
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired of waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise.
If you can dream and not make dreams your master;
If you can think and not make thoughts your aim
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build them up with worn-out tools:
If you can make a heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss;
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone.
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings; nor lose the common touch.
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you.
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And, what is more, you'll be a Man, my son.

In the manner that many authors do, Kipling expressed some of his philosophical views in his written works. Within this poem, and by using that title, he acknowledged the influence of chance in the lives of men; which was an observation made by Solomon: *"I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all."* (Ecclesiastes 9:11). While we should not doubt the God-given wisdom of Solomon, other men may have a share of wisdom also. With this poem Rudyard Kipling has given us the opportunity to test his views, or evaluate his philosophy by comparison with God's word in response to the exhortation to prove all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

THE POEM

"If you can keep your head when all about you.
Are losing theirs, and blaming it on you...."

This seems to imply that it is a good thing to keep your good sense in confusing circumstances, and conversely that it is a bad thing to lose your rationality when stressed. As an example of the good and right attitude, we need look no further than the calm demeanour shown by the Lord on the occasions when He was confronted by the scribes and Pharisees who wanted to provoke Him to anger, or to blaspheme, or tell a lie. In the storm on Lake Galilee, and on other occasions when the disciples showed their lack of understanding or lack of faith, He was always the master in control of himself and the situation.

"If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;"

As Shakespeare wrote (Polonius, in Hamlet), 'To thine own-self be true, and it follows as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.' We are assured of the truth in this saying from the bard when we place our trust in the Lord, who said of the scriptures, *"Thy word is truth"* (John 17:17); when we try to follow His example and rely on His promise for the guidance and comfort of the Holy Spirit. But being confident of our own trust is not licence to be over-assertive or dismissive of another's uncertainty.

"If you can wait and not be tired of waiting,"

Jesus displayed the longsuffering, that is so strongly characteristic of the LORD God, in His dealings with all those around Him during His earthly ministry. Just as Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8), so we must be patient, waiting for the fulfilment of God's promises, inured to our own sufferings by strength, comfort and guidance granted through God's mercy according to our needs. Blessed are the

humble, the meek, the just, the kind, the merciful, the guile-less, the peacemakers, Jesus told the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount, because patient use of such virtues would bring recompense from God (Luke 23:41), the giver of every good gift (James 1:17).

“Or being lied about, don’t deal in lies,

“Thou shall not bear false witness.....” (Exodus 20:16) is the second last of the ten commandments, which were incorporated into the Law Covenant; and that prohibition of falsehood is embodied in the law of love which Christ defined in Matthew 22: 37 to 40. The Lord was *“full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). He told Thomas that He was *“the way, the truth and the life”* (John 14:6). Nor did He deal in lies, sometimes prefacing His words with *“I tell you truthfully...”* (for example. Luke 4:25).

“Or being hated don’t give way to hating,”

“Hatred stirs up strife, (but love covers all sins)” declared Solomon. (Proverbs 10:12; NKJV). The world in general, but especially the Jews, hated the Lord (John 7:7), but He told the multitude in the Sermon on the Mount to *“Do good to those who hate you”* (Matthew 5:44).

The contemporary attitude of godlessness in the world today is an expression of hatred, both to God and to fellow human beings. Hatred is a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:20), of the carnal or earth-bound mind.

“And yet don’t look too good, nor talk too wise.”

While the crowds who heard the Lord preach were amazed at His teaching, His superior knowledge of the scriptures was matched by His humbleness in dealing with their problems, which He did with compassion and without favouritism. He did not use His greater wisdom, nor God’s power to overawe His hearers.

“If you can dream and not make dreams your master;

In this reference to dreaming Kipling means the human trait to imagine, and hope for, success in earthly endeavours, and even the wish for an easy passage to success.

But the Lord did not need to have such a dream because He knew and understood God’s plan for salvation of the human race, and of earth’s restoration to be the perfect place for mankind to live. Nor do we need earthly dreams, laying up earthly treasure where moth and rust doth corrupt, but look forward with the conviction that all these things will be granted in the world order to come.

“If you can think and not make thoughts your aim”

This challenge to go beyond thinking and to take action seems to reflect the point made by James that "*faith without works is dead*" (James 2: 14 and 17). The Lord was both a man with ideas, expressed in His preaching, and a man of action displayed in His miracles. Similarly, as James pointed out, our works, our good deeds are evidence of our faith.

“If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;”

The idea expressed in these two lines is based, I think, on a human point of view. Each human life may have, occasionally, a time of triumph when adversity is overcome, or when adversity claims the upper hand and disaster seems to strike. But as time and chance affect those lives, a reversal may occur, and victory can change to loss, while disadvantage can be set aside, thus making both to appear as impostors; false outcomes. If Satan were regarded as disaster personified, then the Lord triumphed over him when He was tempted in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry (Matthew 4: 1 to 11). However, from God's point of view, every disaster on earth will be overcome when divine power will bring the ultimate, complete triumph.

“If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,”

Jesus brought the truth of God's love and power which He preached, firstly to the Jews, and through the apostolic writings to the fallen human race; although no-one was barred from listening to His preaching. The scribes and Pharisees, well-versed in the letter of the Mosaic Law, made attempts to convict the Lord of blasphemy. They acted as knaves in trying to trap him, but revealed themselves as fools when the Lord displayed their hard-heartedness, because He had both the letter and the spirit of the Law and the truth. They had neither the spirit of the law nor the truth.

“Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build them up with worn-out tools:”

If it be accepted that the Lord Jesus was "*the angel of his (God's) presence*" (Isaiah 63:9) through the ages before He came to earth, He had to watch His work thwarted by the influence of the sinfulness of mankind. Perhaps His lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23: 37,38) can be taken to illustrate the point. But the Lord, while becoming a little lower than the angels for His time on earth, and suffering the hard-heartedness particularly of the Jews, was raised to heavenly power and glory to wield, in God's time, tools of righteousness, justice and love.

“If you can make a heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss;
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss:”

Here again we have the intrusion of earthly values into Kipling’s philosophy. The appropriate desire to win, for the Christian, is to gain the high calling, since no matter how much wealth or importance is gained in this life, its value comes to nothing when death intervenes. *“All is vanity,”* said Solomon (Ecclesiastes 1:2). And it is improper to put at risk any of God’s blessings. The Christian should not gamble, since he/she is subject to time and chance beyond his/her control. However, Christ taught His followers to do good deeds and not boast about them; and most personal concerns are matters for prayer, although the poet does not mean quite that by not breathing ‘a word about your loss.’

“If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone.”

This is simply a challenge to show stamina and perseverance. For Kipling it was probably to do with worldly things, and in that physical way it applies to us, but this attitude also applies to spiritual things in the call to remain faithful unto death. There is implied here a reward for fortitude in the face of discouragement, perhaps the relief experienced when an earthly trial passes. And looking into the future the reward for faith in God and Christ is joint-heirship with the Lord in the kingdom age, and that is promised by God, whose promises do not fail.

"And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: “Hold on!””

The poet has not neglected the use of poetic license, for here is an example. When ‘heart and nerve and sinew are gone’ there are no means by which the struggle of living may be continued. But the plea for courage, determination and patience is surely epitomised by the Lord’s endurance in the garden where He was betrayed.

“If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings; nor lose the common touch.”

We have a great example of the virtue of keeping the common touch in the Lord’s preaching to, and feeding of the thousands at the lakeside, apart from His regular preaching in the synagogues in many towns in Palestine. While on the other hand He also showed a kingly presence during the triumphant entry into Jerusalem; and in a different manner when He was summoned to Herod, and to Festus, and to Pilate. He displayed both virtues when He resisted the temptations from Satan.

“If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you.”

The gospel record shows that Jesus had enemies and loving friends. Despite their goodwill towards Him, those friends could not prevent His enemies from taking His life. But over all was God's great love and power, which are displayed by the Lord's resurrection for His enemies to be made His footstool, and by that love calling all men and women to love the creator in return. In this we have faith, the conviction that 'neither foes nor loving friends' can hurt us.

“If all men count with you, but none too much;”

There is a caution here in that there are risks or even dangers in being too enthusiastic or having mis-placed zeal. A suitable example could be the crowds who followed Jesus to be fed rather than to gain an understanding of His gospel message; or the persecution of the early Christians by Saul before his conversion.

“If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,”

The meaning of the phrase 'the unforgiving minute' seems at first to be somewhat obscure. It brings to mind "*redeeming the time, for the days are evil*" (Ephesians 5:16). And the distance run in a minute depends upon the speed of the traveller. I think that Kipling is simply saying, do not waste time on trivialities, but get some value from every minute of the day. Solomon gave the same advice; to seek wisdom, rather than expend energy on unimportant things.

“Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And, what is more, you'll be a Man, my son.”

While Kipling's views expressed in the verses of his poem contain some worthwhile advice, as shown by the examples of Jesus and the apostles, the closing couplet does not agree with scripture. Physical attributes and possessions belong to us only for a short time, in much the same way that "*bodily exercise profiteth (for a) little (time)*" (1Timothy 4:8). Perhaps the poet implied that material and temporal things could be obtained by working for them, thus making the most of each minute. But great effort may be needed in bad circumstances just to satisfy life's basic requirements. Certainly no-one can gain the whole world, and the Lord pointed out that even in that event, the cost of such gain would be life destroyed and salvation lost (Luke 9:25).

The earth, and everything in it belongs to God who brought it all into being. "*The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness*" David declared in Psalm 24: 1.

The creator himself declared *"I am Yahweh, and there is no other: apart from me there is no god"* (Isaiah 45:5).

And as for becoming a noble man through leading a virtuous life, the reality is that God created man without blemish, but he became alienated from the creator by disobedience, and reconciliation has been offered only through faith in the redemptive price paid by Christ's sacrifice which sealed the New Covenant. That faith becomes established through developing the Christian virtues, and enables God, by His grace and mercy to grant imputed righteousness. (Ephesians 2:8 and 2 Peter 1: 5 to 8)

Rudyard Kipling's poem **'IF'** is a short guide to earthly behaviour derived from one man's experiences. A better guide from a divine author is available to us. It is the word of God, where there are other **IFS**.

THE SCRIPTURES

The word **if** occurs approximately 1,610 times in the KJV, and 1,784 in the NIV. However, it is not the frequency of its occurrence that gives the word such importance, but its intrinsic meaning; which is, in the general case, the assertion of a causal connection between an action and its consequence. "If" means 'on the condition that'.

According to Strong's concordance, in the Old Testament there are nine words translated as 'if'; the predominant ones are 'eem' (Strong #518) with sense of something conditional; and 'kee' (Strong #3588) indicating a causal relationship. The other words convey meanings such as 'if not', 'whether', 'unless', 'perhaps' to suit better their contexts.

In the New Testament there are seven Greek word translated as 'if', the main one being 'i' (Strong #1487) which means something conditional.

Old Testament

The first 'if' in the KJV is in Genesis 4: 7, where God told Cain that *"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well sin lieth at the door"*. The principle expressed here reflects the condition that God put before Adam, that good behaviour is acceptable to God, with the opposite that disobedience would result in death, although in that initial situation the consequence of disobedience was not defined by the use of the word 'if'.

Now it would not be appropriate to consider the context of every 'if' in the Bible. However, there have been several important occasions where God's dealings with men and women of old, depended upon their choice of action; occasions which have marked decisive events in the development of God's plan for humankind.

One such occasion was the demonstration of divine leniency when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. Abraham asked God to spare the city for the

sake of fifty righteous people within it. *"And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes"* (Genesis 18:26). But the condition could not be met; not even for five righteous people, and the city was destroyed.

Another important occasion was God's dealings with Pharaoh, which was to *"Show my power in you, and that my name may be declared in all the earth"* (Exodus 9:16). Moses was instructed to demand the release of the Hebrews on God's condition that *"If you refuse to let them go..."* (Exodus 8:2) calamity would follow for the Egyptians.

Having been delivered from bondage in Egypt by His power, God, through Moses, said to the Hebrews, *"If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people..."* (Exodus 19:5; NKJV). On the condition that they obeyed God's requirements they would be blessed. On the other hand there was an alternative that disobedience would bring disaster, as it did on many occasions.

Another aspect of God's covenant of blessing with the Israelites concerned their attitude to the first inhabitants of the land of Canaan. God instructed them, *"They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me. For if you serve their gods it will surely be a snare unto you"* (Exodus 23:33; NKJV), a snare which they fell into on many occasions. The Israelites needed to be reminded of God's provision for them many times. Again, through Moses, He told them, *"If you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all his commandments ... the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth"* (Deuteronomy 28:1; NKJV).

And through Nehemiah, who remembered the above promise given by Moses, when the refugees from Babylon were prevented from rebuilding Jerusalem, that *"..... If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me, and keep my commandments, I will gather them....."* who were cast out (Nehemiah 1:8 and 9; NKJV).

These few instances show that God allowed the Israelites to choose to obey His commands and be blessed, or to disregard His goodness and suffer the consequences; because when they obeyed He fought against their enemies, gave them good harvests in peace and safety, sometimes through miraculous intervention. But when they turned away from God's benevolence He allowed the hostile nations around them to become a 'snare unto' them.

It is thought by some that God changed His mind when dealing with the perfidy of the Israelites, but God's character has *"no variableness or shadow of turning"* (James 1:17). He did not have to alter His attitude towards them since He warned them, directly and through the prophets, what the

consequences of their choices would be; even to the extent of punishment in exile. From the beginning He offered blessing for their devotion and allowed the opposite for their apostasy. He would have preferred continuous obedience, although by His knowledge of human behaviour He could foresee their disobedience which brought Him grief.

New Testament

That fundamental offer of divine providence continued through the Jewish age until the period of relative peace under the rule of the Roman Empire when Jesus Christ brought a new dispensation of God's dealings with the human race. And that offer of divine providence has been continued through the gospel age, but in a spiritual sense, not with the direct action of divine power.

However, the offer was not a repeat of life for obeying the Law, but the opening of the way to reconciliation with God, and a calling to share with Christ the work of restoring the earth and its inhabitants to the glory for which it was created. The way to truth and life is through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, on the condition that faith is sincere and develops greater depth throughout life during the gospel age. That is, to understand and follow unflinchingly the example set by Christ while He preached the gospel message.

Jesus said to His disciples, *"If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself..."* (Matthew 16:24 and Luke 9:23; NKJV). And to the rich young ruler He said, *"If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments..."* (Matthew 19:17; NKJV), those commandments being embodied in the law of love, *"That you love one another as I have loved you"* (John 15:12; NKJV).

That law was explained by John, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his Son, the only begotten, that every one believing into him may not perish"* (John 3:16; Diaglott), and *"If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"* (1 John 4:11; NKJV). And through John, Jesus repeated God's call, *"If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him ... and to him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne"* (Revelation 3:20; NKJV). His invitation was to all people, although initially it was offered to the Jews, for Jesus said to the Jews, *"If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed"* (John 8:31; NKJV). But when some Greeks asked to see Jesus, Andrew and Philip brought the request to Him, and He told them *"If any man serves me, him my Father will honour"* (John 12:26; NKJV). The invitation to that privilege of friendship was opened to all people when Jesus said, *'You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you'* (John 15:14).

In his letters to the congregations where he preached on his missionary journeys, Paul expounded on the conditions which pertain to responding to

God's calling, opened through the New Covenant. It is a calling to spiritual revival (Colossians 3:1), and to the Romans he wrote, "**If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the spirit ... you will live**" (Romans 8:13; NKJV). To the Galatians he wrote; "**If we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit**" (Galatians 5:25; NKJV). To the Colossians he wrote; "**For it pleased the Father that in him all the fullness should dwell ...and (in) you ... if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast.**" (Colossians 1:19, 21 and 23; NKJV) ... you will be granted imputed righteousness, son-ship by adoption, and joint-heir-ship with the Lord.

Peter also emphasised God's grace and mercy in opening the way of reconciliation when he wrote, "**If you call on the Father ... conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear**" (1 Peter 1:17; NKJV) with the consoling words, "**Even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you are blessed**" (1 Peter 3:14; NKJV). And "**if you do these things you will never stumble.**" (2 Peter 1:10; NKJV)

CONCLUSION

For the Israelites the offer that they would gain life if they obeyed the Law could not be fulfilled because sinful, that is, disobedient, human beings could not keep a good and just and righteous law. The Law was to show them that there had to be a better way to gain God's favour; a better sacrifice was needed, and that sacrifice sealed the new way through the New Covenant.

The Israelites failed to keep the Law Covenant perfectly, even if any one of them made the choice to try to obey it, and they had to wait for the Messiah for deliverance. They were always subject to Adamic death, but without reconciliation the condemnation remained. Whereas the believer of the gospel age, who cannot keep the New Covenant perfectly, failing to keep its Royal Law, has the choice to accept its terms without the wait imposed on the Jews.

And one of the gracious provisions of the New Covenant is on the condition that, **IF** "**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins**" (1 John 1:9). For "**There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus**" (Romans 8:1).

The gospel age believer is also subject to Adamic death, but through God's acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice, the condemnation has been removed, "**If we believe that Jesus died and rose again**" (1 Thessalonians 4:14; NKJV).



"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Philippians 4:8).