

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



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News and Notes

AND HAS MADE US TO BE A KINGDOM

by Colin Giles

What led me to this subject was that I was thinking about some verses that are known to us from the KJV, that are indeed precious to us, but that may not always give us the correct meaning. Translation of documents into another language is a difficult task and we are grateful to those translators that labour at giving us the meaning nearest to the original as possible.

There is the added difficulty of determining what was in the original text, as we do not have the original documents and must rely on copies that may or may not be true copies. This occurred because the storage methods in past times was not as good as can be achieved these days, so preserving documents once required making fresh copies.

Compounding the difficulties of translation is the challenge of explaining ideas and idiomatic statements that may not be familiar in another language. As an example, I remember reading the writings of Daisy Bates who lived among the aborigines in South Australia and who showed them a great deal of kindness. They in return showed their respect for her by calling her grandmother. However, when she tried to translate the Lord's Prayer into their language she was stumped. The words "*Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name*", were relatively easy, but putting, "*Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven*", into the native language for a people who had not been a nation nor had a concept of heavenly beings, proved to be impossible. "*Give us our daily bread*", was also easy to translate, as it is what all people have need of every day, but asking for forgiveness of sins was not a concept that they understood as necessary.

Three of the common errors that we find in the Bible are:

1. Comments in the margins that have crept into the text.
2. Words that are translated inconsistently.
3. Difficulties in establishing the original text.

This is not a full list of the common errors that have occurred in the Bible, but examples of these three can be shown by reference to some verses :-

Errors of Type 1

This can be demonstrated by reference to 1John 5:7-8. In the KJV it reads, "*For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the*

Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

If we compare these words with a modern version such as the ISV, which is the result of later research, we have, *"And the spirit is the witness because the spirit is the truth. For there are three witnesses — the Spirit, the water, and the blood — and these three are one."*

We note that the meaning in the KJV has been changed by the addition of extra words which were only admitted into the received text by Erasmus on the authority of a late copy of a Greek text.

Error of Type 2

This can be illustrated by the text in John 3:15-16 as given by the KJV. *"That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

The word 'eternal' used in verse 15 should also have been used in verse 16 where the word 'everlasting' occurs, not only because the original Greek word is the same but also we would expect it, as the same thought is repeated.

Errors of Type 3

These are a little harder to show, as we have to rely on the work of those who labour to bring us a faithful copy of the original document. It requires the comparison of the various copies that are available and a knowledge of when they were copied. A verse that I believe has suffered this error and is the subject of this presentation, is Revelation 1:6.

The KJV reads, *"And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* But the later translations have something different. For example the NIV has, *"And has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen."*

I am not suggesting that we will not be kings and reign with Christ but as I understand it, this is not the thought of this verse.

There are four reasons that I would give to support the reading as in the NIV.

1. The reason just given of a changed reading found in the latest recension of the Greek text.
2. This changed reading is repeated in Revelation 5:10, "*You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth*" (NASB), combined with some added details, and also in a shortened form in Revelation 20:6 "*Blessed and holy is the one that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him for a thousand years.*" (NASB).
3. The source of the promise is found in Exodus 19:4-8 and I intend to expound on these verses more fully in a moment.
4. The same thought is found in 1 Peter 2:9 but is given in words that add to our understanding. I will return to that verse later.

I will now consider the promise as given in Exodus.

*"You saw what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. And now if you carefully obey me and keep my covenant, you are to be my special possession out of all the peoples. For the whole earth belongs to me, **but you are to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to me.** These are the words you are to declare to the Israelites. When Moses came, he summoned the elders of the people and told them everything that the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together: 'All that the LORD has said, we will do!' Then Moses reported all the words of the people back to the LORD."* (Exodus 19:4-8).

There are two questions that come to mind from these verses :

1. What covenant were the people to keep, since at this time the people had only arrived at the mountain and the Law Covenant had not been given?
2. When did the people as a whole become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to God, since later they were presented with an organised body of priests to present sacrifices on their behalf?

I will now consider the first question.

What covenant were the people to keep?

As I mentioned, it could not have been the Law Covenant, as that had not then been given or sealed by the sprinkling of blood. Also it would not seem that it was given in a prospective sense of any requirements that God may impose on the people as otherwise the people could not have responded with the promise of, "*All that the LORD has said, we will do!*"

When you commit yourself to act in some way, you at least need to understand what it is that is required of you. The answer, I believe, must be found in the hopes and expectations of the people at that time. What it was that had held the people together as a people for 400 years (Genesis 15:13) is not told us in scripture, and we can only piece together the clues that we are given elsewhere. For those clues we need to go to Hebrews chapter 11, the faith chapter.

*"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the **recompense of the reward.**" (Hebrews 11:24-26).*

The important phrase in these verses is "*recompense of the reward*", as it indicates that the people cherished the hope given unto the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This promise of receiving a blessing was repeated a number of times to the patriarchs, and different aspects of that promise were given at different times. There was:

1. the promise of the land,
2. the promise to be a great nation,
3. the promise to have numerous descendants,
4. and the promise that a descendant of his would bless all nations.

We should also be aware that the designation that the promises given to Abraham were a covenant was not made until Abraham had returned from rescuing Lot and his family from the four kings that had made war on Sodom. *"In the same day the LORD made a **covenant** with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates"* (Genesis 15:18).

I would therefore understand that it was the promise of the land that was the essential element of the covenant that God had made with Abraham, and that was what Moses and the people had in mind when they promised to do all that the LORD had commanded. The same key promise was implied when God chose to deliver his people from their bondage in Egypt, *"And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his **covenant** with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob"* (Exodus 2:24).

There are also some other verses in Hebrews chapter 11 that give us an insight into the hopes of the patriarchs.

*"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a **better country, that is, an heavenly**: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."* (Hebrews 11:13-16).

First of all, the phrase in verse 13 *"These all died in faith"*, would be better translated as 'In accordance with faith all these died', which would indicate that faith had been their support and guide all their lives and their death did not change their hope although they died not having received the fulfilment of the promise. It is important to note that in these verses the promise of the land played a key part in the patriarchs' hopes although they had no settled abode but dwelt in movable structures. Their vision of the future is inspiring. If they wanted a place that they could call home there was ample opportunity for them to return to Ur where they could put up a sign, 'Abraham the patriarch lives here', or 'Jacob slept here'. No!, their vision for the promised land also included a changed ruling order with God as head.

So what the people understood of the promises to Abraham is not clearly stated, nor is it clear what they understood of the future blessing when they promised God to do all that he asked of them, but the knowledge that Moses had of future blessings, presumably received from his mother, indicates that the knowledge of the promise given to Abraham was known.

So then what was in the mind of the people when they promised, *"All that the LORD has spoken we will do"*, although not defined, must have included some knowledge of this promise. Abram had obeyed the command to leave the land that he had been born in and move to an unknown country. The people of Israel had seen the power of God in destroying the army of Pharaoh and now they in their turn were on the way to enter the land that God had planned for them as an inheritance.

The statements of Hebrews chapter 11 just read indicate that the promise of the land also implied that a righteous kingdom would be established. Therefore the promise of Exodus 19:6, *"And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation"*, must have been in harmony with that promise. Not only did the promise include the land, but also implied that they should have been looking forward to the promise of a better country. This forward-looking promise now included a further objective of

making them priests in God's service. How that was to be done we are not specifically told, but I would understand, that it was to be by demonstrating to the people in surrounding countries what a righteous kingdom was like, as well as by praising God. Unfortunately the nation did not live up to this high ideal.

This intention of God to have a kingdom of priests is repeated under a new dispensation, and we find this promise mentioned three times in the Revelation. The function of the priests in this new order is not exactly defined, but we may get some clues by the action of the true high priest as presented to us in Hebrews.

"But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." (Hebrews 7:24-26).

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." (Hebrews 8:1-2).

There is only one High Priest, whose duties we do not undertake, but he demonstrates the duties and qualities of a priest. As I understand it, the priests will educate the nations in the ways of God and will minister to the needs of the people.

My final reference is 1 Peter 2:9-10, which gives some further information on the purpose of this priestly class, though it is not of a detailed nature. *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in times past were not a people but are now a people."*

This text is a reflection of Exodus 19:6. Some of the words have been changed, or their order altered, but they give a similar thought to that in Exodus. Instead of *"a kingdom of priests"* there is *"a royal priesthood"*. The sense of the adjective *"royal"* is that of being attached to a royal household rather than being of a ruling class. The use of the term *"priesthood"* restores the sense of a kingdom or an organised body of people in the service of another. There is *"an holy nation"* in both places, indicating that we are sanctified or set apart for a special purpose. There is the phrase, *"a peculiar people"* and also *"a chosen generation"* in

Peter, reflecting the sense of part of Exodus 19:5, "*ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine*".

Before considering the word "*peculiar*" which has an interesting meaning, the thought of the verse should be considered. It indicates that God had made a selection of some people, the nation of Israel, and brought them into a special relationship. All nations belong to Him and He could have dealt with them in the similar manner, but He chose not to.

Now to consider the meaning of the words "*peculiar treasure*" of Exodus and "*peculiar people*" of 1 Peter 2:9. The word 'peculiar' occurs a number of times in the New Testament. It means 'a costly possession acquired with effort, and carefully guarded'. It reminds us of the verse in 1 Corinthians 6:20, "*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body*". Our salvation was achieved at some cost to God.

The final part of the reference in 1 Peter is "*that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*". This also gives some understanding of the function of being a priest.

This enlightenment is in contrast to the blinding mentioned in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "*In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*"

The knowledge of the scriptures may bring unto us the realisation of our unworthiness to stand in the presence of God because of our sinfulness, but we rejoice to know the means and method by which we have been cleansed. The truth indeed brings liberty. The words "*that has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*" are not found in the Exodus 19:6 reference, but are full of meaning for the Christian. We rejoice to know that there will be an end to the world of suffering. I am sure that you can all testify with me that no matter what our weaknesses or failure to meet these high ideals, we are lifted up and rejoice when we consider the light that has shone into our lives. When I contemplate the promises that God has given, I cannot help but quote, with apologies to A. B. Patterson, the greatest of our Australian poets.

'For we see the vision splendid, of a sunlit life intended,
For the Christian knows a life, that the world can never know.'

May you all continue to rejoice in the light brought unto you.



THE BOOK OF LIFE

by Paul W. Brownlow

(Quotations are from the Revised Version unless otherwise indicated.)

Revelation 3:5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. (KJV)

These words of encouragement and promise are part of the letter to the church in Sardis, one of the seven churches in Asia Minor addressed in Revelation 2 and 3.

Given that the Book of Revelation was written for the enlightenment and guidance of Christ's servants (Revelation 1:1-3), and comparing the above verse with the corresponding parts of the three preceding letters . . .

Revelation 2:7 To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.
(Ephesus)

Revelation 2:11 He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death
(Smyrna)

Revelation 2:17 To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna
(Pergamos)

. . . it can be seen that "the book of life" is a register of those among Christ's servants whom He will raise to everlasting life.

Our hope of being among that blessed company depends entirely on our faith in the Son of God; there is no other way set before us (John 14:6). And yet, according to the Bible, the book of life existed long before the advent of Christ. Since earliest times, individuals of exceptional faith had found favour with God, not having known Jesus Christ, and God remembered them.

The golden calf

The book is first mentioned in connection with an incident that occurred at Mount Sinai, a short time after the Law Covenant had been formalised between God and the children of Israel (Exodus 24:7,8). During Moses' protracted absence on the mountain, the people cast aside the commandments they had so recently sworn to keep.

Exodus 32:7 And the LORD spake unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:

8 they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed unto it, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people:

10 now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

Moses begged the LORD to withhold his anger, and went down to the camp, carrying the two stone tablets on which were inscribed the ten commandments. Infuriated by the scene he beheld in the Israelite camp, Moses threw the tablets to the ground, breaking them in pieces. Then, after rebuking Aaron, destroying the golden calf, and forcefully crushing the rebellion with the help of the Levites, Moses returned to the mountain to plead with the LORD on Israel's behalf.

Exodus 32:31 And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold.

32 Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

33 And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.

Verse 32 implies that Moses was already aware of the book's existence, and knew that his own name was written therein.

The reference to 'blotting out' in this passage and in Revelation 3:5 makes it clear that, prior to death, one's place in the book of life is conditional (Matthew 10:22; Revelation 2:10). During that time, should one sin against the LORD, he would be 'blotted out', that is, his name would be removed from the book. Naturally, this measure could only be applied to those whose names were already in the book; and so the question arises, On what basis had they been chosen? Other parts of Old Testament prophecy allow us to build up a more complete picture.

"written with the righteous"

In Psalm 69, David invoked retribution upon the enemies of the LORD . . .

Psalm 69:27 Add iniquity unto their iniquity:
And let them not come into thy righteousness.
28 Let them be blotted out of the book of life
And not be written with the righteous.

Those in the book of life are termed, "the righteous"; however, given the sinful propensities of man, by what criterion would the LORD have judged them righteous?

Ecclesiastes 7:20 For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (KJV)

Bear in mind also that Psalms and Ecclesiastes belong to that era in which the Law of Moses defined God's standard of righteousness, and as the apostle Paul later wrote,

Romans 3:20 ... by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified
[RV mg: Or, *accounted righteous*]
in his sight: for through the law *cometh*
the knowledge of sin. (KJV).

So we are left, for the moment, with that question. With respect to the book of life, what does 'righteous' actually mean?

There is a text in Isaiah (4:3) and another in Ezekiel (13:9) which allude to the book of life without mentioning it directly, but probably the most important of these Old Testament scriptures is in Daniel 12. This was part of a revelation given to the prophet towards the end of the Babylonian captivity, with the qualification that it pertained to the "the time of the end".

Daniel 12:1 And at that time shall Michael stand up,
the great prince that standeth for the children
of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble,
such as never was since there was a nation
even to that same time: and at that time shall
thy people be delivered,
every one that shall be found written in the book.

"Thy people", that is, Daniel's people, Israel (9:24), but with the proviso, "every one that shall be found written in the book". Knowing from Psalm 69 that it is "the righteous" who are written in the book, we can understand that from God's point of view, Daniel's people were 'the righteous' of Israel, and the following verse explains the precise nature of their deliverance:

Daniel 12:2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth
 shall awake, some to everlasting life,
 and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Plainly, their deliverance would not be from human captors but from death, and we see that it is only those "written in the book", that is, "the righteous", who will be raised to everlasting life.

John 5: 28 and 29

Moving now to the New Testament, we find that Jesus' prophecy of the resurrection in John 5: 28 and 29 is remarkably similar in form to the passage we have just read in Daniel.

John 5:28 Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh,
 in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice
 [that is, Christ's voice],
 29 and shall come forth;
 they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life;
 and they that have done ill,
 unto the resurrection of judgement.

"All that are in the tombs"

"All that are in the tombs" includes every human being who has lived and died, from Adam through to the time when Christ finally calls forth the dead. And the division of the resurrection into two categories mirrors the classification of the risen dead in Daniel 12, verse 2:

". . . they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life . . ."

Without doubt, "they that have done good" describes all that have found favour with God, and whose names have been entered in the book of life. The book of life therefore contains the names of "the righteous" from all ages.

The righteous of the Gospel age

The apostle Paul referred to the book of life in his instructions to the church at Philippi:

Philippians 4:3 Yea, I beseech thee also, true yoke-fellow, help these women, for they laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

So there is no doubt that the righteous ones of the Gospel age are also included in the "book of life"; all we lack at this point is confirmation concerning those who lived before Moses, that is, prior to the Law.

Hebrews 11

That question has been comprehensively answered by the apostle Paul in Hebrews. Abel was the second of Adam's sons. His murder at the hands of his brother, Cain, is the subject of the earliest account of man's history outside the garden of Eden (Genesis 4).

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts: And through it he being dead yet speaketh.

Earlier I left the question suspended — What does 'righteous' mean when applied to those who are written in the book of life?

Hebrews 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

This is the meaning of "righteous" in Psalm 69:28 — "the righteousness which is according to faith."

Righteousness

The Judaizers in the early Christian church maintained that righteousness could only be gained through strict observance of the Mosaic Law. In refuting their teaching, Paul used the example of Abraham, who lived four hundred years before the Law Covenant:

- Romans 4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, hath found?
- 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not toward God.
 - 3 For what saith the scripture?
And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.
 - 4 Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt.
 - 5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness.

[Instead of “reckoned”, the King James Version uses the word “imputed”.]

“The ungodly” in verse 5 are, of course, mankind in general. Abraham was one of the “ungodly”. He was an unrighteous man; but he believed God’s promise, and God accepted his faith in lieu of righteousness, as the basis of reconciliation between them.

And I think the best definition we can find of “the righteousness which is according to faith”, is right here in verses 5 to 7:

- Romans 4:5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness.
- 6 Even as David pronounceth blessing upon the man, unto whom God reckoneth righteousness apart from works,
 - 7 saying,
Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven,
And whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin.

For emphasis and elaboration the Old Testament writers often repeated the same thought with different wording. Here Paul used a form of this literary device, aligning his own words with those of David. “The man, unto whom God reckoneth righteousness apart from works” and “the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin” are two ways of describing the same blessing; so we see that God reckons righteousness to the faithful by *not* reckoning their sins to them. This principle is reflected in Romans 8: 33 and 34:

Romans 8:33 Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?
It is God that justifieth;
34 who is he that condemneth?

Although the faithful continue to commit sin through weakness, sin is no longer laid to their charge. That is the meaning of "the righteousness which is according to faith", and is the blessing which God conferred upon Abraham, and Abel, and Noah, and Moses, and other faithful of pre-Christian times. That is why their names, and ours, are written in the book of life.

Let us just return for a moment to Revelation 3:5 -

Revelation 3:5 He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life . . .

While we live, our place in the book of life is conditional upon overcoming those influences, from within and without, that would draw us away from Christ. The apostle Paul declared, in 1 Corinthians 9,

1 Corinthians 9:27 but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.

But for the faithful who are gone from the earth, no matter in which era they lived, antediluvian, patriarchal, Jewish or Gospel age, their place in the book of life is sure, and their resurrection to everlasting life will follow as a matter of course.

The meaning of salvation

So, was the salvation of those faithful individuals who lived before the time of Christ fundamentally different from the salvation of those in the Gospel age who have come to God through Jesus Christ?

This should not be judged according to rewards. While there is relatively little in prophecy to enlighten us concerning the future inheritance of the ancients, there is enough to suggest that it will be different from that of the Church (Psalm 45:16; Revelation 3:21; 5:9,10; 20:4), but that is a separate matter from salvation itself, which is the attainment of everlasting life.

Nor should we take into account the relatively limited revelation of God's plan that His servants were granted in those earlier times (1 Corinthians 2:7; 1 Peter 1:10-12). It seems to me that what they knew of God, and how their collective role in the future may differ from that of the Church are simply artefacts of the time in which they lived, and not a reflection of the calibre of those individuals or the regard in which they were held by the Almighty.

There is clearly something more elemental to salvation than revelations and rewards, something that has enabled God to reconcile chosen individuals to Himself in all ages; and as we have seen, that something is justification by faith. Justification is an act of favour on God's part, and we certainly have no difficulty accepting the idea that God would show favour to those He loved.

The New Covenant

But the substance of justification, or reckoned righteousness, is God's forgiveness of sins; and with regard to the faithful of pre-Christian times, particularly those under the Law Covenant, that may seem difficult to harmonise with the Apostle's statement in Hebrews:

Hebrews 10:4 For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.

Here, "take away sins" does not mean 'atone for sins'. The word 'atonement' [Hebrew #3722] appears many times in connection with the sin offerings of the Law Covenant. It implies forgiveness and reconciliation, so we may be assured that God did indeed forgive the sins for which those sacrifices were offered (Leviticus 16:29,30).

In the above verse, Paul was contrasting the limitation of that sacrificial system with the blessing of justification through faith in Christ, whereby the necessity for repeated sin offerings has been removed. That is what he meant by the expression, "take away sins".

The reckoning of righteousness to God's servants in times past was in no way dependent upon Christ's sacrifice, which is exclusively connected with the New Covenant, and therefore of benefit only to those who enter into a relationship with God under its terms (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:6-13).

- Hebrews 10:16 This is the covenant that I will make with them
 after those days, saith the Lord;
 I will put my laws on their heart,
 And upon their mind also will I write them;
then saith he,
- 17 And their sins and their iniquities will I remember
 no more.
- 18 Now where remission of these is, there is no more
 offering for sin.

Christ's once-for-all sacrifice has made justification by faith the saving principle of the New Covenant. It allows those who come to God through faith in Jesus Christ to be freed from the recurring condemnation of sin and to have their names entered in the book of life at the very beginning of their relationship with God, before their faith has been established and tested, unlike Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others, who "obtained a good report through faith" (Hebrews 11:39). All that is required initially is that we believe on Jesus Christ, repent of our sins, and undergo baptism (Acts 2:38). Then, to fulfil our part in the covenant and maintain our names in the book of life, we must endeavour to keep Christ's commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 1:3-6).

Matthew 24:12 But he that endureth to the end,
 the same shall be saved.

The purpose of such a covenant? Ultimately, to cultivate the people of God in the spiritual likeness of their Creator, by allowing the believer in Jesus Christ to begin life anew free from guilt and fear. This is the 'cleansing of the conscience' of which Paul wrote (Hebrews 9:14; 10:2, 22), something that could never be accomplished under the Mosaic Law, and which is the basis of a spiritual transformation * (Ephesians 4:23).

Significance of the book of life

The book spans virtually the whole period of man's existence on the earth. All whose names are written therein have been reconciled to God through faith — in this respect all stand on an equal footing. And for every living believer in Jesus Christ, it is perhaps a more tangible representation of one's standing with God than simply, 'justified by faith'. It is a comforting thought that the most humble of God's people are written with the greatest in the book of life.

[* We plan to publish a more detailed examination of this subject, titled "The New Creature"; by P.W. Brownlow; in NCN No. 149.]



THE MAN WHO DEFIED GOD

by Linton Roe

There are many stories in the Old Testament that have taken the imagination of people through the ages, including Noah and the Ark, David and Goliath and Daniel in the Lion's Den, but possibly the most told of all is that of Jonah. Even our Lord Jesus acknowledged him in one of His parables.

This is a true story of a man who defied God's instructions to take a message of repentance to a wayward people, but it is more than a story of one miraculous event; it is a series of miraculous events.

First let us look at the setting of this story.

Jonah was born in about the 8th century BC and was the son of Amittai, who lived in Gath-hepher, near Nazareth. He was a prophet of God and was called to undertake the special work of taking a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh. I believe that the city of Nineveh that is referred to here was situated on the Tigris River near the modern city of Mosul. This is interesting because it was an Assyrian city, and outside the area of Israel that the Jews occupied at that time. It would therefore have been very puzzling for Jonah as to why God would send him to a heathen city. However, this was God's decision, and we also see in the book of Nahum that God finally lost all patience with Nineveh and foretold its total destruction.

Nineveh was a very large city. Jonah noted that it would take three days to walk across; this has been confirmed by archaeologists, who state that it was about seven kilometres across. So we can see that God may have taken action to protect His people, even to the extent that He may have used measures that we may consider to be outside the ambit of His normal dealings with His people.

Let us look at the reaction of Jonah when God instructed him to go to Nineveh.

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me'." (Jonah 1:1,2; NRSV).

What was Jonah's reaction? *"But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD."* (Jonah 1:3).

Yes, he fled, boarding a ship that was sailing from Joppa to Tarshish. But God was not to be denied, and set in train a series of events to convince Jonah that he must do what God directed him to do. He caused a severe storm to arise and imperil the lives of all on board the ship. The sailors were terrified and looked for a culprit.

"But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them." (Jonah 1:4,5).

What was Jonah doing while the storm was raging?

"Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. The captain came and said to him, 'What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish'." (Jonah 1:6,7).

Also the sailors were a superstitious lot, so let us see what they decided to do to identify the culprit.

"The sailors said to one another, 'Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, 'Tell us why this calamity has come upon us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?' 'I am a Hebrew' he replied. 'I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.' Then the men were even more afraid, and said to him, 'What is this that you have done!' For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them so". (Jonah 1:8-10).

On learning why God was displeased with Jonah they sought an answer of how they could placate God.

“Then they said to him, ‘What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?’ For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. He said to them, ‘Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me this great storm has come upon you.’ Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them. Then they cried out to the LORD, ‘Please, O LORD, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you’. So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.” (Jonah 1:11-16).

But God had already made a plan to convince Jonah to carry out the will of God.

“But the LORD provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” (Jonah 1:17).

Jonah seems to have got the message, and he sought God’s forgiveness.

“Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying, ‘I called to the LORD out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me’. Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; how shall I look again upon your holy temple? The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O LORD my God. As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the LORD!’ Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.” (Jonah 2:1-10).

So Jonah was saved, but what was his reaction then?

“The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, ‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.’ So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk.” (Jonah 3:1-3).

Yes, Jonah had learned his lesson and proceeded to carry out the work that God had given him and so he went to Nineveh.

“And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4)

What was the result of the message from God?

“And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.’ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.” (Jonah 3:5-10).

Yes, a heathen people repented of their evil ways.

Was Jonah satisfied with this wonderful outcome, that a heathen people heeded the warning from God? NO.

“But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is

better for me to die than to live.” And the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.” (Jonah 4:1-5).

At this outrageous reaction from Jonah, did God take an easy way out and allow Jonah to die?

“The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4:6-8)

Even when God showed all this concern for the welfare of Jonah, Jonah was still not satisfied.

“ But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” Then the LORD said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?” (Jonah 4:9-11).

We are not told of Jonah’s final reaction to the great patience and forbearance that God showed to Jonah but it is reasonable to think that Jonah finally understood the reason for God’s actions relating to the Ninevites.

So, God showed His great Love for all people, for both a heathen nation and His wilful servant.

I mentioned at the beginning that this was a story with many miraculous events. They were as follows:

The storm
The lot that fell on Jonah
The large fish to swallow Jonah
Jonah returned to dry land
The bush to protect Jonah

Now I would like to go back to the earlier comment that I made that may have also been in Jonah's mind. Why should God be concerned about the actions of a heathen nation when we know that He had a special people in the Nation of Israel?

"Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos 1:1,2).

Yes God had special dealings with the Jews but He also took action to keep other nations in line so that His plan of a rightful heir from the line of Abraham could come to fruition.

In considering this question I was drawn to another prophecy concerning the city of Nineveh. This was made by Nahum.

"An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh. A jealous and avenging God is the LORD, the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger but great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty." (Nahum 1:1-3).

Here we see that God did finally lose patience with that great city of the Assyrian empire and Nahum prophesied of its destruction which came about in about 612 BC. The Assyrian kingdom gave way to the Babylonian and it was this kingdom that brought about the captivity of the Jews and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. This was also part of God's plan to maintain the Jewish people as a nation until it was time for the Messiah to come.

But the story of Jonah also demonstrates God's great love for all people, and that He has a plan for the redemption of the people of all nations.



NEWS AND NOTES

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.

New Arrival

We are delighted to announce the safe arrival of a baby girl, Eunice Livia, born to members of our congregation, Diana and Robinson, on 12th January, 2019, weighing 3.4 kg. Mother and daughter are both doing well, and we pray for God's continued blessings for the family.

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).



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