

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



No. 147

October 2018

Amid the Alien Corn

Russell Collins

David

Colin Giles

God's Standards

Bob Simpson

God of Creation

M and J Buckmaster

News and Notes

AMID THE ALIEN CORN

by Russell Collins

'Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn.'

Ode to a Nightingale
John Keats

THE BOOK OF RUTH

The book of Ruth is set *"in the days when the judges ruled"* (Ruth 1:1), and is a sequel to the book of Judges. With its quiet and subdued tone, the book of Ruth is in striking contrast to the accounts of the warlike exploits of Deborah, Gideon, Jephtha and Samson recorded in the book of Judges. The book has only four chapters.

Chapter 1

In a time when there was a famine in the land occupied by Israel, Elimelech, a man of Bethlehem in Judah, took his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, from Bethlehem into the land of Moab.

In Moab, Elimelech died, and the two sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. In the course of time both of Naomi's sons died also, leaving Naomi with her two daughters-in-law.

Naomi then determined to return to Bethlehem, and set out with Orpah and Ruth. Naomi endeavoured to persuade her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers' homes in Moab. With tears Orpah returned, but Ruth refused to leave Naomi, declaring her love and devotion in the moving and unforgettable words recorded in the first chapter.

Chapter 2

To obtain food, Ruth proposed that she should glean in the fields, that is, gather ears of grain left by the reapers. Gleaning would have been arduous, back-breaking toil, especially as it would have been done in the heat of summer and early autumn. Naomi was too old for such work, so Ruth's willingness and labour would have been of great comfort to Naomi.

It so happened that Ruth gleaned on the property of a near kinsman of her late father-in-law, Elimelech. That kinsman was Boaz, a man of wealth, an upright and kindly man, as shown by his words to Ruth. Boaz instructed his reapers to allow Ruth to glean wherever she wished, and also to let some sheaves of barley fall for her to gather.

On one day we read that Ruth had gleaned about an ephah (two gallons or ten litres) of barley, and when she returned home Naomi began to see hope for her devoted daughter-in-law and herself, for Boaz showed Ruth great kindness.

Chapter 3

Naomi was greatly concerned for Ruth. She wanted life to be easier for her. When the harvesting was finished, and the time for threshing and winnowing had come, Naomi told Ruth to go to Boaz and lie at his feet by night. Such a course of action could have been disastrous for all concerned, but Naomi must have trusted in the Lord and in the uprightness of Boaz and Ruth.

There is provision in the Law of Moses for a situation similar to that which Naomi was putting forward. Naomi sought to prevail upon Boaz to take a kinsman's part and provide for Ruth, perhaps even to marry her. Naomi probably understood the provision in the Law for a levirate marriage, that is, the practice under the Law requiring a brother or near kinsman to marry the widow of his brother or near kinsman.

Both Ruth and Boaz showed their honour and uprightness under circumstances of trial and testing.

Chapter 4

Boaz duly approached the kinsman nearer to Naomi than he, but that kinsman was not able to redeem the inheritance of Naomi. Boaz, therefore, true to his word, before the elders and the people of ancient Bethlehem Ephrathah, at the gate of the city, purchased all of Naomi's inheritance, and took Ruth to be his wife.

Naomi, then, in her old age, knew peace and happiness such as she had not known for many long and weary years. The union of Boaz and Ruth was blessed by the Lord, for both Boaz and Ruth became placed in the ancestral line of King David and of David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some Matters to Ponder and Consider

The writer of the book of Ruth is not named. Tradition has it that Samuel wrote the book, but no evidence exists to support that tradition.

Ruth was a Moabite woman. Moab was the son of the incestuous union between Lot and his elder daughter, as recorded in Genesis 19:37. Moabites were forbidden to become Jews, as also were Ammonites. Ben-ammi was the son of the incestuous union between Lot and his younger daughter, and became the father of the Ammonites, as recorded

in Genesis 19:38. Thus we find the prohibition in Deuteronomy 23:3,4. *"An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee."*

How was it then that Ruth was accepted by Israel and by the Lord? There are at least four reasons for Ruth's acceptance.

In the first place she devoted herself to Naomi in her sorrow, and was completely unselfish in her devotion. *"Whither thou goest, I will go ..."* (Ruth 1:16).

Secondly Ruth put her trust in Naomi's God, the one true God, and truly turned to Him. *"... thy God shall be my God ..."* (Ruth 1:16).

Further, Ruth obeyed the commandments of the Lord, as she promised to do, and showed herself to be both upright and virtuous in all that she said and did.

In the fourth instance she remained faithful and steadfast, and did not err or go astray in all her difficulties and trials; *"... where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people ..."* (Ruth 1:16).

Some Lessons For Us

We can be encouraged and strengthened in our Christian walk by the examples of Naomi, Boaz and Ruth.

Naomi bore great sorrow in the loss of her husband and her two sons, and must have returned to Bethlehem from Moab with a heavy heart. She showed great patience and endurance when she had so little hope left to her.

Boaz was a *"man of wealth"* who could have been oppressive, miserly and even unjust. But he possessed none of those failings, and was a compassionate, kind and upright man, a worthy husband for the faithful and devoted Ruth.

Ruth herself showed true love and devotion in the face of difficulty, sorrow and suffering. She too, like Naomi, was a widow, but still resolved to go with Naomi to a strange land and an unknown people. She remained ever steadfast and devoted in the face of a struggle for her very existence.

All the things that affect the Lord's people are noticed by Him. The book of Ruth is a reminder to us that events that centre on home and family may be just as significant, or more significant in the Lord's sight as those that occur in the public arena or on the field of battle.

The Lord God is no respecter of persons, as we read in Acts 10:34, and accepts as His children all those who truly turn to Him. Ruth's acceptance foreshadowed the situation that now obtains for all believers under the terms of the New Covenant, expressed in Paul's epistle to the Galatians, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:28; RSV).

Concluding Thoughts

Ruth was greatly honoured by the Lord, being mentioned by name in the genealogy recorded in Matthew 1:5. She is not mentioned in Luke's genealogy. Only Boaz is mentioned in Luke 3:32, but as the wife of Boaz, Ruth is in the direct ancestral line of David and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know from Hebrews 11:6 that the Lord God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. He rewarded Ruth with material and spiritual blessings, and with the eternal honour of being an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

As far as we are concerned, as believers in Jesus in this age of the gospel, material rewards may not pertain to this life or be evident in it. In this late period of the Gospel dispensation, many believers do enjoy material blessings to a greater or lesser extent, especially in a politically stable country such as Australia. But we should be ever mindful that so many Gospel Age believers have experienced great trials and suffering in their lives.

None of us is exempt from difficulties and trials, but we should always bear in mind that there are promised to us rewards which are spiritual and eternal. God's promise is of an incorruptible inheritance in the world to come.

As we press on toward the mark of the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14) let us thank God for the knowledge and testimony of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz, and the strengthening and encouragement that comes from thinking of them and their faith in God. They died in faith, and still await the resurrection. The promises to them have still to be fulfilled, and we, if we remain faithful, will have the

privilege and honour of co-operating with the Lord Jesus in the fulfilment of all of God's promises to that great crowd of witnesses, including Naomi, Ruth and Boaz, and to all of the human race.

We have the promise of "*some better thing*" (Hebrews 11:39) provided for our future, a resurrection to an inheritance in heaven as joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus; life more abundant than any we could have known, and great joy of which we now know just a little.

Until that time of deliverance and blessing which shall be to all nations and all families, let us always give thanks to God through Jesus Christ, and, like Naomi and Ruth, not lose heart no matter what circumstances may arise.



DAVID

by Colin Giles

The account of the life of David as a man of God and as recorded in the Bible is full of many events from which we can learn valuable lessons. We know more about his life than about most other people whose life stories are recorded in the Bible. Because he experienced such a variety of events he provides guidance for us when we find ourselves in times of stress. Although there was a great deal of material about the life of David, I still found it a challenge to understand his mind and to determine the lessons that will be a help and provide guidance for us. This principle of finding lessons in the lives of people who have gone before is established by a Psalm of David quoted in the New Testament :-

"For Christ also pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15: 3,4).

The Psalm quoted is 69. It is a Psalm written by David to describe his troubles when surrounded by enemies. The particular point of this quotation is that the promises and consolation found in the scriptures support Christians when they are undergoing trials. It enables them to endure the trials both patiently and cheerfully.

The particular aspects of David's life that will be considered are those experiences that may have moulded his life. The particular lesson that

can be learnt is that expressed in Romans 5:4, "*Knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope*".

A starting point in understanding David's life is to investigate the background of his family. Researching your ancestry is a popular pastime today, as it may throw some light on your present circumstances. Current research would suggest that it is one's heritage that loads the gun of one's personality, but it is the individual that pulls the trigger.

In David's case there was a variety of people that were his forebears, some of whom exhibited outstanding acts of faith. He was of the line of Judah, who was the fourth child of Jacob by his first wife Leah. At Judah's birth Leah exclaimed, "*This time I will praise the Lord*". When Jacob blessed his sons just before his death, the character of Judah is indicated by his blessing in the words, "*Judah, your brothers will praise you*". When the brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain the second time, it was Judah who took the lead in pleading for the life of Benjamin. The elder brothers had blotted their copy-books as far as leadership of the family was concerned. Reuben had committed adultery and Simeon and Levi had made themselves odious by killing the men of Shechem over the matter of the treatment of their sister Dinah. Judah's life was not without stain as shown by the fact that the line of his descendants was through his daughter-in-law whom he had failed to give in marriage to his third son Selah.

What is of special interest in the line of David, is the fact that at least two of his forebears came from the people of the land of Canaan who we find were commended for their faith although their family background had nothing to commend them. I refer to Rahab of Jericho who had sheltered the spies sent by Joshua. She had confessed, "*I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you*" (Joshua 1:9). From the biblical record we are informed that Rahab married Salmon, and their son was Boaz who married Ruth the Moabitess. The Moabites were descendants of Lot, Abrahams nephew, but it was by an incestuous relationship with his daughters. We may presume that his descendants had married into the people of the land.

The Israelites had a mixed relationship with the Moabites. The Moabites had hindered the entry of the Israelites into the promised land, but later we learn that David took his family there for a safe keeping from the wrath of Saul. Later David conquered them and made them his slaves. It was to Moab that Elimelech and Naomi went because of the famine in the land and it was from a Moabite family that Ruth came. Who can forget

those words of dedication that Ruth made to her mother-in-law, *“Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”* (Ruth 1:16,17).

So we find that God sometimes used foreigners for His purposes although they were outside the congregation of God’s people.

There were seven sons of Jesse who were older than David. Although all the sons had the benefit of the same parental guidance, it was David who had the quality which God sought. Perhaps the fact David was in the fields minding the sheep when Samuel arrived indicates that David was given the job the other sons did not want. The Psalms that David wrote telling of the things that a shepherd would know are written by a mind that would contemplate them. Psalms like Psalm 19 *“The heavens are telling the glory of God”*. Also the 23rd Psalm which takes the things that a shepherd would experience and finds in them a picture of the care that God has for His children.

I can also imagine that David’s shepherd life gave him opportunities for practising his skill of playing the lyre. When Saul was seeking someone to play a musical instrument it was said of David, *“Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him”*. David did not lack courage. His claim before Saul was, *“David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living god.”* (1Samuel 17:34-36).

David also had an engaging personality, as both Jonathan and Michal loved him despite the anger of their father Saul, and they protected him despite the risks entailed.

As we read about the many trials of David when hiding from Saul, we can only be amazed that he maintained such calmness. His words to both friend and foe indicates that he was learning to rely on God for protection. His thoughts at times of peril are expressed in some of the Psalms. For example Psalm 3. *“LORD, how are they increased that trouble me!*

Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah. But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about. Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people."

Even under provocation, David stood firm in his commitment to act rightly. When David had an opportunity to kill Saul he resisted his followers' advice, and on two occasions remained confident that God would direct his path.

David's band of followers was a mixed bag of men. There were his brothers, those in distress and the discontented. There were about 400 men in all and it must have been a constant job to provide sufficient food for them all. We know that he was raiding the Philistines and taking their goods and animals. He also operated a kind of security service for farmers, as we discovered when he asked Nabal for some payment for his services and Nabal very churlishly resisted acknowledging him. The quantity of food that Abigail, Nabal's wife, gave to David indicates something of his requirements.

David had trouble in controlling the temper of his troops when they all returned to Ziklag to find that the Amelekites had raided the town and carried away all the women and children. The statement of scripture is that David strengthened himself in the Lord.

David may have been a born leader, but he still had to learn how to put it into practice. His ability to lead and guide was established in difficult times.

David's reliance on God is shown by his action when he learnt the news of Saul's death. He mourned for him, showing that he understood that Saul had once been anointed by God. David did not immediately ask for the rulership of the nation, but waited on the Lord to give it to him. He was ruler over Judah for seven and a half years before he became King over the whole nation. He was king for only forty years, so he had to wait a considerable period of time to receive that honour.

I have noted some of the challenges that David faced and how his background may have helped him become the person to fulfil God's designs. At his death he called himself, *"the sweet psalmist of Israel"*. This is shown in the Psalms that he wrote. They lay open to all that read them the strong feelings that he had. In them there is joy, wonder of creation, distress, sorrow, perplexity and those emotion of the heart so that we can find in them something that echoes our own emotions. Who can forget Psalms like Psalm 19? *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."* (Psalm 19:1-4). They must have been written when he was a shepherd and could look at the night sky. Or the 23rd Psalm, which likens the care of God to that of a shepherd.

The Psalms are also notable for the number of times they are referred to in the New Testament and very often establish a truth. Think of the number of times that Psalm 110:1 is quoted. *"The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."*

There is a truth contained in the Psalms and they are expressed in words that come readily to mind as they tell of the grandeur of God's promises. There is also an underlying meaning that is now being revealed to us, that is expressed in Peter's statement, *"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."* (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Some of the Psalms were written out of David's deep distress but express emotions that apply at another time. Psalm 22, for example, which begins with the words, *" My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?"*

The moving of God's spirit transforms the words to give them a depth of meaning more than the human spirit can give. David's time as a shepherd must have given him time to develop his skill of playing the lyre. We know that he was able to calm Saul's trouble mind by his playing. The value of music to lift the spirit is recognised, as in Colossians 3:16,

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

The usefulness and purpose of scripture to guide the believer is also established by Romans 15:4, *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”*.

The Bible is different from other writings in that, although it is for the purpose of seeking wisdom from above, it does not exclude from the record failures of people to meet the high standard that is set. It reveals failures and also the consequences of those failures. As the saying is, ‘It reveals human actions warts and all’. Or in the words of 1 Corinthians 10:11, *“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come”*. Now the *“these things”* of this verse were all the sins that the Children of Israel committed during their forty years in the wilderness. There is a lesson for us in these verses.

When David took the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and then wished to build a more permanent structure to house it, God made him a promise that, although David was not to build that Temple, his son would. Moreover, God also promised that He would make David’s name great and would appoint a place for his people Israel and, moreover and importantly, the LORD declared that He would build David a house and establish a kingdom for one of David’s sons. In response to this promise David gave thanks to God in the words, *“Who am I O Lord God and what is my house, that thou has brought me thus far? And this was a small thing in thy eyes”*. As promised by God, David overcame all his enemies and his kingdom was established over many surrounding nations. It is then at that time that we find David committing adultery with Bathseba. Perhaps David, with all his success, had forgotten how easily temptation comes. It is the lesson of the verse in Corinthians, *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (1 Corinthians 10:12). There is a salutary lesson in that quotation for all of us to learn, including your writer.

These warnings given to the members of the Corinthian congregation may have a particular application to that congregation who were in danger of comprising their standards when meeting socially with those of the world. These words are given with a tender consideration for the Corinthians' welfare. The words of comfort associated with them are, *“but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are*

able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The lesson then is that we should not lose heart in our struggle to overcome the temptations that surround us. We may not realise the work that God is doing in us, but the things that we experience must play a part in making us fit to have a part in the Kingdom of Heaven.



GOD'S STANDARDS

Devotion by Bob Simpson

There are many, many standards. In fact, there are standards for almost everything. For instance there are standards for weights and measurements, and there are standards for dress. You can have standard petrol in your car. The 'Penny Cyclopaedia' states that in the year 1266 it was enacted by the king of England that the standard weight of a penny be 32 wheat seeds and of course there are countless things involving similar standards. There are also standards for living.

Let us now look at God's standards.

When God created us we were made in His image, He made us complete in every way, everything in its place. Although we see variation among us, all our body parts are in their right place. Our nose is in its right place; it is right where it should be. We have eyes, ears and a mouth. We have a body with arms and legs and so on.

How can we compare such things? Our digital cameras are but a poor imitation of our eyes, and our digestive system and metabolism excel anything that chemical engineers and biologists have produced. Also, our brain that the Lord gave us is vastly superior to that of the most advanced computer, for we can wonder and marvel at God's creation.

After six creative days, God declared His work to be very good (Genesis 1:31). Everything had been created in order, with nothing defective. The plants and animals filled their places, reproducing after their kind not needing to evolve into any new kind (Genesis 1:25).

Therefore God contains within Himself the knowledge and wisdom to do it all, and not just to do it, but to do it perfectly, in the multitudinous kinds of plants, fish, birds, and animals we see on the earth.

God created the heavens above, established laws for the orderly and precise movement of the heavenly bodies so that we can use them as standards in our count of time, for day and night, for seasons and years (Genesis 1:14; Psalm 8:3,4).

God posed some questions to Job that may help us to compare His knowledge, and abilities and standards to those of man.

"The Lord asked Job out of a storm, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? Tell me if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set? Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from its womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, this far you may come and no further, here is where your proud waves halt. Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water? Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, 'Here I am'."

"Job answered the Lord; I am unworthy. How can I reply to you. I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer, twice, but I will say no more." (From Job chapters 38, 39 and 40.)

God said of man, *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts"* (Isaiah 55:9). So maybe we should compare some of God's standards with some of our own.

Yahweh has standards and principles for us. They are for us guidelines on how we should walk (Psalms 25:4,5; 86:10,11; Isaiah 33:22).

The first standard He set was that of obedience. Adam and Eve failed to live up to that standard.

Later, He gave a set of standards to the Children of Israel, which we know as the Ten Commandments. The Israelites failed to live by those standards, too.

When Jesus was asked a question "which is the greatest commandment in the law" He replied *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets"* (Matthew 22:35-40).

So it is we should love one another, as it is written, *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8). It is also written, *"Be Holy, because I am Holy"* (1 Peter 1:16).

God's standards are set out for us in the Bible. They are pathways to follow because they lead to the narrow road to the Kingdom of God.

I have selected a few verses outlining some of God's standards that we need to follow, because *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2).

"For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions - is not from the Father but is from the world." (1 John 2:16).

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." (Matthew 6:24).

"Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behaviour." (1 Peter 1:13-15).

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:20).

"That the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17).

"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24).

Prayer

Our Father, we thank you for the abilities we have, to marvel and wonder at your creations, and that we have your word of truth as a standard to guide us as we travel along the pathway to an everlasting life in the Kingdom of God. We thank you in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

GOD OF CREATION

by M and J Buckmaster

Introduction

In the short time before His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed for His disciples to know that what He had taught them was God's word, and that His word was the truth (John 17:17). That truth includes the first verse of the Bible, that *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"*. The verses that follow give a very brief account of the creation process, but not in scientific terms, since the Bible is not a book of science in the contemporary meaning of the word.

Despite this, there has been much discussion about the duration of creation, concerned mainly with the meaning of the Hebrew word translated as *"day"*. Many articles, including one in issue No. 113 of this publication, limit the meaning to the normal terrestrial day of twenty-four hours, as promulgated by the so-called Creation Scientists. In this paper we offer information that allows for a different conclusion.

The Translation Argument

In Genesis 1:5,8,13,19,23 and 31 the Hebrew word *"yom"* has been translated *"day"*. It has been argued that because in some instances where *'yom'* is governed by a number and its meaning is of a twenty-four hour day, such as in Leviticus 23: 24, 27, 34 and 39 where the days of the month for certain activities are proclaimed, it follows that whenever *'yom'* is accompanied by a number its meaning must always be of a terrestrial day. However, there are several instances where this can be seen to be not the case.

One example of *'yom'* being used in association with a number but signifying a period of time longer than 24 hours is Zechariah 14:7-9. *"But it shall be **one day** which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light. And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one."* The *"one day"* in verse 7 is *'echad yom'*, which is the same as occurs in Genesis 1:5, translated as *"the first day"*. In Zechariah *"one day"* is referring to the kingdom age, a long period of time, not a 24-hour day.

Other examples are Isaiah 9:14, *"Therefore the LORD will cut off head and tail from Israel, palm and bulrush in one day"*, describing the fate of Israel when the Messiah is given the ruler-ship of the nation and the world of mankind. Again, the Hebrew words are *'echad yom'*. And Hosea 6:2,

"After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight", which is apparently a reference to the resurrection during the kingdom age.

Also, in Genesis 2:2 we read that *"And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made."* It is generally understood that God is still resting from creation, so the seventh *"day"* has been at least six thousand years up to the present time, and has yet to come to an end.

There are also many examples where the Hebrew word 'yom' means different periods of time, one example being Genesis 2:4 where *"... the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens"* embraces the six *"days"* of the previous chapter. Another example of 'yom' being an unspecified period of time is *"the day of the LORD"*, which occurs several times in the Old Testament and has different meanings with respect to chronology and duration. Other ways in which the word 'yom' has been translated include time, year, age, ago, always, season, ever and evermore, an abundance of possible meanings that require careful consideration of the context of each case.

So it becomes clear that 'yom' is used in a wide variety of situations related to the concept of time. 'Yom' is not just for days; it is for time in general. The conclusion of our class discussion some time ago was that in all cases the context of a word should be considered. That principle should therefore be applied in determining the meaning of *"day"* in Genesis 1.

It seems to be unreasonable to disregard that conclusion. To insist that the *"days"* of creation were literal twenty-four hour days is therefore inconsistent and illogical. From the above there can be no justification for maintaining that the *"days"* of creation were literal twenty-four hour days. They were periods of time, not necessarily all of the same length. Taking the stance of insisting that the *"days"* of creation were twenty-four hour days may dissuade enquirers who have a knowledge of science from pursuing the matter further, acting as a deterrent to a belief in God.

The Theological Argument

When we have been told that God is *"from everlasting to everlasting"* (Psalm 90) and that God's plans will not be delayed by human intervention (Isaiah 46:12; Habakkuk 2:3, Hebrews 2:3), it seems to be disrespectful to try to put a human timetable on God's work of creation. When God stated that His thoughts and ways are higher than our thoughts and ways (Isaiah 55:8,9), that should be a warning to all those who study the scriptures to avoid the presumption of ascribing our limitations to the Creator, no matter to what heights our thoughts and ways may rise.

Isaiah stated that God is a god of order (Isaiah 9:7), a worthy attribute of human affairs according to Paul (1 Corinthians 14:40), and which is proven by the manner in which the Bible sets out God's plan of the ages as pointed out by Peter (2 Peter 3:6,7). Since God has a plan for mankind beginning with Adam and Eve, it cannot be that He did not have a plan for creation. And since His plan for mankind encompasses at least six thousand years so far, with the thousand years of the kingdom age yet to come, it seems that it would be inconsistent of God to hurry through creation in one hundred and forty-four hours.

In Genesis it is stated five times that God saw that His work was good, which, bringing that divine assessment down to human terms, means that God enjoyed His work and what He created. It is stated that everything that was created was created for His pleasure (Revelation 4:1). From those two points it may be inferred that He took time to enjoy the work, just as we do. Being made like Him we pause to admire our handiwork, just as it seems He did. And we are told that He was not limited with respect to time (Psalm 90) just as there are no limits to His knowledge and power.

The Genesis Account

There are aspects of the Genesis account of creation that are difficult to explain scientifically, and difficult to correlate between the first two chapters of the book.

It does not seem to be possible to correlate the sequence of events described in Genesis 1:1-19 with what we observe in the universe. For example, we are aware that the earth and the other planets orbit the sun, and the moon orbits the earth. We recognise that the sun, moon and stars are part of the heavens, and thus we would expect them to be included in the *"heavens"* that we are told were created *"in the beginning"* with the earth. But Genesis 1:14-18 tells us that the sun, moon and stars were created on *"day"* four. Also, it is the light from the sun that provides our daylight, so what is the *"light"* described in Genesis 1:3,4 as dividing the day from the night?

There has been much speculation about the relevance of the words *"evening"* and *"morning"* in relation to the *"days"* of creation, but none of the ideas seems to be plausible.

The account of the order of creation in Genesis 2 is different from that in Genesis 1. In Genesis 1 we are told that God made the animals before He created man. *"And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth*

after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." (Genesis 1:24-27).

However, in Genesis 2 we read, "*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof."* (Genesis 2:18,19). This seems to suggest that animals and birds were formed after Adam was created to provide a companion for him, and they were then taken to him to be named. This does not agree with the generally accepted sequence of events as described in Genesis 1, and it illustrates the difficulty in understanding the account of creation presented in Genesis.

It may be that we are not intended to know the answers to these difficulties. All that we can be sure of and, as a corollary, all we need to know, is that God created the heavens and the earth, and everything that is on it.

The 'Impossible' Argument

We are told in Luke 1:37 that "*... nothing is impossible with God*" (NIV). However, this statement needs qualifying, because we are told in Hebrews 6:18 "*... it is impossible for God to lie*", which is the basis of the ninth commandment, "*Thou shalt not bear false witness*" (Exodus 20:16).

The biblical record shows that everything that God has done with respect to His plan for mankind down through the ages has been good. That observation may seem to be at variance with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but only from a human point of view, since Jesus pointed out that the people of those cities would have a better prospect of redemption than the Jews who orchestrated Jesus' execution.

Therefore logic requires that the statement in Luke should be amended to read, more accurately, '*...nothing good is impossible with God*', thus maintaining the harmony of the scriptures.

For the being who is all-knowing and all-powerful there can be no credence given to the idea that God can do anything wrong. He is perfect in all His ways (2 Samuel 22:31). He does not change His mind. The nature of His character does not vary, and there is no variance in His deliberations (James 1:17). His judgements are impeccable and His promises are infallible (2 Peter 1:4). Any perception that any of these aspects of God's nature are changeable would suggest that God is not perfect. This idea is not tenable despite man's imperfect understanding of our place before the Creator.

And from what we are told about His character it is illogical to think that God would condense the natural processes of growth, which He established for the continuance of life on earth and which we can observe to take many terrestrial years, into "days" three, five and six of twenty-four hours each during the "day", the period of time, of creation.

Having found no justification for the idea that the periods of time of creation were twenty-four hours each, there is further evidence about this topic to be considered, and it is to be found in the discoveries of science.

Science

Paul wrote to Timothy, "*Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called*" (1 Timothy 6:20). Some people have misapplied this verse to condemn science in general and scientific evidence in particular. However, the Greek word translated "science" in this verse is 'gnosis', which means 'knowledge'. Paul's warning to Timothy was concerned with the gnostic sect, which claimed to have received their heretical ideas by divine inspiration, just as the true apostles claimed divine inspiration for their preaching of the gospel message. The apostles' claim was verified through their miracles, empowered by the holy spirit. The gnostics had no such authorisation.

A more accurate translation of 1 Timothy 6:20 would be 'and oppositions of knowledge falsely so-called'. The so-called knowledge of the gnostics has nothing whatsoever to do with contemporary science. Paul was not telling Timothy and his congregation, or us, to be wary of science, but rather to be aware of false prophets, a warning which he had given many times in other epistles to other congregations (2 Corinthians 11:13, Galatians 2:4). The English word science is derived from the Latin word for knowledge, so science is not, of itself, something to be disregarded. Since the subject of science has been introduced, there are three nominal aspects of contemporary science.

The first can be summarised thus: hypothesis, experiment, analysis, deduction. This is empirical science, which is well illustrated by the discipline of medicine. It also served civilisation in the elucidation of the laws of physics and chemistry, both of which now, themselves, serve the applied sciences.

The second is observational science, exemplified by geology, where only observation and deduction are applicable since the experimental aspect is not available because of the constraints of time. Another example is astronomy where it is impossible for man to experiment with any of the heavenly bodies. He can only observe them. Observational science is essentially dissociated from empirical science.

The third type of science is applied science such as engineering, where the application of engineering knowledge, gained during the experimental phase, has been separated from the practice. An applied scientist need have no involvement with empirical science, but may have to accommodate some observational science.

Evidence of Geological Time

The age of biological material such as the remains of animals and plants, has been measured by the technique of radio-carbon dating, which is based on the fallacious assumption that cosmic radiation has been constant always and therefore the concentration of radio-active carbon in the atmosphere has been constant. Also involved in the technique are assumptions about the constant rate of radio-active decay and the inherent imprecision of statistical error, all of which could make the estimates of the ages of such materials incorrect, perhaps by several orders of magnitude, and thus they cannot be accepted at face value.

Any assumption is bad science. Science, like Bible study, requires the student to find proof: to "*prove all things*" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

However, with that principle in mind, there is acceptable evidence from radio-active dating techniques applied to elements other than carbon, which confirm the long-held concept deduced from inspection of landforms, from the beaches to the mountains, that the ages of the rocks, including fossils, cover long periods of time, although the purported lengths of those periods of time are only approximations. This conclusion is quite separate from the (approximate) dating of carbon in tissue from plants and animals.

For example the formation of river canyons has been observed on an annual basis as the slow erosion of the rocks by running water. That process would have taken a very long time to produce the Kahli Gandaki

Canyon in the Himalayas and the Grand Canyon in the United States, both of which are thousands of feet deep.

Another example of a geological time scale is the formation of the island of Hawaii by volcanic eruptions, a process that is taking place at the present time and which has been under observation for more than two hundred years. In that time the island has been enlarged by only a few metres so it would have taken a very long time for it to emerge from the sea and grow to its present size. The same geological observations apply to the islands of Surtsey and Heimaey which have emerged near Iceland in recent years.

A third example, and typifying the saying 'as old as the hills', is Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa. It is a shield volcano formed by each eruption adding a layer of lava to its height. The process would have taken many eruptions spread over a long period of time to increase its height to nearly twenty thousand feet. And there is a shield volcano called Olympus Mons on Mars that is a measured seventy-eight thousand feet high.

Since all the geological processes on earth, and at least one on another planet, have taken place over long periods of time, it is therefore reasonable to accept that the creative process throughout the universe took place over long periods of time, not six twenty-four hour days.

Another False Theory

It is claimed that the long periods of time indicated by the geological evidence, despite geology being a valid, although imprecise, branch of science, provide the time framework for biological evolution to have taken place. This viewpoint is accepted by many in defiance of the situation that no aspect of biological evolution has any proof.

Accepting the long periods of time of the earth's geological history to be properly established does not necessitate acceptance of the theory of evolution.

However, while the numerical values of the lengths of the geological ages are immaterial to the argument concerning the time periods of creation, the supposition that man first appeared on earth thousands of years before the time given in the biblical account is crucial to the resolution of the contradiction of creation by the theory of evolution. The theory of animal evolution over a protracted period of time is not acceptable for many reasons. Although animals existed on earth for a long time before mankind, we are told that God made them as individual species to breed after their own kind. They did not evolve into different species as proclaimed in the theory of evolution.

The "*days*" of creation are defined by geological time up until the creation of Adam and Eve, but the theme of the Bible is an account of God's relationship with mankind, and the time from the final act of creation to the present day is defined by the biblical genealogies, which indicate that that period is approximately six thousand years.

The Bible does not give any coherent detail of the creation of the physical universe. The questions asked by earth scientists are not answered by the Bible, and conversely the questions asked by Bible students are not answered by contemporary science.

God has been generous enough to allow us, by scientific methodology, to find out much about the nature of the physical earth, and of some of the underlying functions of the stars and the planets, although cosmology is in a state of flux probably because of lack of information, since it is an observation-only science.

Similarly, we have gained much medical knowledge that has enabled many infectious diseases to be curtailed, broken limbs to be repaired, and personal behaviour to be modified by different therapies, but many of the benefits of scientific methodology are being socially negated by disregard and/or corruption of its discoveries. While we need science to maintain our contemporary life-style, we do not need science to prove either the existence of God or the reality of divine creation.

Similarly the application of scientific principles has enabled engineers to build edifices that would dwarf the tower of Babel, and that could include the pyramids of the Egyptians and the Mayans.

The manner in which contemporary science has enabled mankind to modify the planet on which we live validates the information gained about the geological nature of the earth. Thus there is an obligation to accept the conclusion that the earth is much older than the human race, despite the inaccuracies embodied in the data leading to that conclusion.

Conclusion

The issue of this discussion is the length of the "*days*" of creation, and the Bible gives the time-line for the human race from that time when Adam and Eve were placed in the garden in Eden, through its genealogical accounts, irrespective of the time before the creation of Adam and Eve. Although there is no definitive statement about that prior time in the account in Genesis, there is no sustainable conflict between the geological record and the biblical record, because the human time-line begins with the final act of the creation work, the creation of the first two human beings at the end of the sixth "*day*" of creation.

Thus there are two aspects of history. Firstly, the period of time before Adam, which is indicated by, and includes, the six "days" of creation. Each "day" from the Hebrew word 'yom', in the context of creation, has the meaning of an unspecified period of time. And secondly, that period of time from Adam, which is defined by the biblical genealogies in terrestrial years. These two aspects are separate and complementary. They are sequential. They are not incompatible.

The foregoing observations support the view that by accepting the verified evidence that God created the heavens and the earth over long periods of time, He appears more noble ... no, most noble, most majestic and most capable of carrying out the reconstitution of all things (Acts 3: 21) and of making all things new (Revelation 21:5), for He is Yahweh; and there is no-one else (Isaiah 46:9) who is able to do it.

We recognise that this understanding of long "days" of creation is not shared by all Bible students. However, it was the understanding of Ernest Henninges who wrote ' ... it is not at all necessary to suppose that the "days" of creation were 24 hours each. What their exact length was cannot be told us by scientists; neither can we tell them; but no disrespect is shown to the Scriptures by understanding that those "days" were long epochs' (New Covenant Advocate, Volume 5, No. 8, November 1913, page 118).

Henninges also wrote in 'Bible Talks for Heart and Mind, page 11, 'Every avenue of learning, every fact established by scientific research, every examination of the wonders of the heavens above and the earth beneath, every inquiry into the operations of moral law and spiritual force, may lead to the knowledge of God, for He is revealed by the things that He has made (Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-26; Romans 1:20).

Whatever our understanding about the length of the "days" of creation, something we can be sure of is that:

'All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.'

NEWS AND NOTES

New Book

We are pleased to announce the publication of a new book entitled “Notes on Paul’s Letters to the Corinthians” by Russell Collins. This book is available to be downloaded from our website (www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au).

Printed copies can be obtained free of charge by contacting us at info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au.

Autumn Conference

Our annual autumn conference for 2019 will be held from Saturday 6th until Monday 8th April at the Comfort Inn Main Lead in Ballarat, about 2 hours’ drive from Melbourne. Our conference theme is ‘Christian Privileges and Responsibilities’, and the conference text is “*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love*” (Galatians 5:13; NIV).

We are looking forward to a time of blessing, with talks, Bible studies, devotional gatherings and fellowship. For further information contact info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au.

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS

The New Covenant News is compiled by an editor responsible to the New Covenant Fellowship. 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).

Email: info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au

Website: www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au