

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



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The New Creature

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Psalm 110

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**Notes from a Group Study
of the Epistle to the Hebrews**

News and Notes

THE NEW CREATURE

by Paul W. Brownlow

(2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24)

All quotations are from the Revised Version unless otherwise indicated.

Wherefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature.

These are Paul's words, from 2 Corinthians 5:17. As we know, Christ designated Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Galatians 1:16; 2:7; 1 Timothy 2:7), and Paul's writings reflect his dedication to that commission. Many of the early churches outside Judaea were mixed congregations of Jews and Gentiles (Acts 14:1; 18:6), and Paul was faced with the responsibility of resolving the problems that arose out of the coming together of these formerly separate groups, the Law of Moses having previously prevented the social interaction of Jews with people of other nations (Acts 10:28).

In four of his letters Paul referred to the believer in Jesus as a "new creature" or "new man", and large parts of those letters were devoted to counselling the believers concerning their attitude toward those of their fellow Christians with whom, apart from this newfound faith, they had very little in common. Paul saw that without unity the Church would inevitably disintegrate, but he knew that unity was impossible while its members still regarded themselves and others under the old labels, so he put it to them that because they had believed on Jesus Christ a change had taken place in them; that they were no longer the people that they had been, but had become something new and different.

2 Corinthians 5:17

If we begin from verse 14, I think it will help us to follow Paul's reasoning:

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died;

This might seem a rather strange thing to say: "one died for all, therefore all died"; but it is just another way of saying, if Christ died for all, then His death symbolises for *all who believe* a death to their old sinful way of life. The same thought is expressed at length in Romans 6:

Romans 6:2 We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?
3 Or are ye ignorant that all who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
4 We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also might walk in newness of life.

So, returning to our text in 2 Corinthians 5:

- 14 because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died;
- 15 and he died for all, that they which live ... [that is, the believers] ... should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again.
- 16 Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh ...

What does it mean, to know someone “after the flesh”? Looking through Paul’s writings, we find that he used this and similar expressions to indicate fleshly lineage, for example, 1 Corinthians 10:18, “Behold Israel after the flesh ...”, meaning the natural descendants of Jacob. In Ephesians 2:11 he addressed the non-Jewish believers as “Gentiles in the flesh”. So, to henceforth “know no man after the flesh” is to no longer attach any significance to natural descent, in particular not to discriminate between Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:28).

- 16 Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh:
even though we have known Christ after the flesh,
yet now we know *him* so no more.

I take this to mean Christ’s connection with Israel. In Romans 1:3 Paul described Christ as “born of the seed of David according to the flesh”, and in the early verses of Romans 9, among the privileges which belonged to the nation of Israel, he included, “of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh” (Romans 9:5). Jesus was born king of the Jews (Luke 1:32) and was sent only “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24), His purpose being to fulfil God’s promises to that nation (Romans 15:8). Salvation was indeed “of the Jews” (John 4:22), but from the time that the Gentiles were called to be fellow heirs of the promises, Christ’s exclusive relationship with Israel ceased to exist (Acts 10:45; 11:18; Romans 3:29; Ephesians 2:15-18; 3:6).

In all of this Paul was establishing a rational basis for what he was about to say:

- 17 Wherefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature:
the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new.

“Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature”: that is, neither Jew nor Gentile, but a “new creature” to whom neither of these descriptions applied, the theory being that the people with whom this new creature would identify, with whom alone he would be able to find true fellowship, would be other new creatures like himself. Naturally, his allegiance would be to them, and by encouraging them to think of themselves in this way, Paul sought to establish a bond among the believers stronger than that of their traditional associations.

“Dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus”

What was it, though, that distinguished this “new creature” from the rest of mankind?

Wherefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature ...

It is the fact that he is “in Christ” which gives substance to the expression, “a new creature”, but we need to understand precisely what the apostle meant. We have already read from Romans 6, in which Paul likened baptism into Christ to dying with Him and being raised anew:

Romans 6:4 We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also might walk in newness of life ...

This is no trivial thing. Given the apostle’s choice of such a graphic metaphor, death and resurrection, one feels that he was alluding to the most profound change that a human being could possibly undergo. Nevertheless, it is a metaphor; the believer has not literally died and been raised, therefore it is not a physical change that Paul was talking about. Turning back to Romans 6 again, this time the eleventh verse,

11 Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.

A dead human being has no power to respond to anything, including the temptation to do evil, and Paul was likening this *post mortem* inertia to a condition of mind which the believer should voluntarily adopt toward the influence of the world; as someone who is dead, registering no response; by contrast, however, “alive unto God in Christ Jesus”, with the mind receptive and directed toward the influence of God.

Only the believer in Jesus is in a position to truly do this, to reckon himself “dead unto sin”, because it requires extraordinary confidence, not in oneself, but in God. I would think it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for anyone with an appreciation of what sin is and what the consequences of sin are, to reckon himself “dead unto sin” without some assurance that he will not be held accountable for his failures, because there will be failures (Romans 8:33,34; Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 3:6,14; 4:16; 10:19; 1 John 8,9; 2:1).

Can anyone reckon himself “dead unto sin” while at the same time experiencing guilt, or shame, or being afraid of God’s condemnation? I doubt that the human mind is capable of doing this. How could the Jew under the Law reckon himself “dead unto sin”? Self-reproach and fear were inseparable from that arrangement because of man’s inability to overcome

sin. In the Gentile world, fear of divine retribution was an instrument in the hand of pagan priests to manipulate a credulous population.

Only through Jesus is the problem of sin comprehensively and permanently dealt with, in the imputation or reckoning of righteousness to the believer. As Paul wrote in Romans 8, verse 1,

There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

If one is “in Christ Jesus”, it means that the dominion of sin has ended (Romans 6:14); the estrangement from God which it caused, the condemnation of the Mosaic Law and its effect upon the conscience (Hebrews 9:9,14; 10:2,22), the bondage of the Gentiles to false gods (Galatians 4:8), are all removed, making it indeed possible to reckon oneself “dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus”.

Wherefore if any man is in Christ, *he is a new creature* ...

The “new creature” therefore begins life through God’s gracious gift of imputed righteousness. This is the essential foundation without which the rest cannot proceed, and to those who had received this gift Paul gave the title, “new creature”, in order that they might see themselves as no longer Jew or Gentile in God’s sight.

... the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new.

So much is contained in these few words. I believe that this embraces far more than the change within the believer that we have been talking about, and that Paul had in mind the monumental change in God’s mode of dealing with man, embodied in the Gospel, and of which the “new creature” is the product.

Colossians 3:10

Despite the devotional character of much of this epistle, there is no mistaking Paul’s underlying intention, which was to counteract the influence of those who wished to impose Jewish customs upon the church. Just to align this with our previous passage, and to show that Paul was approaching the same issue in almost exactly the same way, I am going to quote a couple of verses from chapter 2 of Colossians. This might sound familiar:

- Colossians 2:12 having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.
- 13 And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, *I say*, did he quicken together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses;

Here we see the same metaphor that Paul used in Romans 6, of having figuratively died with Christ and been raised again with Him to life; confirming also in plainer language that the basis of this change from death to life, and therefore the essence of being “in Christ”, is the forgiveness of our sins through faith, that is, justification or imputed righteousness.

From the beginning of chapter 3, this line of thought is continued:

- Colossians 3:1 If then ye were raised together with Christ,
seek the things that are above,
where Christ is seated on the right hand of God.
- 2 Set your mind on the things that are above,
not on the things that are upon the earth.

“If then ye were raised together with Christ ...” Paul was not casting doubt on the matter: most assuredly God had ‘quickened’ them, or made them alive together with Christ, in forgiving them their trespasses. Paul’s intention here was to remind them that God, having provided this gracious gift, now required something of them. Because He now regarded them differently, no longer as enemies but as adopted sons (Romans 5:10; 8:15), they must regard themselves differently, beginning with a radical change in their priorities and objectives:

- 2 Set your mind on the things that are above,
not on the things that are upon the earth.

In other words, a complete change of mind; and in this we see the fuller implication of repentance, because that is what the Greek word *metanoeo* [Strong #3340] means: to *think differently*.

While invoking the prospect of the heavenly reward, “the things that are above” also embraces the word that had come to them from heaven, from the mind of God, through Christ and the apostles; and in the contrast between heaven and earth there is the unmistakable moral contrast between godliness and worldliness. By setting their minds on the things of God’s word, that is, committing themselves to be guided by His word, then the “things that are upon the earth”, which had formerly occupied their thoughts, would be displaced. And then Paul projected further into the future than in our Second Corinthians passage:

- Colossians 3:3 For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.
- 4 When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested,
then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory.

By bracketing the believers' present life between a symbolic death with Christ and their eventual manifestation with Him in glory, Paul was impressing upon them that the process of change which had commenced in them was directly connected with gaining eternal life. It was as though they had actually laid aside their bodies in death, and were in a period of waiting for the life to come, which for the present time is "hid with Christ". Yet they continued to live, albeit no longer unto themselves, no longer having their minds set "on the things that are upon the earth". How were they to address this challenging task? Continuing the analogy to death and resurrection, Paul wrote,

Colossians 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth ...
(Mortify [Strong #3499] means literally, "put to death" [Diaglott].)

... fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and
covetousness, the which is idolatry;

- 6 for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon
the sons of disobedience;
- 7 in the which ye also walked aforetime,
when ye lived in these things.

They must now regard themselves as though the body to which such ungodly behaviour came naturally, which once "lived in these things", had indeed died. As we have read in Romans 6:11, "reckon ye also yourselves dead unto sin", which is a self-imposed state of mind; and in Colossians 3, verses 8 to 10, Paul spelled out how that new mindset should manifest itself:

Colossians 3:8 But now put ye also away all these: anger, wrath, malice,
railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth:

- 9 lie not to one another; seeing that ye have put off the
old man with his doings,
- 10 and have put on the new man, which is being renewed
unto knowledge after the image of him that created him:

The new man

We can see that Paul followed essentially the same steps to the same conclusion that he arrived at in 2 Corinthians 5, except that he described what they have become as "the new man", rather than the "new creature"; however, there is no doubt that they are one and the same.

and have put on the new man, which is being renewed ...

New, yet *being* renewed, which tells us that the renewal which has nominally taken place at the time of belief and repentance (Romans 6), and been symbolised in baptism, is in reality a commencement. We all know from

experience that even with the most sincere intentions, real, meaningful change in people happens slowly, and often with great difficulty. What the believer has done is not change miraculously or instantaneously, but *commit* to change. The putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man are in fact synchronous and ongoing.

and have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto knowledge ...

The Diaglott word-for-word has “being renewed by exact knowledge”, which is surely the intended meaning, inasmuch as it is the increasing influence of God’s word that drives the renewal. Its power over our life increases in direct proportion to what we understand and retain, because to that extent God’s influence is no longer solely from outside, but within, in the form of an enlightened conscience. ‘Conscience’ comes from the Latin, meaning ‘with knowledge’, and while we all have the capacity for conscience, the things in our conscience are learned, not innate. It is the restructuring of the Christian’s conscience which is at the heart of renewal, because it is this which allows justification to have its desired effect (Hebrews 9:9,14; 10:2,22).

Paul wrote to the Galatians:

3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ.

5:14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

6:2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

To “put on the new man” is the same as “to put on Christ”. The commandment to “love thy neighbour as thyself” Paul called “the law of Christ” (see James 2:8), and verses 12 to 14 of Colossians 3 expand on those virtues which are characteristic of Christ Himself:

Colossians 3:12 Put on, therefore, as God’s elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

13 forbearing one another and forgiving each other, If any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye:

14 and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.

The image of God

Colossians.3:10 and have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him:

That is, “after the image of Him that created *the new man*”. Ephesians 4:24, which we will look at shortly, declares the “new man” to have been created “after God”, that is, in God’s likeness. Now, it is written of Adam that he was made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26), yet according to the scriptures Adam was not unique in this respect. We find the same description used by God of mankind after the Flood (Genesis 9:6), and some two and a half thousand years later both Paul and James affirmed that in their day human beings still retained the likeness of God, even unconverted Gentiles (Acts 17:29; James 3:9). How then do we distinguish between that which is apparently common to the whole human race, and the image of God to which this small group of His elect is being conformed?

The explanation is, I believe, that the Bible uses the concept of God’s image in two different ways. As distinct from the lower orders of creation, God gave man superior powers of reason and with that the capacity to acquire moral judgement according to divine principles; in simple terms the ability to learn to discern good and evil. In this sense man was made like God, and it is this that the scriptures refer to as being present in mankind generally. It is, however, a capacity that lies idle without instruction and belief. To a limited extent it was developed in God’s people of old, but only through Christ does it begin to be employed as God intended it.

On the other hand, “the image of him that created him” in Colossians 3:10 represents the full development of this capacity, the divine moral *character* itself; originating in God, exemplified in Christ, and through emulation being developed in the believer.

“Christ is all, and in all”

Colossians 3:10 and have put on the new man which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him:
11 where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman: but Christ is all, and in all.

Here is the proof that Paul had been moving toward the same conclusion as in 2 Corinthians 5, in the hope that the Colossians also might find a fellowship in Christ which would eclipse the distinctions of race, culture and social status which hitherto had separated them. Christ being “all, and in all” is the antithesis of a church divided along racial lines, so that the first part, “Christ is all”, would seem to express a changed perspective on life. Paul’s words in Philippians 3 come to mind:

- Philippians 3:7 Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ.
- 8 Yea, verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may gain Christ,
 - 9 and be found in him ...

Paul's life had become geared to the cause of Christ and the attaining of the resurrection of life. Christ had become "all" to him, in the sense of 'all-important', and he counselled his readers, "Brethren, be ye imitators together of me" (verse 17). Had they followed his example, the things that stood between them would have become insignificant.

The second part of Colossians 3:11, "Christ is ... in all", refers to that which, ideally, all believers share. It connects closely with Jesus' prayer in John 17.

- John 17:20 Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word;
- 21 that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me.
 - 22 And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we *are* one;
 - 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me.

God is spoken of as being "in" Christ, Christ as being "in" the Father, the believers as being "in" God and "in" Christ, and Christ as being "in" the believers. This is by no means easy to grasp, but I believe that the key to understanding it is in verse 22, and Christ's desire that His disciples "may be one, even as we *are* one", which expresses hope for a unity among the believers like the unity that existed between Christ and His Father. A unity like this among the believers could only be one of mind, that is, fellowship [Strong #2842], which is a state of sharing or holding things in common. Because Christ compared that to the unity between Himself and the Father, we can infer that both relationships were of the same kind, and this unity or fellowship of mind must explain the idea of one being "in" the other.

It is obvious then that the fellowship of the believers with one another, with Christ, and ultimately with God, grows with the renewal of the "new man", because it is the growing likeness of Christ, and to produce this was the goal of all the apostle's work. To the Galatians he wrote,

- Galatians 4:19 My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you,

and in chapter 1 of Colossians, he defined the object of the Gospel calling:

Colossians 1:27 ... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Ephesians 4:24

From 2 Corinthians 5 we have seen that the “new creature” is brought into being by God’s gift of imputed righteousness. Colossians 3 has augmented that picture with the ongoing development of the “new man”, showing us that he is *being* renewed by knowledge into the likeness of Christ, and therefore of God. Now finally a few verses from Ephesians 4 will, I am confident, complete our understanding of “the new creature” or “new man” by gathering together the teachings of both those other epistles, and at the same time establishing a connection with another very important New Testament theme, that of the Holy Spirit. [For further information, see the booklet, “*What Is The Holy Spirit?*”, available on request from info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au.]

Having enjoined them to no longer behave as the Gentiles (verses 17-19), who had given themselves up to a life of wickedness, Paul continued,

Ephesians 4:20 But ye did not so learn Christ;
21 if so be that ye heard him, and were taught in him,
even as truth is in Jesus:
22 that ye put away, as concerning your former manner
of life, the old man,
which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit;
23 and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
24 and put on the new man, which after God hath been
created in righteousness and holiness of truth.

It is the last two verses that I am most interested in, the latter first:

24 and put on the new man, which after God hath been
created in righteousness and holiness of truth.

In effect, this is a summary of what we have learned from 2 Corinthians and Colossians: “put on the new man, which after God”, that is, in God’s image; “hath been created in righteousness”, that is, righteousness by faith; “and holiness of truth”, the sanctifying influence of the word of God. It is the preceding verse, however, which really adds to our understanding:

Spiritual renewal

"and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind,"

This introduces the idea of man’s spirit. It tells us that it is a function, or characteristic, of the mind. It tells us that the difference between the “old man” and the “new man” is a spiritual change, a renewal of spirit, and therefore the factors in the creation of the “new man”, righteousness and holiness of truth, must also be the agents of this renewal of spirit.

As I have already put forward, the realisation that in Christ he has been freed from the condemnation of sin manifests itself in the cleansing of the believer's conscience (Hebrews 10:22). This forms the basis of a spiritual change by removing the impediment of guilt, self-reproach and fear, feelings which are alien to the mind of God and render man unlike Him at a fundamental level.

How do we separate the idea of 'spirit' from 'conscience'? In the scriptures, the word 'spirit' [Hebrew #7307 *ruwach*; Greek #4151 *pneuma*], though literally meaning 'breath', when used of human beings almost always indicates a predominating mental disposition. For example, when Moses called on the people to make voluntary offerings for the tabernacle, this was the response:

Exodus 35:21 And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up,
and every one whom his spirit made willing ...

In other places the spirit of individuals has been described as 'jealous' (Numbers 5:14), 'hard' (Deuteronomy 2:30), 'sad' (1 Kings 21:5), 'anguished' (Job 7:11), 'contrite' (Psalm 34:8), 'broken' (Psalm 51:17), 'faithful' (Proverbs 11:13), 'hasty' (Proverbs 14:29), 'haughty', 'humble' (Proverbs 16:18,19), 'patient', 'proud' (Ecclesiastes 7:8), 'perverse' (Isaiah 19:14), 'erring' (Isaiah 29:24), 'grieved' (Isaiah 54:6), 'ready' (Mark 14:38), 'meek' and 'quiet' (1 Peter 3:4) [KJV renderings]. Invariably the context shows that the word 'spirit' has been used to indicate the state of mind of the person concerned, which has then manifested itself in behaviour.

For us who believe on Jesus Christ, the assurance which God's gracious gift of imputed righteousness brings causes a profound change in our state of mind, particularly in our attitude toward God, which in the absence of fear increasingly becomes one of devotion, which is sanctification or holiness (John 17:17), and of love. Fear disables love; that is a characteristic of human beings (1 John 4:18); it is therefore our confidence in God which makes us free to love others.

The restructuring of the conscience according to truth consolidates and develops that state of mind, or spirit, so that it more and more resembles God's Spirit. Jesus said,

John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life.

Jesus called His words "spirit" because of the spiritual *effect* that His teachings would have upon those who believed. If the "new man" is created in the image of God, then the renewal of spirit must also be in the likeness of God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed,

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth.

That is, 'make them holy in the truth'. Righteousness and holiness of truth together bringing about a renewal of spirit, and unity among the people of God.

John 17:22 ... that they may be one, even as we are one.

All things new

In conclusion, let me return briefly to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

Wherefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature:
the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new.

This is not unlike Revelation 21:5, "Behold, I make all things new", and I think that there exists a harmony between these scriptures. Paul understood that the inward change which individual members of the Church were undergoing embodied a principle which would apply in the salvation of all people. Indeed, I think he saw that the work of the Kingdom age had already commenced in Christ's elect, and accordingly we find the same concept expressed by the apostle James:

James 1:18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth,
that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.



PSALM 110

by Russell Collins

1. *The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*
 2. *The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.*
 3. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.*
 4. *The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*
 5. *The LORD at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.*
 6. *He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.*
 7. *He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.*
- (KJV)

Matthew 22:41-46.

"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, 'What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?' They say unto him, 'The son of David'. He saith unto them, 'How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?' And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions."

The Lord Jesus quoted from Psalm 110:1. We are fortunate that because of Jesus' ministry on earth and the New Testament Scriptures, we know the answer to His question. Jesus was a descendant of David through Mary, and could therefore be called a Son of David by fleshly descent. But Jesus is God's King who is placed by God on David's throne forever. David will be raised by the Lord Jesus from death, and he will be subject to Jesus in the age to come.

In His human life Jesus was indeed the Son of David, but after Jesus' resurrection God made Jesus His King on David's throne with all power in heaven and earth, and Jesus then became David's Lord in fulfilment of Psalm 45:16, *"Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth"*.

The fleshly ancestors of Jesus were His fathers from whom He descended through Mary, but in the age to come they will be His children when He brings them back to life to serve as His rulers on earth in the great Kingdom work of blessing.

Psalm 110 pictures the Messiah as king (verses 1 to 3) as priest (verse 4), and as victorious warrior (verses 5 to 7).

In verses 1, 6 and 7 David spoke of the Messiah, while in verses 2, 3, 4 and 5 David spoke to Him. At the time of writing, the Ark of the Covenant and the seat of government were in Zion. David's victories over Ammon, Syria and Edom pre-figure Messiah's final victory over all His foes. God made a promise to David through Nathan with these words:

"And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

God's promise to David is fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, wielding power at God's right hand, having with Him a people *"in the beauties of holiness"* devoted to Him and intent on doing God's will through Him in the promised world-wide kingdom to come.

Psalm 110 is one of the most frequently quoted psalms in the New Testament. It is either directly quoted or has reference made to it in Matthew 22:41-46; 26:64; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44; Acts 2:33,34; 7:55,56; 1 Peter 3:22; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:3,13,14; 8:1; 10:12,13; and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

"My LORD" in verse 1 is a translation of the Hebrew 'Adonai', which means 'sovereign or controller' (Strong 113). Yahweh said to Adonai to sit at His (Yahweh's) right hand until He (Yahweh) makes Adonai's enemies His footstool. Adonai is, of course, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and He is addressed as the ruler of Israel, both naturally and spiritually. It is because He is addressed as Israel's and the Church's Lord that Jesus quoted the words in the three gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The throne of Christ is the heavenly throne (Acts 2:34; Ephesians 1:20-22; Hebrews 1:13,14), and the *"right hand"* is the place of power Exodus 15:6).

The 'sitting' or 'being seated' at God's right hand seems to suggest 'settled dominion', as of one having an established sovereignty. An earthly picture of the heavenly situation may be seen in Genesis 41, verses 40 to 44, where Joseph is represented as wielding the royal power of Pharaoh, yet remaining second to him on the throne. God has promised to subdue Jesus' enemies, but this does not mean that Jesus remains inactive until this is accomplished. Jesus is watching over His Church, and promises to be with them even if from time to time groups of believers may number only two or three (Revelation 1:12-20; Matthew 18:20). We know only that Jesus has been given all power in heaven and earth and that He is continuing to reign as God's King, but it will not be until the millennium that the fullness of His power will be seen.

The *"rod"* of the Lord's strength in verse 2 is a symbol of discipline and punishment, and signifies victory over adversaries and the subduing of resisting enemies. The rod, like the sharp, two-edged sword out of His mouth (Revelation 1:16), called *"the rod of his mouth"* in Isaiah 11:4, seems to indicate that the Lord's enemies will be overcome by the divine message of love and goodwill, which will change the hearts and minds of so many who will hear that message in the Kingdom of God. But this is not to say that firm disciplinary action and punishment will not be undertaken if such are necessary. The whole process of reformation of earth's peoples will take time, and some of the resurrected 'unjust' of this world may require firm guidance and control, and even punishment, to lead them to repentance and life.

The "rod" of strength will be sent from Zion, the ancient seat of David's royal line which culminated in Jesus Christ. Zion, that is, Jerusalem, was the centre from which the Gospel went forth at the beginning of this Gospel Age, and from which the Gospel will go forth with greater power in the last days (Psalm 2:6; Isaiah 2:3,4; Micah 4:2,3; Luke 1:32,33).

"Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies" (verse 2) may refer to the period of the Gospel Age in which Christ's enemies knowingly or unknowingly oppose His reign, or, more likely, the words refer to Christ's future millennial reign, when He will rule over his enemies openly as King over them.

The *"people ... willing in the day of thy power"* (verse 3) could be the consecrated ones of the Gospel Age who are moved by the power of God's Holy Spirit to dedicate themselves to God through their mediator and High Priest, Jesus Christ. It seems more likely, however, that *"the day"* of Messiah's *"power"* is the day when He will openly exercise that power, which He has so far wielded unseen and unobserved by the world at large, when in the *"day"* of the millennium He has taken to Himself His great power and has reigned in full view (Revelation 11:17).

"In the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: - thou hast the dew of thy youth." The Hebrew original of these words in verse 3 requires the clauses to be joined together. *"In the beauties of holiness"* is a poetical phrase meaning 'in holy garments' such as those worn by the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:4). Messiah's people, the Gospel Age Church, symbolically wear 'holy garments' unseen and unrealised by the world, but in the age to come the beauties of their 'garments' will be manifest to the world as they assist the Lord Jesus in the great work of enlightening the nations and all families of the earth.

"The womb of the morning" seems to suggest God's creation and control of the earth, the succession of day and night, and years and the seasons. The words of the LORD to Job lend support to this understanding. *"Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it?"* (Job 38:8,28,29).

The words *"Thou hast the dew of thy youth"* seem to refer to Messiah's warriors, the Gospel Age Church, who will remain ever-youthful in their work as members of the *"royal priesthood"* (1 Peter 2:5,9;

Revelation 1:6); and as foretold by Isaiah in chapter 40, verse 31, *"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."*

They will resemble the dew in their freshness and appeal. The dew of Messiah is similarly associated with Christ's return and the promised resurrection in Isaiah 26:19, *"Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead"*.

Under the Mosaic arrangement, the office of high priest was distinct and separate from the office of king. The king was necessarily of the tribe of Judah, and the high priest was of the tribe of Levi. An heir of David could be a high priest only by decree of God himself. The priestly office attached to that of king speaks of mercy and forgiveness, yet Psalm 110 emphasizes that there will be no weakness in the reign of the King established at God's right hand.

In this psalm we see a new order of priesthood, likened to that of Melchizedek, in contrast to the Aaronic priesthood; yet not a priesthood on earth like that of the Melchizedek, to whom Abraham paid tithes. The distinguishing feature of that priesthood was the union of king and priest in one person. Psalm 110 published the decree of God that the great deliverer and king promised would combine in his own person also the office of high priest as well as judge to further the purposes for which He was made King.

The extraordinary oath of God shows that the combination of king and priest in one office is something unparalleled. David died, but Jesus, the king and priest after the order of Melchizedek, lives for ever.

"The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath" (verse 5) seems to be a description of the final and decisive victory of Messiah and His assistants over all enemies in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is *"the Lord at thy right hand"*, and *"the day of his wrath"* is *"the day of his power"* of verse 3.

"He shall judge among the heathen" means the nations which will come under God's judgment in the age to come, God's judgment through Jesus Christ being enlightenment leading to salvation and everlasting life, rather than condemnation and punishment.

"He shall fill the places with the dead bodies" (verse 6) is surely figurative. The words 'the places' are supplied by the translators, and, as some commentators think, 'the earth' would be a better inclusion: "He shall fill the earth with the dead bodies". As the prophecy applies to the Kingdom, the *"dead bodies"* would be all the people raised from death by the Lord Jesus, but still at their resurrection dead in trespasses and sins from their previous lives.

The clause *"He shall wound the heads over many countries"* (verse 6) reads in the original Hebrew "He shall wound the head over many countries". 'Head' is singular, and therefore could refer to Satan, who is to be bound at the commencement of God's Kingdom (Revelation 20:1-3), or to the Papacy (Revelation 13:14; 16:14; 17:12-14; 19:19-21); both of which have been permitted to wield power and authority over many countries, Satan since creation, the Papacy since the early centuries of the Gospel Age, and both of which are to be firstly wounded and then destroyed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

"He shall drink of the brook in the way: Therefore shall he lift up the heads" (verse 7). The point here seems to be hasty refreshment in Jesus' untiring zeal and devotion to the will of God. Jesus' zeal is mentioned in Hebrews 10:5-7; Luke 9:51; Psalm 69:9 and John 2:17. The prominent thought seems to be Jesus' continuing zeal against the foes of God when He comes in glory to reign in power as God's appointed King (Isaiah 50:1-7). We think of David pursuing the Amalekites and pressing over the brook Beser, where two hundred of his men stayed behind through weariness (1 Samuel 30:9,10), of Gideon's three hundred men who did not bow or kneel to drink (Judges 7:5,6), and of Samson revived with water by the LORD at Lehi (Judges 15:17-19).

Refreshment seems to be the main point in verse 7 of Psalm 110, refreshment by God for Jesus in His untiring zeal against God's enemies, symbolised in the words *"Therefore shall he lift up the head"*.

From the above observations it seems that the reason that Psalm 110 is one of the most-frequently quoted psalms, is because David put past and prophetic events into an historic perspective.



Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Authorship

There was general agreement that the author of Hebrews is unknown. No name is given as the writer in the introduction nor in the closing verses, in contrast to many other epistles. The strongest contender for its authorship is Paul the apostle. The lack in Hebrews of the usual introduction seen in Paul's other works may be because it was lost during the period between its writing and its copying. The idea that an introduction is missing is supported by the observation that the ending is more personal than the beginning. The ending is actually similar to the introduction to most of Paul's other epistles. The reference to Timothy being released from prison also suggests that Paul is the author.

Some commentators have suggested that the writer was not Paul because the style of Hebrews is thought by them to be quite different from his style in his other epistles. But this does not exclude him from being the writer, because he had excellent scholastic qualifications from studying "... *at the feet of Gamaliel ...*" (Acts 22:3). He was adaptive and versatile in his arguments in other books; and he had a profound knowledge of scripture and the power of the holy spirit, both attributes given directly to Paul by Jesus after his meeting with the Lord on the road to Damascus. Also, Paul was in Rome at the time that Hebrews was probably written (see below).

Apollos has been tentatively suggested as the author of Hebrews because its style seems to reflect his knowledge of the law. Barnabas, too, has been suggested for a similar reason, but it was thought that these latter two disciples did not have qualifications better than those of Paul, nor positions of authority in the early church greater than that of Paul.

The Addressees

It was suggested that the book was written to Hebrew-speaking Jews, although all Jews were probably bi-lingual, however, perhaps only the older ones were able to speak in Hebrew, the language of the Israelites, while the younger ones were able to speak only in Greek, the customary language of the period. There were probably some who could also use Latin, the language of the Roman Empire.

To write a book solely for a restricted group of readers is out of harmony with Christ's instruction to "... *go forth and teach all nations ...*" (Matthew 28:19), therefore it is unlikely to be the case that Hebrews was written only for Jews fluent with that language, and as far as we know, the book was written in Greek, which was the common language for that part of the Roman empire at that time. Paul could speak in the Hebrew language (Acts 22:2) although his epistles were written in Greek.

It was then pointed out that Luke 3:34 and 35, show that Abraham was a descendent of Heber, a name given as Eber in Genesis chapters 10 and 11. And although not the only son of Eber, Abraham was the great grandfather of the Israelites who have been referred to as Hebrews because of their lineage from Eber. Abraham was a pilgrim, a sojourner in the lands where God directed him, and the word 'Hebrew' has taken on the meaning of traveller or pilgrim. Therefore, despite the possibility of a restricted focus, the letter written 'to the Hebrews' may, in the broadest sense, refer to Christian pilgrims passing through this life during the gospel age.

It would seem to be most likely that Hebrews was written to the Christian Hebrews of the time, both Hebrew-speaking and Greek-speaking; especially to those who were members of the churches which the apostles had established on their journeys throughout the region. It was then suggested that the book could have been intended also for non-Christian Hebrews, or Israelites; that is, Paul's kinsfolk who had not heard or understood the gospel message, those who were scattered outside Judea, and whom he wanted to come to that knowledge (Romans 9:3,4 and James 1:1). And the letter was intended for revision of the truth for those who had forgotten it, and had reverted to the milk of the word, as mentioned in chapter 5 verse 12.

The Time

Hebrews was probably written about AD 60 to 64, because all the epistles are tentatively dated before that latter year. It is clear from Hebrews 13:10, which indicates that the altar and tabernacle were then still in use, that it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple, and the expulsion of the Jews from the city in AD 70.

The Place

Hebrews was written in Rome, as indicated by a postscript in both the Sinaitic and Alexandrine manuscripts, the oldest of the scriptural records available at this time.

Hebrews 1:1

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" (KJV).

It was noted that other versions do not give a significantly different translation.

"God ... spoke ..."

He spoke about salvation, and because it was God speaking, and by speaking about salvation, which is God's purpose for every man and woman (1 Timothy 2:4) an obligation is imposed upon every man and woman to listen. He spoke to the Jewish forefathers through the prophets, who took God's admonitions to the priests and the people, in many different ways and at many different times. Those messages to the Israelites from members of their own nation were significant because they had abandoned God as their King (1 Samuel 8:7,8), and family history was very important to them, so they were more likely to listen to one of their own nationality, even though the prophets called the Israelites to repent and return to God's ways.

The promises given through the prophets were concerned with salvation that would become available through the Messiah. Although spread across several ages, they were the first words that God spoke about salvation. God speaking to us through His Son provides His last words about salvation, because the means of its accomplishment have been established through Jesus' death and resurrection

Hebrews 1:2

"Hath in these last days ..."

Matthew 13:17 shows that many prophets desired to see and hear the things that the apostles witnessed, but those things did not take place until the last days ("*the last of these days*", Diaglott) when Jesus came to earth. Luke 4:17-19 shows that the last days were the days of Jesus' ministry, at the end of the Jewish age.

Although the term 'Jewish age' is not a biblical term, it is based on the Diaglott rendition of Ephesians 3:11 which refers to "... *God's plan of the ages* ('eternal purpose' in other versions) *which he accomplished through Jesus Christ*". Jesus' sacrifice occurred near the end of the Jewish age (Hebrews 9:26). All the prophets, including John the Baptist, foretold of the coming of the Lord and therefore foretold of the coming of

salvation (Matthew 11:13). According to Malachi 4:5, John was the Elijah who was to come. An example of the purpose of the prophets was contained in Jesus' talk with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-25).

Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24).

"He came unto his own, but his own received him not" (John 1:11).

Jesus said He would have gathered the Israelites together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but they would have none of it (Luke 13:34).

Thus, from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the gospel was preached to the Jews only, although gentiles who believed in the truth were accepted, as shown by the episode of Cornelius the centurion (Acts chapter 10). Jesus told his disciples *"Go not into the way of the gentiles ... but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 10:5,6). The restriction of the preaching of the message to Israel continued only until the end of Daniel's seventieth week, each day of that week representing a year (Daniel 9:26,27), in the middle of which the Lord would be crucified. Thus, his ministry ran for three and a half years, and the gospel continued to be preached exclusively to the Jews for a further three and a half years after that time.

At that time Paul and Barnabas, while preaching to Jews and Gentiles in Antioch, declared that the Jews no longer deserved the favour they had been granted for seven years, so that the gospel would from that time also go freely to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). This was probably about the time that Cornelius and his household were accepted by the Lord. That time then, was the end of the Jewish age.

Notice that the end of the Jewish age does not coincide with the point in time when the Old Covenant was replaced by the New Covenant. That time, when Jesus did God's will, and took away the first [covenant] and established the second [covenant] (Hebrews 19:9), was when he died on the cross, and the temple veil was torn miraculously through from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51).

It was suggested that these last days when the gospel message went to the Gentiles could be extended to include all the gospel age. Although there was no indication of the end of the Jewish age at the beginning of Hebrews, it was not long after that time that the book was written.

It was also suggested that of the three days of the Lord in Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-31), the 'last days' of verse 2 was one of these periods, which included the day of Pentecost. While the period referred to by the writer seems to be the time of the ministry of Christ and the apostles, it is not specifically stated as such, so it is not necessarily restricted to that time. The Diaglott rendition is different but it is not contrary to the thought of it being extended across the gospel age.

“... whom he hath appointed heir of all things ...”

However, it was in 'the last of these 'days', at the beginning of the gospel age, that Jesus was appointed to be heir of all things. God promised His Son *“... I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession”* (Psalm 2:8). Jesus was given all power in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18, Hebrews 2:7,8) and these things took place almost immediately after his resurrection, thus giving a relatively restricted meaning of 'these last days'.

All things of which he became heir included the universe, the plan of the ages, and us, whom he purchased with his blood (Acts 20:28). And they are entrusted to the heir as God's representative until the kingdom is complete and is returned to God so that he may be all and in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Hebrews 1:3

“Who being the brightness of his glory ...”

Other versions have *“... the radiance, or effulgence, of God's glory ...”* and Vines Bible dictionary suggests a resemblance to the light from a luminous body. The radiance may have been demonstrated in the shining of Moses' face when he came down from God's presence on Mount Sinai, and in the Shekinah light between the cherubim over the mercy seat in the holiest place of the Israelites' tabernacle.

The light that surrounded the Lord at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8), and which could be seen by James, John and Peter, was considered to be a demonstration of Christ's authority, having access to the light of God which no man can see, nor approach unto except through Christ himself (1 Timothy 6:16).

[To be continued]



NEWS AND NOTES

2019 Conference Report

This year our annual conference was again held at the Comfort Inn Main Lead in Ballarat, from Saturday 6th to Monday 8th April, where we were looked after very well by the friendly staff.

The theme for the conference was “Christian Privileges and Responsibilities”, with six presentations elaborating on aspects of this topic; audio files of many of these talks are available to listen to or download from our website (<http://www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au/publications-and-downloads/>).

There were also Bible studies, morning devotions and hymn singing, as well as a service of thanksgiving for the safe arrival of our newest member, Eunice Livia Robinson, who slept through the event! As always, the question study on the last morning of the conference offered participants the opportunity to discuss several difficult matters relating to understanding and interpretation of the scriptures. The Christian Youth Class this year was small, but the children participated with enthusiasm and shared the results of their labours in a presentation to the adults on Monday morning.

We have again booked the Comfort Inn Main Lead from Saturday 28th until Monday 30th March 2020 so please mark these dates in your diary. We look forward to meeting with all who are able to join us for more spiritual nourishment at next year’s conference.

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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