

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



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Talk given by Darryl Roe at Alexandra Headland

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ARMAGEDDON

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Introduction

Armageddon is part of a prophecy in Revelation 16. The Macquarie dictionary defines 'prophecy' as 'the foretelling of what is to come, usually by Divine inspiration.' Bible prophecy has always been a subject of controversy, sometimes because the prophecies themselves are unclear, but usually because people are still waiting for those prophecies to reach fulfilment. The apostle Peter told us "*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 and 21; NIV). Jesus said in Revelation 22:7, "*Behold I am coming soon. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book,*" and John heard the angel tell him, "*Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near*" (Revelation 22:10).

These scriptures show that our LORD intended us to treat prophecy as an important and essential part of our Christian experience. By means of prophecy, such as the promise of the Messiah (Isaiah chapters 9 and 53), we know that God's word is accurate and true and reliable and certain.

This presentation is intended to give you one explanation of Revelation 16:16, which reads, "*Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon*". The word "Armageddon" simply means 'a symbol or name' (Strong 717). This word is found only once in the Bible, but it is very significant to Bible students in the world of today. The word is related to Megiddo (which means place of troops), which was originally a Canaanite city that Joshua's army defeated, and which the tribe of Manasseh inherited. Megiddo was also the place where Deborah and Barak won their battle against Sisera (Judges 4), and the place where King Josiah and King Saul lost their lives (2 Chronicles 35 and 1 Samuel 31). Israel today is still scattered and defiant, so this tiny nation remains at war with its Arab neighbours, despite prophecies that depict its triumph over the nations. According to the prophecy in Revelation 16, Israel will not find true deliverance from its enemies until it is secured by the kings of the East.

The prophecy in Revelation 16:12 tells us, "*The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings of the East*". These kings will actually intervene to deliver Israel during the war of Armageddon, which will be the final conflict to take place before the millennium. It will involve all the nations of the earth, and Israel will be the only victor. From this come five important questions.

1. What is the nature of the battle of Armageddon?
2. How can all the nations of the world be involved?
3. How is it possible for only one nation (Israel) to survive this battle?
4. Who are these mysterious kings of the East who assist Israel?
5. How is Israel to be saved from defeat by the drying up of the Euphrates River?

In reply, we need to keep in mind that Revelation is a book of symbols. Names, peoples, cities and places mentioned are not always literal. They usually symbolise both good and evil institutions and places, and the name "*Israel*" does not refer to the literal nation of Israel, as many modern day preachers would have us believe. In Revelation 7, Jesus' faithful followers are referred to as coming from the 12 tribes of Israel, 12,000 of God's servants from each tribe, and throughout Revelation the people of God are referred to as the followers of Christ, the Saints, who were forced to suffer martyrdom and persecution for 1260 years and beyond. Thus, the Israel of God is no longer the literal seed of Abraham (Romans 9:8), which is fighting ferociously to claim the land, but the spiritual seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:29), which is fighting the dragon, the beast and the false prophet on a spiritual level (Ephesians 6:12).

The Old Israel

Thus the Israel depicted in Revelation is not the Israel of the Old Testament at all. Since the time of Pentecost, and Paul's preaching to the Gentiles, God's people, from all the nations of the world, have been called into another covenant relationship as true Israelites.

When Moses and his people heard the reading of the Law, and heard God's warning that turning away from his statutes and laws would result in being taken captive by other nations, they said, "*We will do everything the Lord has said, we will obey*" (Exodus 24:7). But Israel disobeyed, became idol-worshippers, and failed to keep the Law Covenant.

After they had been forced to spend 70 years in Babylonia, Daniel the prophet was told that God had allowed another 70 weeks (or 490 years) from the command by Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem (457 BC), to the coming of the Messiah. From that date the period of the prophecy comes to 34 AD, the year the gospel message went out formally to the Gentiles for the first time. Stephen had been martyred (Acts 7:59), Paul was miraculously converted (Acts 9), the Jews had rejected Christ, and Israel as a nation was finally separated from its covenant relationship with God.

Jesus had previously told the Jews, "*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matthew 21:43). Though prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel promised that Israel

would have a wonderful future, those prophecies were not able to reach fulfilment due to their disobedience and their rejection of Christ. Jesus said, *"How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate"* (Matthew 23: 37 to 39).

And so their eyes were blinded, as Jesus said in John 12: 39 and 40; *"For this reason they could not believe ... as Isaiah says, 'He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts' "*. So natural Israel failed and the old Law Covenant was superseded by the New (Hebrews 10: 9). All those Old Testament prophecies relating to Israel's future had to be re-interpreted and applied the new Israel of God.

To help to understand the prophecies concerning Israel, a rule of biblical interpretation should be considered and applied. This rule of biblical interpretation of prophecy is that there is a primary, local, literal application which points to a future, worldwide, spiritual application. God's promises to Israel were primarily aimed toward immediate blessings during the Jewish age. Then, in a secondary sense, they pointed forward to a larger spiritual fulfilment with a worldwide coverage.

Although the nation of Israel received blessings according to those promises, their primary fulfilment failed when Israel failed, and those promises were not nullified or withdrawn. They will still be honoured completely, but only to that 'nation' which Jesus said would replace the Jews who rejected Him. Who belongs to that 'nation'? The New Testament contains many scriptures which explain who that nation is.

The New Israel

The apostle Peter tells us about them *"Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2: 9 and 10). Here he identifies that new nation of Israel which replaces natural Israel. Jews and Gentiles of every nation who believe in Christ, who accept the terms of God's New Covenant arrangement, ratified by Christ's perfect sacrifice, become the true, spiritual Israel of God. Those who were not God's people become His 'Holy Nation', a kingdom of priests, as God had originally intended for natural Israel.

The apostle Paul tells us that these people will bless all the families of the earth, as God had promised to Abraham. He wrote, *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew, nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (that is, God's promise to Abraham) (Galatians 3: 26 to 29). In Romans 9:8 Paul

wrote, *"It is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring"*. In chapter 2 Paul wrote, *"For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart"* (Romans 2: 28 and 29). Circumcision was performed on all male Jewish children as descendants of Abraham as a sign of his covenant with God. Our circumcision is the acceptance of Christ's perfect sacrifice and the suppression of sinful desires as a sign of our covenant with God.

In studying the subject of Armageddon, the rule of Biblical interpretation should be kept in mind; that is God's prophecies may have a double application. The first is the local application, the second is the fulfilment on a world-wide scale, applicable to the Church, God's chosen people (Acts 15: 14). There are many remarkable parallels between ancient Israel and spiritual Israel. The following lists some of them.

Ancient Israel		Spiritual Israel
Jeremiah 50:33, 4	Persecuted by Babylon	Revelation 17:5,6
Daniel 3:14,15	Forced to worship an image	Revelation 14,15
Daniel 4:30	Called 'Babylon the Great'	Revelation 17:5
Jeremiah 51:13,14	Babylon sits on many waters	Revelation 17:1
Isaiah 44:27,28	Rescued – Euphrates dried up	Revelation 16:12
Jeremiah 51:6-8	Flee from Babylon	Revelation 18:4
Isaiah 45:1	Rescued by the Lord's anointed	Daniel 9:25, 26
Isaiah 41:2	Rescued from the East	Matthew 24:27; Revelation 7:2

From these events it may be seen that God's people, both in Old Testament and in New Testament times, experienced the same testings, namely: forced to worship an image, rescued by an anointed One from the East; and God dried up the river Euphrates to set them free. Just before the battle of Armageddon, John described the three powerful satanic forces coming upon God's people. He wrote, *"I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs. They came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs"* (Revelation 16: 13 and 14). These powerful forces of Satan appear to be counterfeit religious forces working miracles to impress the kings of the earth and drawing the whole world into the battle of Armageddon.

The battle which follows is really the final struggle between the forces of Satan and the forces of Christ. Satan's intention is to destroy all of God's people who dare to obey Christ in the face of torture and death. In Isaiah we are told about Satan's intention to control the world and become the King of the earth. Isaiah writes, *"I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in*

the sides of the North. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14: 13 and 14). Satan's aim is to work through a counterfeit religious system in order to deceive the world and finally crush those who are loyal to Christ. Satan wants to sit upon the mount of the congregation. That mount would be none other than Mt. Zion, which was originally on a hill to the North of Jerusalem, and now symbolises divine authority.

However, Zion was also the place where God dwelt. Zion was the temple in Jerusalem, and it later became the name for the Saints of God, the Church. It began as a literal temple on a hill and it became the spiritual temple of the people of God, who are presently scattered throughout the earth. Hebrews 12 tells us about the true Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, city of the living God, where there are thousands of angels as well as the Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven (Hebrews 13: 22 and 23). Also, we are told about a Lamb which stood on Mt. Zion, and with him were one hundred and forty four thousand, having his Father's name written on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1). These are pictured as being redeemed from the world, delivered from the Beast, and they dwell safely with Christ.

Satan also gathers his forces together in preparation for this battle against Christ. It is called the great Day of God Almighty. The prophet Joel foretold this event, saying, *"Come quickly all you nations from every side ... let the nations be roused ... let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side ... the Lord will roar from Zion ... the earth and the sky will tremble, but the Lord will be a refuge for His people"* (Joel 3: 11, 12 and 16).

In the vision, John saw unclean spirits going out to the kings of the earth, working miracles and gathering them to Armageddon; religious forces working on political rulers in order to destroy God's faithful people. But then John saw a rider on a white horse, who came to judge and to make war, and with him were his armies, also riding on white horses ... and he is said to tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God, and his name was the Word of God, who was also the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19: 11 to 16).

As the battle of Armageddon approaches its great climax, the drying up of the river Euphrates, preparing the way for the kings of the East to come to the battle, may be observed. There is a parallel account of this event in the Old Testament. Six hundred years before Christ, the Babylonians held God's people in subjection until Cyrus, the Mede came from the East and dried up the waters of the Euphrates, overpowered the ancient city of Babylon and brought deliverance for natural Israel. Isaiah 44 records God's promise to dry up the waters of Babylon, call Cyrus, the Lord's shepherd, the Lord's anointed, and then he promised that Jerusalem and its temple would be rebuilt after 70 years of exile (Isaiah 44: 27 and 28).

But according to the principle of biblical interpretation, it would not be expected that the Revelation account be literal as well. Babylon is symbolic of a counterfeit religious system. The Euphrates is symbolic of peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues. The rider of the white horse is symbolic of Jesus Christ, the Lord's anointed, who will rescue spiritual Israel just as Cyrus rescued God's ancient people.

In Revelation, God's people are the members of the church of Christ, spiritual Israelites, God's true Saints, who are opposed to Babylon, which is not literal but a counterfeit religious institution, manipulated by Satan. The waters of Babylon represent the peoples and nations who give support to Babylon, the harlot, the counterfeit religious system which persecutes the Saints (Revelation 17:6). The drying up of the waters is the withholding of support for Babylon by the people. They recognise that they have been duped, and actually turn upon each other in anger. Zechariah's prophecy vividly describes this self-destruction. *"A great tumult from the Lord shall be among them, and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour"* (Zechariah 14: 12 and 13).

John told us, *"These shall hate the whore and make her desolate and naked and shall eat her flesh and burn her with fire"* (Revelation 17:16).

Who, then, are the *"kings of the East"* who come to this great battle? Just as Cyrus, God's anointed one, approached captive Israel from the East, so will come the rider on the white horse from the East, with all his army of righteous followers behind him. The kings of the East therefore are God and Christ and the armies of heaven who triumph over the beast, the kings of the earth and their armies, as described in Revelation 19: 19. And Jesus had a name on his robe and on his thigh, *"King of Kings and Lord of Lords"* (Revelation 19: 16). This then, as Jesus told his disciples, is really the return of our Lord, coming firstly from the East, for the Son of Man will come as the lightning which comes out of the East and shines even to the West (Matthew 24:27). But it is also the great day of God Almighty (Revelation 16:14) when God reveals his great anger at the wickedness of the nations. This day of the LORD was predicted by the prophet Ezekiel when he said, *"... every man's sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgment upon them with plague and bloodshed. I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulphur on him and his troops ... I will show my greatness and my holiness ... then they will know that I am the LORD"* (Ezekiel 38: 21 to 23).

At the present time in the Middle East, the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael, the sons of Abraham, are full of hatred, warring against each other, trying to destroy each other, and this will continue until Jesus their Messiah comes. But the battle of Armageddon is not going to occur on the physical plain of Megiddo. It is really the battle between good and evil, between God and the nations and between Christ and Satan on a worldwide scale, and we are assured of who will be the conqueror and who will be defeated.

Just as Cyrus, the anointed one, came with his army from the East to rescue natural Israel from 70 years of exile in ancient Babylonia, so Christ, the anointed One, will come with the armies of heaven from the East to rescue his faithful followers from wicked Babylon the Great. After the battle, Christ will be the victor, Satan and the kings of the earth will be defeated and then Satan will be bound for a thousand years, and Christ will reign forever. Mankind will be brought back from the grave and will learn to walk in the paths of righteousness.

Verse 15 of Revelation 16 reads, "*Behold I come like a thief. Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed*". When a thief comes, he comes secretly, surreptitiously, unexpectedly. So it is with Jesus. The people of the world do not expect him to return. The world continues to marry and be given in marriage, just like it did when the flood came and destroyed all except Noah and his family. But we, who belong to him, who stay awake for him and who wait to be clothed in white linen with him, stand ready to take part in the marriage of the Lamb, which will shortly take place at his return. Revelation 19: 7 and 8 says, "*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteousness of the Saints.)*".

May we also be ready when he appears.



WORSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Talk given by Colin Giles at Alexandra Headland, 2015

The following article is an extension of thoughts previously given in conference papers. This article will begin with a review of the observations made as to how the organisation of the early church developed, and then will extend those observations to include how the members of the church worshipped.

The Synagogue form of instruction itself developed while the Jewish nation was deported for 70 years in Babylon. During that time they were deprived of the Temple service of instruction and sacrifices, so, to keep alive their calling as a people of God, a form of service that included readings of the law and of the prophets was developed. Knowledge of their history was also important for keeping them united as an identifiable body of people.

We see the influence of the Synagogue form of worship in a number of references in the New Testament. When Jesus began his ministry in Nazareth on the Sabbath day we read:

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord'. And he closed the book (that is, rolled up the scroll), and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down: and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, 'To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears:'." (Luke 4: 16 to 21; ASV).

Note the form of the Service:-

1. The service was on the Sabbath day.
2. There was an attendant that kept the scrolls and handed them to the speaker. We also infer that he had sat in the seat that was reserved for those that wished to speak *"The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat."* (Matthew 23:2)) Although he had been a resident of Nazareth, this time he was a visitor and invited to speak.
3. The service began with a reading from scripture. The practice was to have set readings from both the law and the prophets. The reading recorded in Luke was due to be read on the day of Atonement.
4. The reader stood up to make the reading, but sat down when giving his discourse although Paul, when he visited Antioch in Pisidia, sat down in the teacher's seat but stood up to address the audience, perhaps reflecting the local custom.

Some other useful facts about the form of the Synagogue service and the disciples experiences can be gained by a review of the Book of Acts. This I intend to do now and list information that helps in understanding how the services of worship developed.

In Jerusalem

"And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46).

From this we learn that the disciples attended the Temple service, and met believers in their homes. Most of the other reports of meetings in the Synagogue are during Paul's missionary journeys.

At Antioch of Pisidia

"But they, passing through from Perga, came to Antioch of Pisidia; and they went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the

reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on” (Acts 13: 14 and 15).

This is another case where a visitor to the Synagogue was invited to speak. It can be inferred that Paul was dressed in the garb of a rabbi, and sat in the seat reserved for people able to explain the scriptures. The service was repeated on the next Sabbath to *“almost the whole town”* as recorded in Acts 13:44.

At Iconium

“And it came to pass in Iconium that they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake that a great multitude both of Jews and of Greeks believed. But the Jews that were disobedient stirred up the souls of the Gentiles, and made them evil affected against the brethren” (Acts 14:1).

Note that at Iconium they went into the Jewish Synagogue and spoke to both Jews and Greeks.

From these visits we learn that Gentiles had been previously drawn to the Jewish faith and had become proselytes of the gate, presumably drawn by the higher ethical standards that the Jewish religion exhibited compared to the pagan religions. The pagan religions required you to do something that may earn the favour of the gods, whereas the Jewish religion said consider what God had done for you and then decide how you should respond. Superstition in society was at that time rife, so much so that people would not take any action unless the omens were favourable.

There was also another class of religious practice found amongst the Gentiles called the mystery religions, of which we know little because its members were inducted into a kind of secret society, which is why they are called mystery religions. Not a lot is known of their practices because only the initiated were entitled to know the details of that religion. Something of the same sense is implied in Paul's words *“I show you a mystery”* (1 Corinthians 15:51).

At Lystra and Derbe

“(They) fled unto the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the region round about: and there they preached the gospel” (Acts 14: 6 and 7).

It is not recorded whether they went into the Synagogue in these cities, or whether the man who was crippled and listening to Paul was sitting, but we know that Timothy came from Derbe, and his mother and grandmother were Jewish although his father was Greek. Whether there were other Jews in the area of a sufficient number to justify the building of a Synagogue we do not know. A similar situation of insufficient members to build a Synagogue also occurred at Philippi in Macedonia.

It is recorded that on the return journey the Apostle appointed Elders in every ecclesia (Acts 14: 21 to 23). This practice of appointing a body of people responsible for the organisation of the church was the same as adopted in the Synagogue.

Conference in Jerusalem

“And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and questioning with them, the brethren appointed that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider of this matter. And when there had been much questioning, Peter rose up, and said unto them” (Acts 15: 2, 6 and 7).

The gathering at Jerusalem to decide the question of whether Greeks had to be circumcised provides further information about the organisation of the church and how it followed the practice of the Synagogue.

We note that it was both the apostles and elders that were gathered together to considered this matter, and we also note from a latter verse that when the reply was sent back to Antioch, it included the whole church as approving the form of the reply.

Paul’s part in the debate is not mentioned, but we learn from his letter to the Galatians that the debate centred on whether Titus should be circumcised. *“But not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren privily brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you”* ((Galatians 2: 3 to 5).

This section of Galatians, although speaking about the opposing view of the Judaising party, is set in a section of scripture where Paul was establishing that even James, Peter and John did not change anything in the message that Paul was preaching, and especially nothing about requiring Gentiles to follow detailed ceremonies of the Mosaic law (Galatians 2:9; also refer to verse 6).

We know that later Paul had Timothy circumcised, so it may appear that he acted with a certain inconsistency, but Paul considered the attempt to require the Gentiles to be circumcised to gain God’s favour was a matter of principle, whereas in the case of Timothy it was a concession to Jewish scruples so that the work among the Jews was not hindered. There must be a lesson here . It is also significant to note that Peter did not rise to speak until there had been much debate on the subject.

This incident also brings before us the position that James occupied in the Jerusalem church. This James was the brother of our Lord, and seems to have held some sort of presidential position in the Jerusalem church, as he is the person who formulated the reply to be sent to the new Gentile church, as in verse 23; *“They wrote letters by them after this manner; the apostles and elders and brethren send greetings unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia...”*, and also verse 22, *“Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch”*. James was known as being zealous for keeping the law, so the decision he made that the Gentiles do not have to come under the Law Covenant was quite important in setting a new direction.

On Paul's second missionary journey, Timothy and Luke joined the group before they crossed over to Macedonia.

At Philippi and in Macedonia

“And from thence to Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, the first of the district, a Roman colony: and we were in this city tarrying certain days” (Acts 16:12).

At Philippi we note that Paul went to meet a group of worshippers on the Sabbath at a place of prayer, and his preaching found ready acceptance there. When Paul and Silas were thrown into prison we are informed about their own practice of devotion in that they were praying and singing praises to God. They must have had good singing voices, as the prisoners listened to them eagerly. At Thessalonica, Berea and Athens the apostles followed their usual practice and went into the Synagogue to speak. It was only after his message was rejected by the Jews that Paul directed his preaching towards the Gentiles. This action of Paul had previously occurred at Antioch of Pisidia.

At Athens

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he beheld the city full of idols” (Acts 17:16).

At Athens he found a new opportunity to proclaim his message by joining in with the discussion with Philosophers in the market place, but he was disappointed with the response he received and determined to return to his usual practice when he arrived at Corinth.

At Corinth

“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling” (1 Corinthians 2: 2 and 3).

Corinth was another location where they went into the Synagogue on the Sabbath, preaching and testifying that Jesus was the Christ. It was at Corinth that Paul, having first preached to the Jews and been rejected, declared that he would now go to the Gentiles, though this was not the first time he had said this, the first time being in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:46). It was then that Paul entered a house of a man named Justus which was next door to the Synagogue. No wonder that the Jews became upset with Paul and brought him before the proconsul.

Since Paul had purposed to speak to the Gentiles, it is also likely that he used the house of Justus as the place for preaching the word. The fact that Crispus, who was a ruler of the Synagogue, became a believer, could not have improved the humour of Jews, and would explain why the Jews took Sosthenes, also a ruler of the Synagogue (whether there were a number of rulers at any one time we don't know), who could have been sympathetic to Paul. The Jews may have blamed Sosthenes for the unsatisfactory verdict by Gallio. We find Sosthenes as the amanuensis for Paul when he dictated the first epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:1). This is one of the times that Paul withdraw himself and his followers from what had been the centre for the teaching of God's commands. There could be a lesson here.

Not quite the same case occurred at Antioch in Pisidia, in the deliberate action of withdrawing to a separate place, but there is the same directing of his activity elsewhere. I sometimes wonder how the new converts were able to cope under opposition from the Jews.

At Philippi it was the influence of the sooth sayers that had lost their income that caused the apostle to move on, so the believers were able to continue at their place of prayer, but at Thessalonica the Jews had stirred up trouble, and we note in the letter to the Thessalonians that they had suffered much affliction. But whether they were forced to leave the Synagogue we are not told. They had a period of training by Paul, Silas and Timothy, but whether they had access to copies of the scriptures we are not informed.

At Ephesus

On Paul's third missionary journey he journeyed to Ephesus, and went into the Synagogue and spoke to the Jews for three months. He again withdrew the disciples from the Synagogue, after being subjected to stubborn and disbelieving worshippers in the Synagogue who were speaking evil of the Way (Acts 19: 1 to 20).

At Troas

After Paul had travelled through Macedonia and Greece he returned to Troas where we remember that Eutychus fell from the third floor window while Paul was speaking till midnight (Acts 20:7).

What interests me in this event is that the meeting was held on the first day of the week rather than on the Sabbath, which was the seventh day of the week. So what may have been the influences that brought about this change? The only other place where there is evidence of a change in the day of worship is alluded to in 1 Corinthians 16:2, where the congregation were making a collection for the church at Jerusalem. The advice that Paul gave was to put something aside on the first day of the week, thus indicating that their assembly for worship was on the first day of the week. If we assume that these churches were composed mainly of Gentile believers who were either slaves or freemen in the service of a master, then they would not have had the privilege of a day of rest as given to the Jews. They therefore waited till the evening after their labour was done, and if we assume that the day began and finished at sunset as in the Jewish system of reckoning the day, then this would place their meeting time as on the first day of the week.

At Troas, when Paul spoke till midnight, this would still place the gathering on the Saturday in our method of reckoning. It was later that the Christians' time of gathering was moved to early on the Sunday morning, as recorded by Pliny the Roman historian, writing in about AD 112. Only when Constantine became Emperor, in AD 321, were the Christians given a holiday on the Sunday. Constantine as Pontifex Maximus (chief priest) and in charge of the religious year took some of his pagan beliefs with him, so that when he made the first day of the week a holiday for Christians, he called it the venerable day of the Sun; that is Sunday.

These snippets of information that I have selected from the evangelising work of the apostles raise in my mind a few questions as to what the relationship was between the believers and the Jews of the Synagogues and those Jews that opposed the gospel message. Also, what attitude did the disciples take toward the Temple services?

We are aware that when Paul entered a city to preach the gospel, he first of all went into a Synagogue to preach the good news, and although he met some Jews that did not believe, there is no indication that he always withdrew believers from those meetings. The disciples seemed to still attend the Temple services and followed that ritual, so when and why did that practice end? Also, Paul was eager to return to Jerusalem to attend the festivals, where he followed Jewish religious practice by taking a vow. When did this acceptance change?

From what I have read, the opportunity of preaching in the Synagogue continued up until the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. After that time access into the Synagogue was ended because it was seen that the Christians did not support the Jewish cause.

In considering the way that the fledgling church conducted their meetings, there is one subject on which the evidence is not clear to me, and that is on what day they held the Lord's Supper, and how often was it held. I am discussing this subject because it introduces another subject on which I want to comment.

At Troas it is recorded that *"on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread....."* (Acts 20:7). The expression, 'to break bread', is not used for the name of an ordinary meal. When the two on their way to Emmaus stopped for a meal the expression used was, *"when he was at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it."* There is a suggestion that at Troas they were meeting for a particular type of meal. The report of the unruly behaviour at Corinth in chapter 11, when part of the meal was for the purpose of eating the Lord's Supper, there is a suggestion that they were meeting regularly rather than annually.

In the writings of Justin in AD 150, it is clear that having the Lord's Supper was part of the regular pattern of worship. 'At the end of prayers, we greet one another with a kiss. Then the president of the brethren is brought bread and a cup of wine mixed with water and he takes them, and offers up praise and glory to the Father of the universe.'

However, my intention at the moment is not to discuss how often the Lord's Supper was held, as the principle to be applied is as in Roman's 14:5; *"One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind."* What I want to discuss is the meal that is described as the 'love feast', such as in Jude 12. *"These are blemishes on your love feast, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves"*. Similar words are used in 2 Peter 2:12; *"They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their dissipation, carousing with you"*. These words would indicate that the believers met together for a fellowship meal before the Lord's Supper, and this is what those at Corinth were eating, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:22 and other verses; *"What do you not have houses to eat and drink in?"*.

At the Jewish Passover they ate a meal which gave them sustenance for the coming journey, as well as it being a remembrance service, so a meal shared together serves a number of purposes: giving us food and sharing in friendship. It would seem that because of the abuse that had become attached to the love feast, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 11:20; *"When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper"*, this part of the meeting together and having a meal must have been discontinued at some time, possibly because of the abuse that the meal had been subjected to.

A further lesson that we gain from 1 Corinthians 10: 16 and 17 about the Lord's Supper is that, as well as it being a commemorative service of our Lord's work of giving his life in service for us, it is also a picture of the unity of the church. *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread"*. The bread that was broken was originally one loaf, so each believer in receiving a part of the loaf also shared in the unity of the one loaf which symbolises the church. The lesson of this picture is that when we experience differences of mind amongst ourselves, we should remember that we share together in the unity that Christ made for his church.

I have put together a selection of facts that are mentioned in the travels of the disciples. They may not be a connected set of facts, but they build up a picture of how the form of worship that we are familiar with came about. That is not to say that the forms we use are perfect, but only that they have over time been found to be a good basis on which to work.



LOST IN TRANSLATION

Talk given by Merv Buckmaster

Introduction

After the flood the human race still had a universal language, and God's confusion of the language at Babel (Genesis 11: 1 to 8) was a calamity for humankind, because it engendered suspicion between all the tribes and nations of the peoples of earth, it prompted their arrogant claims to the lands of the world that belongs to God, and it ignited the territorial wars that have raged since that fateful time before Abraham.

When God inspired Moses to begin writing the books of the Bible, the language he used was his own tongue, Hebrew, and with that precedent, it was continued to be used for other books of the Old Testament, apart from a few contributions in Aramaic.

After the four hundred year period between Malachi and Matthew, the languages in use in the Roman Empire were Latin, imposed by the Romans, and Greek, the language of the Grecian Empire, and it was the latter tongue that was used by the writers of the books of the New Testament, in preference to both Hebrew, still used by the Jews, and Latin used by the Romans.

During the two thousand years since then there have developed more languages, more mistrust and more dissention; and from the recognition of religions and their associated languages as prime sources of that mistrust

and dissention, our world has become a linguistic quagmire of multiculturalism that has exacerbated the differences between nations, and so brought about more social fragmentation.

We know that God's word is truth, whatever language it was written in, and in order to understand it we need it to be written in our own language. We have been greatly blessed by the work of those who have translated the scriptures for us, recognising their skill and determination to respond to Jesus' command to "*teach all nations*", while acknowledging Paul's command to "*rightly divide the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Difficulties arose with the task of translation because the early translators did not have the original manuscripts. Only copies were available, and by comparing them they found differences. The copying errors suggested strongly that the older the manuscript was, the closer it would be to the original text.

The work of translating from one language to another is fraught with difficulty simply because a word spelled the same way can have different meanings in different languages. For example, the word spelled 'l i t', lit, in English is used thus; 'the fire was lit with a match': but in French 'le lit' is 'the bed'.

Some manuscripts had additional words or phrases, bringing doubt as to their veracity, and prompting caution towards their inclusion in the translation. An example is the closing eulogy at the end of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:13. The words, "*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen*" are not included in the similar passage in Luke chapter eleven.

Then there are different English words used for the same Greek word, an example of inconsistent translation being 'ecclesia', translated most often as 'church', (Ephesians 5:25) but also as 'congregation' (Acts 13:43).

Translators have also been biased by their own beliefs and prejudices, particularly by the influence of social and religious traditions such as those pertaining to dress and ceremony which often came from pagan creeds; and by false teachings such as Trinity, Immortal Soul and Hell-fire Torment.

Despite these complications involved with determining God's word in the English language, there must be a fundamental belief that the God of love would not prevent any believer from seeking, and finding, the truth sufficient to establish his or her faith in the knowledge that He exists, and that He rewards those who diligently search for His truth. This poses a challenge to search continually for the most accurate translation in contemporary language, in order that the full depth of meaning of what was written may become apparent, and then applied to everyday living.

Associated with this tendency towards a personal bias by individual translators are the linguistic aspects of paraphrasing and punctuation. Their good intentions to find an acceptable rendition of the ancient languages has encouraged them to use idiomatic expressions which are only rarely helpful.

The following observations and examples of revision are based upon the King James Version, which is respected because of its authority from King James himself and its noble use of the English language.

There are several other versions of the Bible in English, each one produced through diligent study with the intention, in most cases, to correct perceived mistakes in earlier versions, and to improve the clarity and understanding of the original writings. These later versions provide valuable works for consultation in Bible study in the pursuit of the truth: the flawless knowledge that God would have us to understand, for which the dedicated Bible student should be striving (2 Timothy 2:15), but will not be achieved until complete understanding will be granted by Jesus himself in the kingdom age.

Many other reference works provide great assistance to the believer during the search for understanding. Notable among them are the interlinear versions of the Bible, the concordances, Bible dictionaries and commentaries written by men of faith over the centuries. In order to get closer to the accurate knowledge that Paul mentioned to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:4) it is important to remember the examples which follow. That verse in Timothy is itself an instance of something lost in the translation where the KJV, has, "*will have all men ... come unto the knowledge of the truth*" does not convey the strength of Paul's words to pursue that **accurate** understanding.

The following examples are offered for your consideration.

TRANSLATIONS LOST AND FOUND

Genesis 1: 5, 8, 13, 19, 23 and 31

In these verses the Hebrew word for 'day' is 'yome' (Strong 3117). Its meaning depends upon its context, and the only honest way to translate it, wherever it appears, is to take its fundamental meaning of 'a period of time', and allow its associated verses to determine its definition.

Observations of the processes of the natural order of things over many centuries indicate that God's creation, described in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, was not a brief exercise of His power. Those observations indicate the presumption of imposing a human timetable, on the work of the creator by limiting each of the six days of creation to 24 hours.

The word 'day' occurs hundreds of times throughout the scriptures, providing much scope for interpretation. Note the differences in the meanings of the word 'day' in the following verses:

The periods of time of creation are collected into one period of time "*in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens*" (Genesis 2:4).

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8).

"Saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels" (Malachi 3:17).

The same principle of considering the context also applies to the Greek words translated as 'day' in the New Testament.

The importance of context is also paramount to the understanding of "*all*" when it does not mean 'without exception' (Romans 11:26); and "*everlasting*" when it means 'age-long' instead of 'time without a limit' (Matthew 25:41).

Genesis 2:7

"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

The Hebrew word for 'soul' here is 'nephesh' which means a breathing creature, thus the correct translation is "*and man became a breathing creature*". Other versions have "*and man became a living being*" Men and women were created as living, human beings, quite distinct from spirit beings (1 Corinthians 15:44). God said He created a 'man'. Adam said Eve was a 'woman'. Neither was defined as a 'soul'.

The translation of 'nephesh' and several other words in Hebrew and the Greek word 'psuche' as 'soul' is incorrect. A rationale similar to that above may be applied to all the instances where the word 'soul' appears in the various versions of the Bible, whether the meaning be, for example, human being, personality, or heart and mind, thus restoring the proper meaning for each context, and removing the pretext for the doctrine of the immortal soul which came from pagan philosophy.

Genesis 6: 2 and 4

"The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown."

The word "*giants*" in this verse of the KJV is rendered as 'nephilim' in other versions. The Hebrew word is 'nefeel' (Strong 5303), which means a bully or tyrant, and is derived from 'nawfal' (Strong 5307), which means 'to fall'. This gives weight to the identity of the nephilim as fallen angels, the spirit beings who "*kept not their first estate*" (Jude 6). They are described as "*heroes of*

old, men of renown", probably because of their physical feats that were greater than normal men could do. They were like men, not necessarily giants in stature.

Genesis 6:6

"And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart."

From what is revealed about God throughout the scriptures, His power, His knowledge, His foresight, His patience and His love; being perfect in all His attributes, and without any variableness, it seems improper that that we could think that He should repent of anything He had done. God requires repentance in order to grant forgiveness, (1 John 1:9), and a being who is righteous in all His ways (Psalm 119:137) does not need forgiveness: therefore does not need to repent.

And yet, despite His status of absolute authority He has been compassionate in showing that it is fallen mankind that should repent, then in mercy He has sent out a call for repentance and provided the way for that purpose to be achieved. The discordant wordage of this verse is resolved in the Hebrew-English interlinear version thus, *"and Yahweh was grieved that he made man on the earth and he was hurt in his heart,"*; and is made plain in the NIV, which reads. *"The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain"*.

Genesis 7:11

"In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened."

The nature and effect of the flood is clear from the account in Genesis chapter seven, but without the identification of *"the fountains of the great deep"* and *"the windows of heaven"* the sources of the water are not clear; and prolonged discussion about them serves to detract from appreciation of the purpose of the flood, which was to cleanse the earth of human beings except for Noah and his family. The source of the water of the flood involves a translation still lost to us.

Exodus 3: 14 to 16

This is the record of Moses asking God what he should tell the Israelites when they ask him who had sent him to instruct them. *"And God said unto Moses, I AM that I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."*

Many translations have different wordings for 'I AM', including amongst others, 'I exist', 'I was', 'I will be' and 'I continue to be'. The sense of these different versions is explained by considering the inter-linear Hebrew-English

version of Genesis 21:33 which records that "*Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of Yahweh, the everlasting God*"; and Psalm 41:13, "*Praise be to Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting*"; and Psalm 90:2, "*from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God*"; and that sense is that Yahweh is the self-existing one.

This translation also includes the point that God told Moses that His name is Yahweh, and that is confirmed by the inter-linear Hebrew-English translation where, onwards from Genesis chapter two, God's name should be used in each place where the words '*the LORD*' appear in the NIV, and are taken from the Hebrew word called the tetragrammaton. This obfuscation of the truth has been, not so much lost in translation as suppressed by the Jewish policy of not using God's name because of their mistaken understanding that when God told them not to take His name in vain He meant that He did not want them to use His name at all.

Joshua 10: 12 and 13

"Then spake Joshua ... and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had revenge upon their enemies."

The geophysical consequences of the sun standing still, that is, remaining apparently motionless in the sky, either by the sun orbiting around the earth or by the earth stopping spinning, would be, in the first case to destroy the solar system, or in the second case to destroy the habitability of earth itself.

The correct rendering of the Hebrew word 'dawmam' (Strong 1826), which is translated as 'stood still' is, 'to be dumb' or 'be silent', which in the case of the sun is to be dim, meaning that it did not shine. On the day of the battle between the Israelites and the Amorites the sun did not shine because of the storm clouds, from which the deadly hailstones rained, and which followed the Amorites through the valley of Aijalon for the remainder of the day. The storm clouds also prevented the moon from shining.

Although it could appear that Joshua was directing God about the conduct of the battle, he was only acknowledging the advantage given to the Israelites by the prevailing storm, since they were not sun-worshippers as the Amorites were, and he was petitioning God to allow that advantage to continue. The storm continued and the sun did not shine; it did not 'press down' with its warmth and light for the remainder of the day and the Amorites were destroyed. The sun did not stand still.

In this passage the correct translation has been enhanced by reasoned interpretation.

Habakkuk 2:4 and Hebrews 10:38

"The just shall live by his faith." And "the just shall live by faith."

Chapter eleven of Hebrews gives notable examples of the principle that faith, as defined in verse one, has always been essential in the relationship between God and man. It appears that Paul quoted the verse from Habakkuk in Hebrews, showing that the principle of justification by faith, which he expounded in Romans chapter four, has continued from the time before the flood to now, throughout the gospel age.

There are two aspects of this relationship. Firstly, James pointed out that the believer must show his faith by his works: works of faith, obeying the Lord's commands during his life, being imputed with righteousness, and being faithful unto death. Thus the believer will live in accordance with his faith; or *"by his faith"*.

Secondly, the reward for a lifetime of faith, that is, faithfulness, is a resurrection to everlasting life, so that those who are so justified will be made alive, and live forever. This aspect is emphasised by the word order of the Hebrew text in Habakkuk 2:4 which is, *"the justified by faith will live"*.

Matthew 6:13

This verse concludes the Lord's Prayer with the words, *"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen"*. The similar passage in Luke 11: 2 to 4 does not contain these words, and they are omitted from the Diaglott version of Matthew 6:13, giving support to the idea that they are not authentic. If that is correct, this is an example of an addition to the original manuscript.

However, these words have great appeal because of their expression, of a paean of triumph in the nature of the creator. And that expression of adoration is set out in many verses throughout the Bible, which declare the truth of God's kingdom, His power and His glory, and is well supported by the words of King David in 1 Chronicles 29: 11 to 13. Thus, acknowledging God's status in these words is appropriate to worship, with or without the Lord's prayer.

Matthew 16:18, Mark 8:29 and Luke 9:20

"And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."

In the parable about the best place to build a house (Matthew 7: 24 and 25), Jesus made clear the importance of building on a sure foundation, an immovable rock, so these words of the Lord seem to indicate that Peter would be a building block for the church. But that is contrary to what Paul told the Corinthians that, *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"*. (1 Corinthians 3:11) He set out the same

principle to the Ephesians, declaring them to be *"of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone"*. (Ephesians 2: 19 and 20)

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that Peter was not to be the foundation of the church, and this is supported by the Diaglott rendition, which is. *"Moreover I say unto thee, that thou art a rock, and on this rock (what you said) I will build my church"*.

Paul established in his epistles that faith is essential to the high calling, and it was Peter's declaration of his faith in the Lord that Jesus acknowledged, after he had asked the disciples, *"Who do you say that I am?"*

The principle is paraphrased in the words, 'Peter's rock confession of faith', and is given a significant new dimension where he explained that the church would be *"built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood"* of *"living stones ... acceptable to God"* by faith *"in Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 2:5).

Matthew 7:1, Luke 6:37

"Judge not, that ye be not judged."

The context of this verse is Jesus' dissertation about proper Christian behaviour. Both the noun 'judgement' and the verb 'to judge', are used mostly in an adversarial manner, that is, to deliver punishment. However, judgement is, by its nature, a collective noun, because it has three aspects: firstly, the collection and assessment of information; secondly, the determination of the consequence of the assessment, that is, the passing of sentence; and thirdly the execution of the sentence. The second and third aspects are together regarded properly as condemnation.

In the verses quoted the word *"judge"* comes from the Greek word 'krino' which means to decide, and in other places is given as 'condemn', 'sentence', 'determine' and so on.

In John 7:24 Jesus, who was teaching in the Temple said, *"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgement"*.

In Romans 14:13 Paul wrote, *"Let us not therefore judge one another anymore, but judge this rather..."*. And to the Corinthians he wrote, *"I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say"*. (1 Corinthians 10:15).

These verses set out the principle that judgement is a Christian obligation, the obligation to discern between right and wrong, using the scriptures as a guide. This can hold true if only the first aspect of judgement is applied by us, and if sentence and execution are exercised, not by us, but by Christ, the righteous judge (2 Timothy 4:8). The believer is called upon daily to decide

between doing good and not doing good, and for this task there are many examples in the Old Testament, and a wealth of guidance in the words of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament.

This responsibility to assess but not condemn is recognised by the generally accepted rendition of Matthew 7:1 and Luke 6:37 as, "*Condemn not, that ye be not condemned*", despite most versions using 'judge' in defiance of Strong's prime definition of 'condemn'.

(To be continued)



CORRESPONDENCE

In the December issue we answered a question about dreams. We had a follow-up to that question and several others, which are answered below.

QUESTIONS

Question 1: What about dreams that come to reality?

Answer: The dreams recorded in the Bible were inspired by God through the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit.

The dreams experienced by people since the cessation of that activity of the Holy Spirit are considered to be due to activity of the subconscious mind. They have no relevance to the dreams of scripture. They may be influenced by the activity of evil spirits, but there can be no way to record a dream so that it appears to come true at a later date. The dreams of scripture were given for a divine purpose. The dreams of today are purposeless. They may be considered as indications of disturbed mental processes, the full nature of which is not understood in physiological and psychological terms.

Question 2: What is the work of the Holy Spirit in the present time?

Answer: While the Apostles were alive, they were used by God to perform miracles, to speak in other languages, and to prophesy (teach) - all using the power of the Holy Spirit. However, the Apostles passed away, and so did those miraculous powers. The apostle Paul wrote about the work of God's Holy Spirit in Romans 8, and we understand that those instructions to the church at Rome apply to all true Christian believers throughout this gospel age. Paul said that those who have accepted Christ and committed their lives to him will receive a measure of the Holy Spirit to comfort, strengthen and guide them in their faith and efforts to serve God. By showing the fruits of the spirit we acknowledge that we belong to God's

spiritual family of sons and daughters (Romans 8: 9 to 17). As well as this, the Holy Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses by interceding with God on our behalf when we pray (Romans 8: 26 and 27).

Please note that the Holy Spirit is not a person. It is a motivating force from God, and should be translated as 'it' rather than 'He' (see the Diaglott translation). The work of the Holy Spirit should be seen in the lives of all true believers who are following the example of Christ, showing the world that they have developed all the fruits which are described in Galatians 5: 22 to 24; that is, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. In displaying these attributes, we show others that God has given us a measure of His Holy Spirit.

Question 3: What is the land and waters of Sinim mentioned in Isaiah 49:12? Is it China?

Answer: All versions of the Bible have Sinim, except for the NIV which has Aswan, which is in Egypt. Strong's concordance defines the Hebrew word to mean 'a distant region in the east'. We could not be sure about whether Sinim refers to China or somewhere else, possibly Egypt.

There are two points that deserve consideration for this answer.

Firstly, the context of the verse in Isaiah concerns the return of some of the Israelites from the places where they were scattered. This could possibly be as far as China, but certainly as far as Egypt. The land of Egypt was to be desolated, thereby prompting the Jews there to return to Palestine.

Secondly, the Jews had possibly established trade in silk from China, maybe as early as 800 years before Christ, which was also before the lifetime of Isaiah. From this it may be inferred that some Jews had gone to work in China, which is a distant region in the east from Palestine.

Question 4: Are the events (prophecies) recorded in Daniel chapter 11 about the kings of the north and south in chronological order?

Answer: Yes. The prophecy refers to the period beginning during the Persian Empire, and the matter is dealt with fully in the book, 'Notes on the Book of Daniel', pages 180 to 198. Copies of the book are available from the editorial address upon request.

Question 5: Has the Islamic religion any meaning in Bible prophecies?

Answer: The Islamic religion was begun by Mahomet in the seventh century and is dealt with in a full discussion of the topic in the book, 'The Few

and the Many - A Commentary on The Revelation' under the fifth trumpet of Revelation, chapter 9, pages 185 to 193 . While mentioned in the prophecy in Daniel, its influence was destructive, not beneficial.

The nation of Israel was chosen by God because of the faith of Abraham, and was the only nation, and the only religion of God's concern (Amos 3:2) until the New Covenant was ratified by Christ's sacrifice, and opened to all nations, Jews and Gentiles.

Question 6: Have the Ishmaelites a relation to the Islamites, and so they fulfil the prophecies about him in Genesis chapters 16, 17 and 21?

Answer: In Genesis 16: 10 and 11; and 17:20 God promised Hagar that Ishmael would be the progenitor of a very populous nation. Ishmael married an Egyptian woman and their descendants became the Arabic people. The historical record shows that Mahomet was an Arab, a descendant of Ishmael. Therefore the Muslims, or Islamists, of Arabic lineage are included in the prophecies about Ishmael.

However, in many countries there are many Islamists (Muslims) who are not of the Arabic nation. They are not descendants of Ishmael, and thus are not included in the prophecy.

Question 7: Since Enoch and Elijah did not see death, where are they living now?

Answer: From Ezekiel 18:4;1 Corinthians 15: 21 and 22; Job 14: 10 to 12; and Ecclesiastes 4: 19 and 20, it is clear that every human being will die, and this includes Enoch and Elijah. Therefore they are not living now.

In the case of Enoch, God took him when he was 365 years old, which is young when compared to his son Methuselah, who died at the age of 969 years. Because of his faith, God took Enoch's life when he was a young man so that he would not experience the process of dying. Death is working in every human being (2 Corinthians 4:12), but Enoch was spared the development of the curse of death in his own body.

In the case of Elijah, God took his life because his work for God was done, and his successor was ready to continue that work. Elijah's death was accompanied by a spectacular demonstration of God's power. Although his body went up into the sky in the whirlwind it did not go to heaven for the following reason.

In both cases the heavenly inheritance promised through the New Covenant was not ratified until Jesus died on the cross. He told the disciples that he would go to prepare a place for them, so there was no place prepared for

Enoch or Elijah at the time that God took their lives. They will have to accept the terms of that covenant, just as every human being has to do. (Acts 4:12). Jesus was the first-fruits of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20), so no-one could precede him to that situation in heaven. Thus Enoch and Elijah, like the rest of mankind, wait until Jesus will call them from the grave.

Question 8: What is the meaning of the words 'Morning' and 'Night' for our days in Isaiah 21:12?

Answer: The translations from the Hebrew of the verse in Isaiah, according to Strong's concordance, are correct, but these are terms that have different meanings depending upon their context.. For example; Samuel rose early in the morning (daybreak) to meet Saul (1 Samuel 15:12), but David was to take the wings of the morning (search) to find God (Psalm 139:9). God called the darkness 'night' (Genesis 1:5), but Paul told the Romans that the night of unbelief was ending (Romans 13: 11 and 12).

In this case in Isaiah, he was giving a prophecy that was to be an assurance to the captive Israelites in Babylonia that they would be delivered from foreign domination and their captors destroyed.

The message in the prophecy was to the Idumeans, also known as Edomites, the descendants of Esau who settled in the country called Dumah south of the Dead Sea. The Idumeans taunted the Jews who were at that time captives in Babylonia. Dumah is a region in Arabia but also the name of a tribe of Ishmael. Seir is the main mountain in Idumea. In this passage in Isaiah the translation (verse 11) should be, "There is a call from Seir" rather than "He calleth from Seir".

The Idumeans were concerned about their future. They were aware of the insights of Israel's prophet, and turned to Isaiah, the 'watchman', for help. Thus the Idumeans asked Isaiah, "What (remains) of the night?" They were not concerned about the hours of darkness, but how much longer would Egypt be at war with Assyria causing suffering for the Idumeans. They asked the question twice, thus showing their anxiety about the situation.

Isaiah replied that there would be a period of relative prosperity, symbolised by "*morning*", when the Idumeans could occupy the southern part of Israel while the Israelites were in captivity, followed by a period of adversity, symbolised by "*night*". Isaiah also told them that they could ask again but would receive the same answer.

Although the words 'day' and 'night' are used in scripture to have the common meanings of daylight and darkness, there are other places where 'morning' expresses relief; and where 'night' expresses oppression.

NEWS AND NOTES

AUTUMN CONFERENCE

As already reported, our conference this year will again be held at Lyrebird Park, Yellingbo, Victoria, from Saturday 2nd to Monday 4th April. The conference theme is 'Defending the Christian Hope'. We pray for God's blessing on our gathering.

VISITOR

On Sunday 7th February we enjoyed a visit from Irené Webb, a member of the West Wickham class in England. Irené is the sister of Sylvia Giles, a member of our class. This time of fellowship was enjoyed by all.

MEMORIAL

The annual observance of the Memorial of our Lord's Last Supper, in accordance with the calendar used by the Jews in our Lord's day, will be Friday 22nd April, 2016, after sunset, at Bayswater South Primary School.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

We are pleased to announce that the book, 'Notes on Paul's Letter to the Romans' by Russell Collins, is now available, free of charge, to all who request a copy.

Also, we now have available a translation into French of an older publication, 'Modernism, Fundamentalism and the Bible', by E. C. Henniges, with thanks to brethren in France. This is available as a PDF file from the CBSM website or via email by request.

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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EDITOR:

Mervyn Buckmaster,
1923 Samaria Rd, Moorngag, Victoria, 3673, Australia

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Email: jmbuckmaster@bigpond.com

Website: www.cbsm.org.au