

# **THE NEW COVENANT NEWS**



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**The Apostles' Defence of the Christian Hope**

Talk given by Colin Giles at the 2016 Conference

**Jacob's Ladder**

Talk given by Russell Collins

**Correspondence**

# THE APOSTLES' DEFENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

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The text verse for this conference is 1 Peter 3, verses 15 and 16.

*"But in your hearts consecrate Christ as Lord, being always ready to make your defence to any one who asks from you a reason for the hope that you cherish. Yet argue modestly and cautiously, keeping your conscience free from guilt, so that, when you are spoken against, those who slander your good Christian lives may be put to shame."* (Weymouth).

I have chosen the Weymouth version because I think it clarifies some of the thoughts contained in these verses. The task of translators in conveying the correct meaning can be challenging.

The following are some comments about where different words or phrases have been used in the Weymouth version from the King James version, which reads; *"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."*

I will comment on the differences between the versions in the order in which they occur.

The first difference occurs in the use by Weymouth of the word "*consecrate*" in place of the KJV's "*sanctify*". Both words are an adequate translation of the Greek word 'hagiasmos' from which they come, where the basic meaning is of setting apart for a special purpose. In some translations the word "*holiness*" is used.

The second difference is the use of the word "*defence*" by Weymouth in place of "*answer*" in the KJV. "*Defence*" gives a better sense of the meaning of the original thought. Later I will comment further on how it is used in other places in the Bible.

The third difference is the phrase "*meekness and fear*" in the KJV, which is translated as "*modestly and cautiously*" by Weymouth. The latter gives a different sense and, I consider, a more accurate translation of the intent of the advice.

And the last section for comment begins with the words "*having a good conscience*" in the KJV. In Weymouth the thought is entirely different, because it uses the words "*keeping your conscience free from guilt*".

When we read this first letter of Peter to the believers in Asia Minor, we should remember that it is not a general treatise on the Christian faith like Paul's letter to the Romans, or of answering questions about church discipline as in the letters to the Corinthians, or answering some specific questions on doctrine as in the letter to the Thessalonians. Rather, it is full of exhortations and advise on how to live a life of devotion to the Christian way. If there is a verse that contains the theme of this letter, then it would be 1 Peter 1:7; "*That the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" (RSV).

It is not possible to know what prompted the writing of this letter, but we know that very soon after this letter was written the persecution of Christians in Rome was begun by the Emperor Nero. This letter could well have provided a source of encouragement for the impending time of distress. Throughout the letter, Peter gave advice on how to remain strong by bringing together a number of observations, with one thought leading to another, but in no particular order.

The letter begins with observations about the nature of our calling, with thoughts that the testing of our faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the re-appearing of Jesus Christ. There are observations about the work that is going on within us that causes a change to our hopes and aspirations. From an understanding of the work that is going on within the Christian, the advice that follows is about encouraging the right conduct between people, both within the general society and within the family.

Following that advice, Peter moved on to consider that if suffering for righteousness does occur for the Christian, then he or she is not to consider that to be unexpected; that is, they are not to think that it should not happen if good lives are being lived. The world does not always follow ways that are right and good. It is at this point in Peter's letter that the text verse for our conference occurs, and Peter gave some advice on how to deal with suffering.

In considering this advice of Peter, I found it necessary to review this section from verse 13 to verse 18 in detail so as to understand how he developed his appeal to his hearers. It is the words that join each thought that are important in following Peter's logic. One reason that I used the Weymouth translation at the beginning of this talk is because the way each thought was connected made better sense.

Starting at verse 14, Weymouth's translation, "*But even if you suffer for righteousness*", is an improvement in understanding over the KJV, which has "*But and if*". The meaning is that if this eventuality should occur there is a blessing to be found. Peter learnt that lesson from his Lord in the Sermon on the Mount.

In the next phrase, Weymouth has a simple “So” in the phrase, “**So do not be alarmed by their threats**”, in place of the KJV’s “**And be not afraid of their terror**”. The word “so” indicates that there is a reason for not being alarmed. Ellicot’s commentary also suggests that as the same Greek word is used for “*afraid*” and for “*terror*”, it reads, ‘fear ye not their fear.’ These words are a quotation from Isaiah 8:12; “*Neither fear ye their fear, nor be in dread thereof*”. The fears of the people of Judah in Isaiah’s time were Syria and Israel.

In considering further the advice of Peter, and the lesson contained within it, my mind turned to how this advice can be applied to us. What is there in his words of advice that encourages us to continue on and not be dismayed by the opposition that we may experience, or be overwhelmed when we remember the persecution that has occurred in past? As examples are worth many words, I decided to consider the apostles to find out where in their lives they exhibited strength to counter opposition. The examples should fulfil the following requirements:

- (1) The apostles were ready to give a defence of the hope that was within them;
- (2) The defence was done courteously and respectfully;
- (3) There were indications that the Lord was being sanctified in the heart.

Since Peter wrote these words of advice, I first of all looked for an example where he followed his own advice. We do not know from what source Peter obtained his advice. It may be that it reflected what he had been taught by Christ, or it may have been gained from long experience.

The first example that I could remember was when Peter and John were taken before the rulers of the temple, as recorded in Acts chapter 4, verses 7 to 10, after the healing of the crippled man who sat at the gate of the temple.

*“And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.”* (KJV).

The question put to the two apostles by the assembly was, “*By what power or in what name have you done this?*” (Some translations say that the question was put in the form of a demand, but I note that it is not translated from the same Greek word as in my text verse.) Now, it is true that it is recorded that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, which gave him the words to speak, but that does not limit the operation of the person’s will to concur with those

thoughts and speak forthrightly. This would answer condition (1) in the list above. As a further comment the words “defence” in Weymouth and “answer” in the KJV are translated from the Greek word from which get the word apology, but means making a verbal defence of his or her faith, and the advice of Peter is that our conduct should be free from any misgivings that would prevent us from defending the faith against any accusation brought against us.

Peter's defence was done courteously and respectfully, in that he addressed the council with formal acknowledgment of their position, so it also met the second condition. We may not know whether Peter had sanctified the Lord in his heart, but the indications are that he made his reply freely.

Another case where an apostle demonstrated that he was ready to make a defence of his faith is that of Paul when he was before Felix, as recorded in Acts chapter 24, verses 10 to 21.

*"Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day." (KJV).*

It is of note that Paul addressed Felix with the words; “Knowing, Sir, that for many years you have administered justice to this nation, I cheerfully make my defence.” There was not a lot in Felix’s administration that would recommend him, but, even so, Paul respected his position of authority. Felix had gained his the position of procurator through the benefit of his brother’s influence with the emperor Claudius. Tacitus wrote of him with the words, ‘... with savagery and lust he exercised the powers of a king with the disposition of a slave’ (Tacitus: ‘The Annals’).

Paul made a reply to all the charges brought against him, but used no flowery language or flattery such as was used by the Jewish pleader Tertullus in Acts 24: 2 to 9; *"And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so."* (KJV).

The charges brought against him were:

- (1) that he was a disturber of the peace;
- (2) that he was the leader of a group promoting a heresy;
- (3) that he attempted to profane the sanctity of the temple.

To the charge of causing a disturbance of the peace, Paul claimed that the Jews had produced no witnesses to support that claim, and further that he had no crowds around him in the temple, as they well knew. Paul admitted, when the chief captain examined him before the council, that he was a Pharisee and that his remarks that there was to be a resurrection of the dead had caused some disturbance in the council.

Paul had played on the differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but it would seem that he considered that his words were immoderate. We find that later he had learnt to control his speech. When addressing King Agrippa he acknowledged Festus with courtesy by addressing him as most noble Festus, even after he had been accused that his much learning had made him mad.

As to the charge that he was a leader of a sect or a group that was causing divisions, Paul claimed that, on the contrary, he worshipped in accordance with the strictest rules of the Jewish religion.

As for the charge that he attempted to profane the sanctity of the temple, he claimed that there was no evidence, and those who originally made the report should have been present.

Paul, when making his defence before King Agrippa, answered some of the same charges brought against him.

*“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.” (Acts 26: 24 to 29; KJV).*

He mentioned again that he was a Pharisee so he would not likely profane the words of Moses and the Prophets. When addressing Agrippa, he spoke to him and the other officials with courtesy for their position. Paul's opening words were, *“I think myself fortunate King Agrippa that it is before you, King Agrippa I am to make my defence against all the accusations of the Jews.”* There was not a lot to praise about Agrippa, but his position as a ruler was acknowledged. Paul was ready to answer all the charges brought against him. Note that he was making a defence of the reason for his belief.

I trust that this review of the apostles' actions in being ready to give a defence of the reason for their hope has been helpful. It gives us guidance on what principles we should use. Examples are always encouraging, and even if they did not do it perfectly, it is still informative.

The challenge for you and for me is how to explain our reasons for being a Christian. Under pressure it is hard to remain calm and not be aggressive, but Peter's advice is worth following. Paul, in his defence, outlined his history of being a changed person, and so, for my part, I came to a realisation that claims that God has over my life, as set out in the Bible, were true and cannot be denied. For me the history of God's dealings with mankind, as set out in the Bible and demonstrated in the lives of believing people and by Jesus, answers the big questions about the reason and purpose of life.

For me the claims of science about the source of life are unsatisfactory, and other religions show no proofs for what they claim.

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## **JACOB'S LADDER**

Talk given by Russell Collins

### **Introduction**

In Genesis chapter 25 it is recorded that Isaac and Rebekah married, and Rebekah gave birth to twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was born first and therefore, as was the custom in those days, was entitled to the birthright and blessing of his father Isaac, an inheritance of possessions and the favour of God through his father.

But God had said to Rebekah, when she enquired of Him when her two unborn baby boys struggled within her body; *"Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger."* (Genesis 25: 22 and 23).

Esau was a hairy man, a skilful hunter and Isaac's favourite because of the venison that Esau caught. Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents, and was Rebekah's favourite.

One day Esau returned from hunting and was very hungry. He demanded Jacob to feed him, and Jacob persuaded Esau to give Jacob his birthright in return for the meal. The exchange was made and both swore to the arrangement.

Years later, when Isaac was dying and unable to see, he called Esau to him and asked him to catch and cook some venison and make a savoury meal for him to enjoy so that he could bless Esau before he died. Rebekah heard Isaac make his request of Esau, and instructed Jacob to take two young goats from their flock so that she could make a savoury stew for Isaac, and thus gain Esau's blessing for Jacob.

Jacob pointed out that Esau was a hairy man while he was smooth skinned, so Rebekah had Jacob disguise himself with Esau's clothes and put goat skin on his arm and neck. When Jacob took the stew to Isaac he commented that the meal had been prepared quickly, and noted that he heard Jacob's voice, but Jacob claimed that he was Esau and convinced Isaac because he could feel the hairy skin.

When Esau returned from hunting and took a savoury stew to Isaac they realised that Jacob had deceived them, and both lamented what had taken place. Isaac blessed Esau, granting him prosperity although he would serve his brother until the yoke of service would be broken.

The actions of Rebekah and Jacob were clearly deceitful, and may cause us to wonder why the actions were allowed to happen as they did. By way of explanation we must realise that God knew in advance what would happen, and did not intervene to change the course of events. He allowed the failings and ambition of Rebekah and Jacob to achieve His purpose, and there is no record of any divine judgment against them, except to say that subsequently Jacob himself was deceived by Laban, and no doubt would have experienced the sorrow and disappointment of his father Isaac when he previously was deceived by Jacob and Rebekah.

What also comes to mind in this matter is that God's word is always forthright and truthful, and does not conceal the failings of His chosen people. Jacob's transgression did not cause him to be cast off by God, and he was dealt with mercifully.



Esau hated Jacob because of the deception, and threatened that he would kill him after the period of mourning for Isaac had passed. Rebekah learned of the threat and told Jacob to go to her brother Laban in Haran. Isaac also instructed Jacob to leave Beersheba, and to go to Padan Aram to take a wife of the daughters of Laban.

Jacob's journey to Padan Aram was a long one, and at the end of a day's travelling he reached the ancient city of Luz, where he camped, and during the night he had a vision, recorded in Genesis 28: 11 to 13, 15 and 16. *"And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it. ... And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: 'I am the LORD God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac; ... Behold I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.' Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place and I did not know it.' "*

The 'ladder' that Jacob saw in his dream is the translation used in most versions of the Bible, although the Hebrew word is rendered 'stairway' in the NIV and the New American Bible.

Jacob was much affected by the dream. He realised that God had drawn near to him and favoured him, and he felt a sense of awe from the experience. Thus moved also with a sense of gratitude Jacob *"... rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel."* (Genesis 28: 18 and 19). The name 'Bethel' means 'house of God'. In appreciation of God's promised care and protection, Jacob made a vow that if God would keep him as promised, he would recognise Abraham's God as his God.

How Jacob fulfilled his vow is not recorded, but we may rest assured that he remained faithful to it.

### **The Meaning and Fulfilment of Jacob's Ladder:**

When the Lord Jesus began His earthly ministry, He called twelve men to become His disciples. One of those men was called Philip, and while being chosen, it was Philip who sought out Nathanael, and brought him to Jesus. The account is recorded in John 1: 43 to 51. When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards Him, He said, *" 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile'. Nathanael said to Jesus, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered and said, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' "*

Nathanael must have realised that Jesus had spiritual power and discernment that no ordinary person possessed, and said immediately, *"You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"* (John 1:49). Jesus answered Nathanael and said to him *"Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree', do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'"* (John 1: 50 and 51).

This account is the explanation of Jacob's dream to us. The ladder or stairway which he saw was a representation of Jesus as the Mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:15), the one and only channel of communication between heaven and earth, between God and human beings since Jesus' sacrifice opened the way of reconciliation. Jesus is the way, and there is no other. He said *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). As the mediator between God and all people, Jesus is unique. Under the terms of the New Covenant, no saint or believer or anyone has been, nor can be, a mediator between God and all people.

The apostle Paul wrote, *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all"* (1 Timothy 2: 4 and 5).

At the time when Jacob had the dream he, and all the Israelites were living under the terms of the Law Covenant, delivered to them through Moses, who was the mediator of that covenant, but only to the nation of Israel which originally pledged its allegiance to the LORD God. (Exodus 19:8, Joshua 1:17 and Hebrews 10:28).

As heaven was open at the top of the dream ladder, Jacob being at its base, the vision was a portent of a new arrangement when heaven was to be open to everyone who believes in Jesus as the sole means of communication with God.

The angels are God's messengers *"Sent forth to minister for them, who shall be heirs of salvation"* (Hebrews 1:14). The favours of God come down and the prayers of the saints rise up only through Jesus, the 'ladder'. (Colossians 3:17).

While Jacob lay at the foot of the ladder, God remained above it and gave His blessing, which consisted of a repetition of the blessing promised to Abraham and his heirs. The fact that this blessing came down the ladder is an indication that Jesus, the promised Seed of blessing, is the same Jesus, the Mediator between God and all people, and that the good things promised in the Abrahamic covenant need Jesus the Mediator for their proper and permanent fulfilment.

Jesus, in His earthly ministry, blessed many people by His miracles, but the blessings were only temporary for the disciples at that time (John 14:13 and 16: 23 and 24), but after His resurrection Jesus the Mediator brought permanent blessings, now and in the future, as the scriptures tell us. *"For by one offering he has permanently perfected those being sanctified"* (Hebrews 10:14; Diaglott). All the promises of God, especially those covenanted with Abraham, require the ransom and the mediation of Jesus for their permanent fulfilment (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Believers cannot be mediators, but they can be missionaries and ambassadors to teach and persuade people to become reconciled to God by the only possible way, through Jesus the Mediator (2 Corinthians 5: 18 to 20 and Revelation 22:17).

The 'greater things' which Nathanael and others were to see were not greater exhibitions of God's power in the working of miracles and wonders through the Lord Jesus, but the invitation to thousands of people and their conversion from unbelief, paganism and the Mosaic Law to a new way of life in God through Jesus Christ the Mediator. The call for a change of minds and hearts of so many people to a righteous way of life was unprecedented until God made it possible through the Lord Jesus.

Because of Adam's original transgression, which brought sin into the world, every member of the whole human race is a sinner, out of harmony with God and needing to be reconciled to Him. The constitutional tendency towards sin in human beings affects both the bodies and minds of men, women and children, so that all members of the race are not only enemies *"by wicked works"* but *"enemies in your mind"*; fulfilling *"The desires of the flesh and of the mind"* (Colossians 1:21 and Ephesians 2:3).

This state of enmity with God is true of the whole human race and every member of it. The whole race needs the gracious offices of Jesus Christ to act as Mediator between God and all its members. It is God's desire that all will be saved and be no longer at enmity with Him, as Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2: 3 and 4, *"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

Reconciliation between God and all people, that is, every individual person, is possible only through Jesus, and this is by God's own arrangement (2 Corinthians 5:19 and Acts 4:12). It is the greatest blessing for all people and is a fact for all eternity, because whoever knows and believes this knows the way to life everlasting. Jesus is the Way, and as the 'ladder' He is the only possible and acceptable connection between God and every person individually.

The promise to Jacob in both of its parts, to the Seed and through the Seed, was sent down the ladder in the dream to all the families of the earth. Paul makes clear to us that the Seed is Christ, and puts the matter beyond doubt in Galatians 3:16; *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say and to seeds as of many, but as of one, and to your seed, who is Christ."*

To reach its fulfilment, the whole promise will continue through the Gospel and Kingdom ages. Therefore the Lord Jesus is now and will remain the Reconciler between God and all people until the great work of salvation of *"whosoever will"* of all the families of the earth, living and dead shall be completed. By His atoning death, Jesus has been given Lordship of both the living and the dead, as well as the keys of death and hades, signifying the power to open and release from death and the grave all who are held in captivity by them. Jesus has been given the power and authority to call forth all who have died to receive the opportunity to live forever in the blessings God will provide through Jesus to anyone and everyone who will believe and obey in His promised Kingdom to come (Romans 14:9; Revelation 1:18 and John 5: 25 to 30).

The great work of the Kingdom Age will be to reform the characters of obedient believers of that time, extending to them the New Covenant blessings of forgiveness of sins, mercy to their unrighteousness, and adoption into the household and family of God (Romans 8:21). Those who become believers in the Kingdom Age (2 Thessalonians 1:10) will come to God through Jesus Christ, and God will bless them in and through him. *"He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God"* (Revelation 21:3).

God's law will be written on their hearts, the original likeness to Himself will be restored, and the Almighty will again have pleasure in the work of His hands, people created in His likeness, so that there will be no need of any intervention between Him and them.

When the Lord Jesus will have accomplished all that His Father gave Him to do, with all enemies subdued under Him, the Lord Jesus will cease to act as Mediator between God and all people. He will deliver up the Kingdom to God the Father, that God may be all in all, meaning everything to everyone (1 Corinthians 15: 24 to 28).

This will constitute the conclusion of the work of Jesus as the 'ladder', the Mediator and Reconciler between God and the human race according to God's loving kindness, good pleasure, grace and mercy, as the scriptures tell us (Ephesians 1: 9 and 10 and Colossians 1: 19 and 20).



## CORRESPONDENCE

We have received several questions over the past few months. Those questions were discussed by our group, and summaries of the thoughts expressed were sent to the enquirers. Those questions and answers are presented here for consideration.

### Question 1

Could your group please explain more about Isaiah chapter 11?

### Answer

The context for Isaiah chapter eleven begins in chapter seven of that book. At that time the nation of Israel was divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south, where we find King Ahaz refusing to put his trust in God. In verse one of chapter seven the king of Israel and the king of Syria are threatening to invade the kingdom of Judah and put their own king on the throne, as we see in verse six; *“Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal.”* (Isaiah 7:6; KJV).

In verse seven God pronounced that that will not happen. *“Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.”* (Isaiah 7:7). The heads of those nations were only men who were not invincible, and they are named. On the other hand, the head of Judah was God, and who shall prevail against Him?

Because of the lack of faith of Ahaz, God offered to give him a sign to strengthen him. *“Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.”* (Isaiah 7:11). Ahaz refused, saying that he would not tempt the LORD; rather he preferred to put his trust in his own ability to hold off the invasion. At that point Isaiah became fed up with Ahaz; *“And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?”* (Isaiah 7:13). Not only was Isaiah fed up with Ahaz, but God had finally had enough also.

Regardless of what Ahaz wanted, God then gave him a sign. *“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.”* (Isaiah 7: 14 to 16). The sign that God gave to Ahaz was that another king would rise; not an evil king of the nature of Ahaz, but a righteous king.

*“The land shall be forsaken of both her kings”.* The land mentioned here was that of both Judah and Israel, and *“both her kings”* included the line of the kings of Judah and the line of kings of Israel. All those kings had descended

from King David. *“The land will be forsaken by both her kings”* means that both lines of kings from David would be removed. The means by which God would do that was through assault from Assyria. *“The LORD shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father’s house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria.”* (Isaiah 7:17).

That was an important announcement by God. It probably meant little, if anything, to Ahaz, but to us reading these words they are all important, for they show that it was God’s purpose to end the regal line of David. Both parts of the nation were taken into captivity: Israel by Assyria, and Judah by Babylonia. On the return from captivity back to the land of Palestine neither line of kings was reinstated. The line of David as kings of God’s people was finished. After the return from captivity the remnant of the nation was administered by the priests.

The prophet Ezekiel also prophesied of this event. *“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are discovered, so that in all your doings your sins do appear; because, I say, that ye are come to remembrance, ye shall be taken with the hand. And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.”* (Ezekiel 21: 24 to 27). Ezekiel added a bit more information. Not only would God overturn, overturn, overturn the line of kings from David (meaning there would be no going back to the previous arrangement), but also the rulership would be held until a worthy successor to David arose and it would be given to him.

Returning to Isaiah, we find that he also, at a later date, prophesied the rise of a worthy King. *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”* (Isaiah 9: 6 and 7).

With that background in mind we can now look at chapter eleven.

*“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:”* (Isaiah 11:1). Jesse was the father of David who was the founder of the line of kings after Saul, that governed God’s people.

That line was cut down, as we saw earlier, but not grubbed out; a stump remained. The stump was able to shoot again, the shoot being represented by the rod and the branch in the verse. The shoot and the branch was Jesus, the one whose right it was, and to whom the Kingdom was to be given.

The reason why it was the stem and root of Jesse, and not David, is that as the founder of the line of kings, David was superior to his descendants. Jesus is also of the line of David (Matthew 22: 41 to 46), but is superior to David, so it is not from the root of David that Jesus arose, but from the source that David also sprang. Jesse, David's father, who was not himself a king, is represented by the stem and root out of which David and the line of kings that descended from him came. That line was cut down, but the stem and root of Jesse remained dormant until the worthy King was able to sprout from it.

*“And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD”* (Isaiah 11:2). The Spirit of the Lord is the Holy Spirit, which was given to Jesus without measure; *“For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.”* (Matthew 4: 16 and 17; John 3:34). The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus with wisdom and understanding, with counsel and might, with knowledge and the fear of God. While Jesus had the Holy Spirit during His first advent on earth, it will be at His second advent, when He takes up His office as King, that the power of the Holy Spirit will be used in ruling the world in righteousness.

*“And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.”* (Isaiah 11:3). By the power of the Spirit Jesus will have complete understanding of people. He won't judge people by what He sees or what He hears, but by what is in people's hearts. This will allow Him to rule with perfect justice and righteousness. (Psalm 96:10).

*“But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”* (Isaiah 11:4). The weapons that Jesus will use in ruling will not be those of physical warfare, but with words and commands from His mouth and lips. *“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* (Hebrews 4:12).

*“And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”* (Isaiah 11:5). During His reign as King on earth Jesus will be both righteous and faithful. His decisions of judgement in governing the

people during the kingdom age will be righteous, with the full authority of God, His actions completely faithful to God's purposes.

The preceding verses (1 to 5) were generally considered to be a prophecy of the righteousness of the governance of Christ's reign on earth during the Kingdom age. The following verses (6 to 9) describe the harmony and peace that will be established for all God's creatures in that time, and exist for ever afterwards.

*"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."* (Isaiah 11:6). Animals that since the expulsion from the garden, and still today, are in conflict with each other will, in the Kingdom, be at peace; not just tolerant of, but live in harmonious co-habitation with each other.

*"And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox."* (Isaiah 11:7). Carnivorous animals, such as the lion, will no longer be so. All of them will have their digestive system changed to allow them to eat the grasses of the field, as grazing animals do today, and as they were created for mankind to care-for and enjoy.

*"And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den."* (Isaiah 11:8). There will be children in the Kingdom. They will be those who died in infancy; they will be resurrected and will be able to grow to be adults in perfect safety.

*"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."* (Isaiah 11:9). The same as children playing in safety, nothing will harm anyone. It will be a Kingdom of peace and harmony. Nothing will hurt or destroy: it will be the time when all people, including those who have not heard the name of Jesus, will come to know Him and learn to worship God.

The remaining verses of the chapter seem to indicate God's intention for the people of earth, both Israel and the gentile nations.

*"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious."* (Isaiah 11:10). As we saw earlier, the line of kings that came from Jesse, beginning with David, was cut down. However, the root remained and in due time was able to sprout again. That sprout was Jesus who will, during the Kingdom, take His rightful place as King in the line of David, and rule perfectly with the help of the joint-heirs (Romans 8:17) and the princes in all the earth (Psalm 45:16), to bring all people to the knowledge of God.



*“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.”* (Isaiah 11:11). From this verse onwards, two lines of thought were expressed by our group. Some understood the passage to be historic, while others considered it to refer to the Kingdom.

Those who understood it to be historic noted that many countries that are mentioned existed at the time of Isaiah. It was into those lands that the people of Israel and Judah had been dispersed. Some of them had returned during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but the nation was scattered again, almost completely, by the Romans in AD 70. A few of them have been returning to Palestine during our lifetime, that is, since Israel was recognised as a nation after World War Two.

In other words, from the historic point of view, the remnant consisted of those Israelites who returned to Canaan after Cyrus allowed them to do so (Isaiah 10: 20 and 21). That gathering from among the nations where they had been dispersed was quite incomplete, while at the same time showing that God would not forsake His people, although they would be abandoned until a better result could be achieved.

Others, who understand these verses to refer to the time of the Kingdom, take the names of the nations of Isaiah’s time to be representative of all nations of the world, out of which God will call His people to participate with Jesus in administering the Kingdom.

From this point of view, this was another prophecy from God through Isaiah. It was a promise that God’s chosen people would be brought together from all the nations of mankind; not only from those surrounding the Israelites in Canaan. Since the promise is of a *“second time to recover the remnant of his people”* (verse 11), the fulfilment of that promise will be achieved when Jesus reigns as the righteous king during the kingdom age, because the promise of the *“recovering of his people”* was given after the promise of the Messiah.

Under the terms of the New Covenant it will be the chosen of spiritual Israel who will be gathered from all around the world. They will include the remnant of fleshly Israel who, during the gospel age, have chosen to accept Jesus’ sacrifice of reconciliation, and those gentiles who also have chosen to serve God through faith in Jesus Christ. They, like Paul, will be granted the reward of the prize of the high calling of God through Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:14).

*“And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”* (Isaiah 11:12). An ensign was a flag, a standard or a

banner, that was held aloft so that the soldiers of the king could see where he was on the battle field and could rally to his side in the battle. Jesus is the rallying point for all God's people. In the Kingdom age, as people learn about God and His saving grace, they will come to Jesus from all parts of the earth.

*“The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.”* (Isaiah 11:13). The one nation of Israel was divided into two after king Solomon. The northern kingdom was here called Ephraim, and the southern kingdom was called Judah. Neither that division of the nation nor the enmity between the two peoples will exist any longer.

*“But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them.”* (Isaiah 11:14). Those who understood this historically considered that this verse referred to a time in the past when Israel invaded and conquered, even if incompletely, the people of those lands that surrounded them. Those who consider these verses to refer to a future time understood the references to nations of Isaiah's time to be representative of all nations in the Kingdom whose people will be conquered by the gospel message being preached throughout the entire world.

*“And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod.”* (Isaiah 11:15). Again those who saw these verses as historic regarded them as relating to events that took place in the past. Those who see the verse as future in the Kingdom understood that this verse refers to God removing all obstacles in the way of the gospel being spread to all people regardless of where they will be on earth.

*“And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.”* (Isaiah 11:16). This verse uses the example of God bringing the nation out of Egypt to the Promised Land. That is how He guided them, preserved them with miracles and led them forward with the leadership of Moses. In the Kingdom there will be a way of righteousness that leads to God so that all people who wish to come to God and to worship Him will be able to follow that path.

Isaiah chapter thirty five also speaks of the Kingdom age, how the planet will be restored to blossom abundantly, how people with disabilities will be made whole. In particular, verse eight of that chapter speaks of the way of holiness. *“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be*

*there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*" (Isaiah 35: 8 to 10). The way of holiness leads to God. As people learn the gospel truth about Jesus and His sacrifice they will progress along that path to perfect knowledge that culminates in righteousness and perfect harmony with God.

## **Question 2**

When the kingdom of God shall be established on earth, where will heaven be?

## **Answer**

In 2 Corinthians 12:2 Paul told of someone who was *"... caught up to the third heaven"*.

From this statement many Bible students understand there to be three heavens. The first is the earth's atmosphere where birds fly and clouds form; the second is the celestial heaven, which is the space where the planets and stars have been placed; and the third heaven is the place where God dwells. This third heaven is the place of spirit beings, just as earth is the place of human beings.

Peter wrote of *"... new heavens and a new earth ..."* (2 Peter 3:13) which will replace *"... the heavens and earth which are now ..."* which, we are told, will be destroyed, although we do not know how they will be destroyed. From God's promise that the earth will remain forever (Genesis 8:22), and since God is everlasting (Psalm 90:2), His dwelling place is also everlasting, it is evident that Peter was writing symbolically about the order of things (Greek: kosmos) on earth; the heavens being the governmental arrangements, and the earth being the earthly or social arrangements, both of which will have to be replaced for the kingdom of God to be set up by Jesus when He returns.

Thus, we understand that the three heavens, as defined above, will remain when the kingdom of God is established on earth. We know the first heaven well; it is part of the planet earth. We also have some understanding of the second heaven which was created to show God's everlasting glory. We do not know anything about the third heaven, except that it is the place where God dwells, and because there is no variableness with God (James 1:17) it will remain so, whether it is a place, or a realm or a state of existence.

## **Question 3**

I watched a documentary about the origin of the cross. It was interesting because groups that I have had contact with, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Servants of Yahoshua (Messianic Jews sect) have teachings against the use of Cross as we know (†).

What must we think or believe about this? The question is because we do not worship the cross as the Catholics and Anglicans do, but we do use some symbols.

### **Answer**

It seemed to us that your enquiry has two aspects.

Firstly, what is the nature and use of the cross?

In their New World version of the Bible the JW's use the term 'torture stake' instead of 'cross'. The Greek word 'stauros' means 'stake', whereas 'cross' comes from the Latin word 'crucem' from which the word 'crucifixion' is derived. The cross of the Bible is traditionally regarded as an upright pole with a cross-bar near the top. It was used for capital punishment, that is, death by crucifixion, by the Romans during the time of Jesus' ministry, and by other nations long before that period.

The cross has been taken as a symbol of adversity because of religious beliefs, and more specifically as a symbol of Christianity. It appears on many churches, as statuary and as a feature in pictorial icons of religious events such as the birth of Jesus. These and other symbols of Christianity such as a cross on a necklace or the stylised fish, are regarded by some as graven images.

Secondly, should we worship the cross?

According to the command in Exodus 20: 1 to 5, God prohibited the Israelites from having any 'graven image' which includes statues and other icons.

We agreed that we do not worship the cross of Christ, but some of our group think it acceptable to use it as a symbol of Christian fellowship. Thus there is a personal choice to be made between acceptance of Christian symbolism and complete renunciation of association with graven images.

The cross no longer exists. Although the cross is used as a symbol of Jesus' sacrifice, it is the sacrifice that is important because the reality of that sacrifice will always be the key element in salvation. The acceptance of iconic symbols may be seen by others as worship of those icons.

### **Question 4a**

What is your understanding about the Heavenly 144,000 class and the earthly class?

### **Answer**

We have not found any use of the word 'class' in the Bible. The term is a fabrication introduced by other Bible students.

However, the number 144,000 is in Revelation 7:4 and Revelation 14: 1 and 3. There are many other places in scripture where numbers are given, and their significance is apparent, thus this large number deserves consideration.

The references indicate that this is the number of individuals who are identified by having the Lamb's *"Father's name written in their foreheads"* (Revelation 14:1). *"They were redeemed from among men"* (Revelation 14:4) and since God provided His Son as the Redeemer, they are the people who God is taking out for his name (Acts 15:14) from among the Gentiles, to be included with the remnant of the Jews who accepted the gospel message (Romans 11:5).

They are the *"little flock"* of Luke 12:32; the *"Israel of God"* of Galatians 6:16; the *"household of God"* (Ephesians 2: 19 and 20), the *"spiritual house"* of 1 Peter 2:5; a spiritual Israel as distinct from the fleshly Israel of the Old Testament.

In Romans 8: 1 to 17 Paul established the case that because of their choice to serve God by obeying Jesus' commands they become the sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ. By striving for the prize of the high calling (or heavenly calling) of God in Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:14) they will gain eternal life promised by God, in the first resurrection (Revelation 20:5), raised as spirit beings, as explained by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: 42 to 46.

There will be a first resurrection (Revelation 20: 5 and 6) for those who will *"reign with him (Christ) a thousand years"* (the 144,000). Thus there will be a second resurrection for the rest of mankind to live on the restored earth. This is confirmed by Jesus' words in John 5: 28 and 29, where He said that the resurrection will have two aspects: a resurrection to life for those who have done good things, and secondly a resurrection to judgement for those who have done wrong. These aspects refer to two sections of mankind, and correlate with the first resurrection of the Israel of God, and with the second resurrection of the great multitude of the rest of mankind.

There are some who believe that the great multitude mentioned in Revelation 7:9 refers to a third group of people who will be raised as spirit beings, but most in our group believe that the great multitude refers to the rest of mankind, because Jesus did not mention a third group to be resurrected.

#### **Question; 4b**

Did Jesus come back in 1914 spiritually and reigning in heaven since?

#### **Answer**

This date is derived from the time prophecies in Daniel which give a broad outline of the time scale of God's plan, and on that basis it is thought that some significant events in Jewish and Christian history have been identified. These include the decree from Cyrus for the Israelites to return to

Canaan (Palestine), Jesus first advent, the rise of the Papacy and the decline of the four world empires.

However, when the disciples asked Jesus to tell them when He would return, He told them that only God knew when that would be (Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32). We noted that all the predictions of the time of Jesus' return made by many people since the idea of His second advent was understood, have been wrong. The most important aspects of believing in Jesus' return are firstly to look for indications that the age is drawing to its close, and secondly that believers are warned to be ready for His return: to be not caught unawares by being engaged in worldly affairs.

Our answer to your question is 'No'. Forty days after the resurrection Jesus was taken up into heaven to be with God. There is some indication that He is exerting, from heaven, some influence on the world of mankind, such as the decline of Papal power, beginning when Napoleon took the Pope captive.

There have been some who think that Jesus has returned as a spirit being, calling that His 'invisible presence'; but He instructed us to observe His memorial supper, annually, until He returns. He will let us know when He comes so that we then will not need to continue that memorial to Him, because when He is present no memorial will be necessary to demonstrate faith in Him.

### **Question 5**

How can Genesis 3:5 and 3:22 be contrasted as that of Genesis 2:17 and 3:4?

### **Answer**

While those verses may be contrasted to each other, by which it seems that there is a disagreement between them, your question may be taken as being about establishing harmony between them. This matter is resolved by taking the verses in the order that Moses wrote them.

Firstly (2:17) God told Adam and Eve that when they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil they would die. This presupposes that they understood what it meant to die; they must have known about death.

Secondly (3:4) Satan told Eve that she would not die. This was a lie.

Thirdly (3:5) Satan told her that she would experience a change in her understanding by learning about good and evil. This was not a lie: it is what God told Adam in the first place. By supporting the lie with the truth, Satan deceived Eve, and she chose to eat of the fruit of the tree that was forbidden.

Fourthly (3:22) God knew that Adam and Eve had disobeyed him by eating the fruit that was forbidden, and he knew that they could live forever if they could eat the fruit of the tree of life.

God prevented Adam and Eve from eating fruit from the tree of life by expelling them from the garden where he had put them.

These verses, even separated from their context, that is, the verses between them, give a straightforward account of what is designated as 'the Fall'. This was the starting point of his plan to have 'a people for his name'.

### **Question 6**

I read the article Ransom Revisited by Brother Brownlow in the New Covenant News No. 140, September 2016. It was very interesting and well done. I have since re-read it another two times. I'm not sure that I have yet grasped his entire thought.

However, I have a few concerns. I can't quite seem to see how the death of one perfect, righteous man (that is, Jesus) could allow for the salvation of billions of humans. That seems rather arbitrary. There needs to be, it seems to me, some mechanism, some rationale, some system, some process to connect the two, by which God's wisdom, His justice and love, are fully satisfied. If such is already in the article, I seem not able to perceive it at this time. The concept of a perfect life for a perfect life has always seemed to provide such a basic mechanism.

However, I appreciate the thought-provoking article which seems to elaborate on the 'spirit' of the ransom (sin-offering) and not so much on the technical details of 'how it works'.

**Answer** (Mervyn Buckmaster sent a response to this query after consultation with Paul Brownlow.)

On the basis of one perfect life for one perfect life, simple logic is that Jesus' sacrifice would save only one disobedient man, supposedly Adam. I agree that God's decision that Jesus' sacrifice would redeem the whole human race was arbitrary. It was God's decision to make and, as the one deciding the ransom, He set that price.

From a human point of view, a ransom usually does not correspond to the value perceived by human standards. The ransom is a redeeming price, or redemptive price, and does not have to correspond to what was lost, or stolen. It seems to me that the translation of 'antilutron' as 'corresponding price' is quite misleading when a more accurate translation is 'redeeming price'. Any correspondence between Adam and Jesus is more superficial than substantial.

It is, again, human nature to look for mechanisms, social and moral, in God's dealings with the peoples of earth, but His ways and thoughts are above ours, as is shown by the early chapters of Hebrews which establish the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice, and reward, to be far above what we could contemplate even as part of God's plan for His creation.

Some of those dealings are explained by types and antitypes, and in this case there may seem to be an imbalance between the life of one sinless man given for the inestimable disobedience of humankind. But the ransom displays God's wisdom, justice and love, which you invoked in your thought that a counterbalance of 'life-for-life' was needed.

On the other hand there is an apparent counterpoise between death coming upon mankind through the disobedience of one man, and life being assured through the resurrection of one man. Adam's disobedience brought the condemnation of death upon all his descendants. His disobedience was not transferred to his descendants. Jesus' sacrifice took all the wrongdoing of humanity out of the way, just as the scapegoat did for the Israelites under the Law Covenant, so that through His sacrifice a fallen race could be redeemed, bought back, for God to continue His dealings with that race.

The analysis of this topic by the author of 'Ransom Revisited' reveals a deeper harmony than that arising from the expectation of correspondence between Adamic death and the promise of life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.



## 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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