

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



No. 155

June 2021

One Lord

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Servant of the Lord

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Living in the Joy of the Lord

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

News and Notes

ONE LORD

by Linton Roe

Many years ago we attended a very enjoyable weekend of fellowship in Perth, at which Ephesians 4:4-5 was the theme text. A number of talks were then based upon this text, including mine, which was entitled 'One Lord'. I would like to share with you some of the things I found out as part of my study of the passage.

Ephesians 4:1-6

*“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — **one Lord**, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (NIV).*

I was asked to focus on “*one Lord*”, in Verse 5, but I find that it often helps me to understand a passage by first looking at its context and background, so I'd like to review some of what we know about the letter to the Ephesians.

Context of Paul's Letter

Ephesus was a leading city in the Roman Empire and the capital of the province of Asia. It was a major trading centre and was particularly famous for its temple and enormous statue of Diana (*Artemis* in Greek). The temple was a colossal marble edifice, which took around 220 years to complete, housed a shrine and statue of Diana, and was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

The Christians in Ephesus were mostly Gentile converts, living in a society where the temple, with its worship of Diana, ruled the religious lives of the general populace. Paul had spent a short time there on his way back to Antioch on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21). Later, on his third missionary journey, he stayed for 3 years (Acts 20:31), working alongside the new Christian community there. It was there that he joined with fellow tent-makers Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:19), having previously met them in Corinth (Acts 18:2).

A number of remarkable things happened during this time in Ephesus. It was there that Paul baptised about twelve followers of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7), who had not been aware that there was a Holy Spirit. It was there that he preached for 3 months in the synagogue and for some time held daily discussions in the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10), so that the gospel was spread throughout Asia. Unusual miracles occurred (Acts 19:11-12), strange events took place (Acts 19:13-16) and sorcerers were converted (Acts 19:17-20). On one occasion the city was in an uproar when the tradesmen, goaded by the silversmith Demetrius, became concerned that the Christian teachings would lead to a loss of business relating to the idol trade and the worship of Diana (Acts 19:23-41).

Before returning to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey Paul gave a moving farewell address to the Ephesian elders at the coastal town of Miletus (Acts 20:13-35). That was the last time he saw them (Acts 20:36-38) unless he visited Ephesus after he was in Rome (compare 1 Timothy 1:3 with 3:14), but if he did, we have no record of the event.

Unity a Theme of the Letter

Most commentators think that the Epistle to the Ephesians was one of Paul's earlier letters, written from his home prison in Rome, possibly around AD 60.

The tone of the letter is positive throughout, and it seems that Paul was writing to encourage and commend his readers, and possibly to further expand their horizons. We know that the Ephesian church was later criticised in Revelation Chapter 2 for leaving its first love, and it may be that Paul had an inkling of that future, as love and unity are two of the strong themes of the letter.

In Chapters 1 to 3, Paul spent a great deal of time building up this picture of Christian unity and stating clearly that the mystery of the gospel had been revealed to him, and subsequently to the Ephesians. That mystery was, as he explained in Ephesians 3:6; *"... that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."*

These words lead us nicely into our passage of study, in Chapter 4, where Paul exhorted the brethren to *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit"* (Ephesians 4:3). This surely is one of his chief goals in writing to the Ephesians. He wished to encourage them all to work hard at maintaining unity.

That concludes my brief overview of the context of the letter. Let's now return to the seven points of unity mentioned at the start of Ephesians Chapter 4.

There is One ...

“There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. It seems to me that Paul was spelling out seven of the basic doctrinal ingredients for maintaining unity in the fledgling church. Having one Lord is the fourth of these features.

Definition

The word “*Lord*”, according to Strong's Concordance, is the Greek word 'kurios' (koo-ree-os), which signifies 'he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has power of deciding; master, lord'. In the Old Testament, Moses and tribal leaders were referred to as lords, as a mark of respect for their positions. In the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 8:4–6 states that there are many lords and many gods. So, in simple terms, a lord is one who has power, authority or mastery over others.

So, who is the “*one Lord*” referred to in Ephesians Chapter 4? To me the context makes it clear that it is Jesus. I believe that we have three good reasons to make this claim. Firstly, Paul identified Jesus as “*our Lord*”, in Chapter 3:10-11;

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Secondly, the word “*Lord*” is contrasted with “*one God and Father*” in this passage: “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father ...*” (verses 5 and 6). Logic would suggest to me that these cannot be referring to the same person.

Thirdly, the passage from 1 Corinthians 8, mentioned before, clarifies that, although there are many lords, for Christians “... *there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live*”.

Jesus' Lordship Demonstrated

The apostle John showed that Jesus acknowledged his lordship during his first advent. John 13:13-15 gives us the account:

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus is shown to be the mightiest of all lords, with the exception of God. Twice in Revelation he is referred to as the *“King of kings and Lord of lords”* (Revelation 19:16 and 17:14). Romans 14:9 further shows us that Christ is now also Lord both of the dead and of the living.

By preaching Jesus as the *“one Lord”*, Paul was encouraging his readers to become unified under their Lord’s leadership. The Scriptures give us evidence of what can occur when people have divided loyalties or try to serve more than one master.

Jesus told a parable in the Gospels specifically to illustrate that no man can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13). Paul criticised the Corinthian brethren for following leaders other than Christ, as we read in 1 Corinthians 1:12–13;

“One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ’. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?”

So, we see that Jesus, the disciples and the apostles were all united in acknowledging that Jesus of Nazareth was this *“one Lord”*, and that following him alone was essential for salvation and unity.

How Does “One Lord” Imply Unity?

Having established that the *“one Lord”* is our Lord Jesus, we might ask: ‘In what way was having *“one Lord”* important to the Ephesian brethren for their unity?’ I would suggest that there are a number of important reasons.

Firstly, many of the Ephesian Christians had come out of polytheism, where many gods might have been worshipped by a family, or where different households might have had different patron deities. Having many gods responsible for the health and welfare of a community could

lead to great insecurity in relations, I would suggest, as one man might act in a way which he believed was right, to appease one god, while another might act in a totally different way, possibly to the detriment of the first. This type of instability was seen when the silversmiths instigated the riot mentioned earlier (Acts 19:27).

Secondly, Paul had shown the Gentile believers that before they had been accepted into the Christian Church, they had been without Christ and were therefore ineligible for unity in the family of the one and only God; *“remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world”* (Ephesians 2:12).

It was only through the knowledge and saving work of their one Lord that they now had this marvellous opportunity of citizenship, which was offered freely to them, if they accepted the Gospel by faith. With the offer of citizenship came their inclusion into the unity of the *“one body”*. In other words, unity was not possible until one came who could unify all, both Jews and Gentiles, in a new family of faith.

Thirdly, the Gospels point out that unity is achieved not only through Christ’s work, but also through our understanding and acceptance of that work. Like the Ephesian brethren, we must acknowledge Jesus as our *“one Lord”*, for, as Petersaaid, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

Again, in Romans 10:10-13, Paul showed that belief and confession go hand in hand when receiving salvation and being united in one body;

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame’. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Practical Aspects

What does all this discussion about having one Lord and striving for unity mean for us? I would like to pose the following questions. I ask them of myself, but you might like to consider how you would answer them too.

Some of these questions could provide lengthy discussion, but I will try to make a comment on my experience and give a verse of encouragement in answer to each one.

Who do I hold in my heart as Lord?

I definitely think of Jesus as my Lord, my example, and my Saviour. I see God as my Heavenly Father and the originator of all things, but his Son as my leader and forerunner in the faith. Hebrews 12:2-3 has an excellent goal for us; *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart”*.

Do any worldly lords (for example employers, politicians, VIPs, teachers, mentors, advisers, sports coaches and so on) detract from my relationship with Christ?

My answer to this question is, unfortunately, ‘Yes’. Although I know what I should do, I find that I am reluctant to displease other people, and often have trouble keeping different aspects of my life in balance. I should always ask myself the question ‘What might Jesus do in a similar situation?’ to try to react in a Christian way. Jesus once encouraged his disciples in their struggles with the world in this way; *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

Do I allow someone else to lead my thinking?

I think I would answer this question with both ‘Yes’ and ‘No’. Yes, in the sense that we all have to have a starting point for our thinking, and I see the influence of my family, my brethren and my friends on my beliefs. No, in the sense that, as I get older, I find myself more able to critically analyse different opinions and then make up my own mind about which ones I find most concordant with Scripture. My personal challenge is to keep demonstrating love to others after we’ve ‘agreed to disagree’.

Paul praised the Bereans for their constant striving for truth (Acts 17:11), and encouraged the brethren at Thessalonica to *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”* (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Do I look to a teacher, counsellor, priest, parent, elder or friend for my own spiritual direction and would God be pleased with that?

Let me be clear about this question. What I mean is, do I accept what someone else has said or written without proving it for myself? I think that I would generally answer 'No'. Probably my education and training in science has made me more critical of unsubstantiated claims than I was earlier in my life. I do read the works of commentators and find them valuable, but I always see them as the works of human beings, and therefore fallible. When I hear an opinion or point of view, I try to ask myself, 'Says what Scripture?' I certainly value the wisdom, suggestions and advice which I receive from people but I know that we all fail.

The second part of the question is hypothetical: would God be pleased if I did look to others? I will simply say that I need to do my best to work out my salvation, and let others answer the question for themselves. We know that even the Spirit-inspired apostles had their disagreements. One case in point was when Paul criticised Peter *"to his face"* on the issue of separating himself from Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-16).

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul offered some sage advice to the younger man about guarding his own understandings; *"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers"* (1 Timothy 4:16).

How can I come to my own understandings of Scripture while still maintaining unity with my brethren?

My personal response to this question is that I should try to separate in my mind love of a person from the doctrines the person believes to be true. Note the word 'should' here. How many of us can actually separate what a person believes from their character and behaviour? It seems to me that one tends to dictate the other.

However, 1 Corinthians 13 tells me clearly that, even if I *"can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge"* (1 Corinthians 13:2) yet don't have love, then I am nothing. So, I try to ask questions of my friends and brethren to clarify their, and my, beliefs, rather than criticise them as people. Examples might be: 'How do you understand this Scripture?' or 'How can we harmonise that thought with this Scripture?' or 'What do you think about that idea?', rather than questions like 'Why do you say that?', 'How can you justify that?' or 'Where did you get that idea from?', which tend to be a little more personal.

Does my belief in Jesus as “one Lord” lead me to feel a sense of unity with other Christians?

Generally speaking, yes. I enjoy speaking with other Christians because I find that the opportunities to do so are few and far between. On the other hand, I find it disappointing that discussions with many Christians often turn to the trinity or other areas of doctrinal difference, which tends to make me feel a lack of unity.

Ideally, I would like to be able to concentrate on the wonderful joys of the Christian faith and thus feel more unified with my fellow Christians of all persuasions. This is not to ignore important issues of difference, but simply to try to focus on building unity as the initial step.

Perhaps we can make it a goal to speak to others of things which edify as a first priority in maintaining peace and unity with them. Paul had a similar message in Romans 12:18; *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me summarise some of the main points I’ve covered:

- The Ephesian brethren were exhorted to love one another and be united in all things under “one Lord”.
- A lord is a person who has power, authority or mastery over others.
- The “one Lord” spoken of in Ephesians 4:6 is Jesus Christ.
- Jesus acknowledged that he was the Teacher and Lord of the disciples.
- Having one Lord is important for maintaining unity amongst brethren.
- Setting up other lords leads to disharmony and conflict.
- Acceptance of Jesus as our “one Lord” is what brings us salvation and citizenship in God’s family, regardless of our earthly heritage.
- The Scriptures provide advice to help us with a range of practical questions.
- They exhort us to do our best to maintain unity with our brethren and our neighbours in the broader sense.
- We will perhaps never be completely unified in thought, word or deed in this age, but we can be unified in our desire to serve our one Lord to the best of our abilities.

May God bless you in your endeavours to serve him through the Lord Jesus Christ.



SERVANT OF THE LORD

by Russell Collins

Introduction

The book written by Obadiah, who is regarded as one of the minor prophets, has just twenty-one verses. The time when Obadiah prophesied is not known for certain. It could have been about 840 BC when the Philistines and Arabians invaded Jerusalem during the reign of Jehoram (848-841 BC) as recorded in 2 Kings chapters 24 and 25, at about the time of Elisha. It may have been during the attacks on Jerusalem by the Babylonians which began about 605 BC, which would have made him a contemporary of Jeremiah. The similarity of the words in Joel 3:3-6 with those in Obadiah 11 and 12 seem to favour the earlier date for Obadiah's prophecy, although the similarity of the words in Jeremiah 49:7-22 with those in Obadiah 1-9 may favour the later date.

The name 'Obadiah' means 'servant of the Lord', that is, 'Servant of Yahweh'. Neither his father's name nor his place of birth is given.

The book of Obadiah begins with the words, "*The vision of Obadiah*". The term "*vision*" conveys something seen by the mind, including what is also heard in connection with what is seen. Nearly all images seen in visions in the scriptures are of events future from the time they were given, and accompanied by spoken words. Sometimes there are even conversations by the characters seen in the visions and the ones to whom the visions were given, as in Daniel 12:5-9 and Revelation 7:13-17.

The vision given to Obadiah seems to have been a revelation by means of hearing rather than sight, but the description is so clear that there is no difficulty in calling up mental pictures of the conditions and punishments foretold by the Lord and recorded by Obadiah.

Theme

The theme of Obadiah's prophecy is the judgment and destruction of the people of Edom because of their pride in rejoicing over the misfortunes that came upon Jerusalem and the Israelites, and the Edomites' active participation in the sacking of the city. Most of God's prophets were sent to warn the nation of Israel, but in Obadiah's case, and also in Jonah's, their messages were intended principally for the Gentile nations neighbouring Israel.

Historical Information

The inhabitants of Edom were descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother, and were in constant conflict with the descendants of Jacob, the people of Israel, God's chosen people. The Edomites rejected Moses' request to pass through their land (Numbers 20:14-20), they opposed King Saul (1 Samuel 14:47), they fought against David (1 Kings 11:14-17), opposed Solomon (1 Kings 11:14-25), and Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:22), and rebelled against Jehoram (2 Chronicles 21:8). From the thirteenth to the sixth centuries BC they settled in Mount Seir, a mountainous region south of the Dead Sea, with their capital at Sela, later called Petra. The terrain is very rugged, so that Petra can be reached only through a narrow canyon enclosed by towering mountain walls thirty to forty metres (100 to 150 feet) high. During the fifth century BC the Nabatasans drove the Edomites from their territory and forced them to withdraw to Idumea in southern Palestine. Herod the Great was an Edomite.

Outline of Obadiah's Prophecy

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|-----------------------------|---------------|
| 1. The Doom of Edom | verses 1-9. |
| 2. The Denunciation of Edom | verses 10-14. |
| 3. The Destruction of Edom | verses 15-21. |

COMMENTARY

The Origins of Edom

The name 'Edom' means 'red' (Strong's #123), and is a derivative of the word 'adam' (ruddy). Esau was called 'Edom' after he preferred the red pottage to his birthright, and the region occupied by his descendants has been called 'Edom' (Genesis 25:25,30).

Although Esau lost his birthright and inheritance, he still managed to prosper. He threatened to kill Jacob, but Jacob fled, leaving everything behind. When Jacob eventually returned to Canaan, Esau in turn departed from the land. Both were by then wealthy with extensive flocks and herds, and thus could not occupy the same territory. Esau had married idolatrous daughters of the land, thus showing his disregard and lack of faith in the true God. Esau moved with his family and possessions to Mount Seir, and there founded a great and warlike nation (Genesis 27; 36:1-43,46). Esau's descendants, the Edomites, were firmly established when Moses led the children of Israel through the wilderness, and, although they were related by family origin and descent, prejudice against Israel was so strong that they refused to allow Moses and the people to shorten their journey by passing through their land (Numbers 20:14-21).

The Territory of Edom

Since neither Edom, Moab nor Ammon would allow the Israelites to pass through their lands, Moses was obliged to go around those countries. Later Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan at Jericho. The territory then known as Mount Seir extended westwards along the eastern side of the Arabah to the Dead Sea, while its eastern border was formed by the mountains leading to the Arabian plateau. The territory extended south to the Elanitic gulf, an arm of the Red Sea, its port being Ezion-geber.

The topography of the country supports the prophet's description, "*You who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights*" (verse 3), "*and make your nest among the stars*" (verse 4). Edom's fortresses were almost inaccessible, and from them the Edomites ravaged the surrounding countries. They formed confederacies with other idolatrous tribes against Israel, joined Nebuchadnezzar's forces in the invasion of Judah, made a spoil of Jerusalem, and denied fugitives escape routes to Egypt or elsewhere. The Edomites also despoiled the land of Judah during the Babylonian captivity, and took every advantage of the unsettled conditions of the land under the governors appointed by Babylonia.

Prophecies of God's Judgment

But Edom's fortresses were not secure against God's judgments. His reasons for punishing Edom are recited by Obadiah in verses 10 to 14. God permitted the Edomites to carry out their works of hatred against his people, and for a time they prospered. Other prophets, notably Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke against Edom, and Obadiah expressed the whole issue most concisely in verse 15, "*As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head*". The Edomites reckoned without God in their pride and hardness of heart toward their ancestral brother Jacob.

Obadiah's prophecy is a clear confirmation of God's foreknowledge, for in this vision is predicted what no human being could foresee. "*There will be no survivors from the house of Esau. The LORD has spoken*" (verse 18). The statement is unqualified. The whole house of Esau would be destroyed, "*house*" meaning descendants. The LORD accomplished the destruction of Esau in a less spectacular manner than the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but the destruction was none the less complete.

The prophet Ezekiel was also inspired to pronounce judgement against Mount Seir or Edom, and provided more detail. This was during the Babylonian captivity, when the Edomites rejoiced over Israel's misfortunes.

“The word of the LORD came to me: ‘Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, prophesy against it and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you and make you a desolate waste. I will turn your towns into ruins and you will be desolate. Then you will know that I am the LORD. Because you harbored an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over to the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax, therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I will give you over to bloodshed and it will pursue you. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you. I will make Mount Seir a desolate waste and cut off from it all who come and go. I will fill your mountains with the slain; those killed by the sword will fall on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines. I will make you desolate forever; your towns will not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the LORD. Because you have said, ‘These two nations and countries will be ours and we will take possession of them’, even though I the LORD was there.’ ” (Ezekiel 35:1-10).

The attitude of the Edomites was contrary to God’s designs, as shown by the words *“You boasted against me and spoke against me without restraint, and I heard it. ... You will be desolate, O Mount Seir, you and all of Edom”* (Ezekiel 35:11-15).

The means God used for punishing the Edomites was the invasion by the Scythian hordes of the north, tribes of horsemen under the leadership of Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Those wild tribes took advantage of Nebuchadnezzar’s return to Babylon, leaving Palestine to be weakly ruled by governors. Those tribes from the north were used by God to punish those nations which had moved in and taken possession of the land when the Israelites were taken away captive. The Edomites joined in taking advantage of the Israelites’ deportation, and their attitude is described in Ezekiel 36:2; *“Aha, the ancient heights have become our possession”*.

The LORD used Gog and his hordes to punish and destroy Edom, then subsequently used the forces of the Medes and Persians under Cyrus and Darius to push back the northern hordes when the time came for the Jews to be restored to their own land. The prophecies against Gog are to be found in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39. The application of these prophetic words is not future from our day, as some believe, but are fulfilled in the military operations of Cyrus and Darius, which prepared the way for the return of the Jews to Palestine by driving out the northern hordes and punishing the Edomites.

The symbolism of verse 16 of Obadiah needs some explanation. *“Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been.”*

These prophetic words are spoken against Edom. Jerusalem was God’s *“holy hill”*, for it had Mount Zion, the fortress, and Mount Moriah, on which the temple stood, the place of God’s presence, which was therefore sacred and holy.

Verse 16 seems to imply drinking to excess and consequent drunkenness, which is frequently used in scripture in a symbolic or figurative sense, as in Isaiah 28:1,3,7-8; and in Revelation 17:2,6 and 18:3. These passages illustrate how drunkenness is used to express a condition of intoxication beyond reasoning, or a cloudy and confused state of mind, and sometimes also a state of complete apathy.

Edom indulged in, as it were, a drunken feast when they invaded Judea, either in association with Nebuchadnezzar or by simply joining in the desolation when they saw what was happening. They helped themselves to the full, desecrating Jerusalem and slaying the inhabitants. Later, when Nebuchadnezzar’s generals and the main forces had departed, they continued to ‘drink up’ whatever good things remained.

But, the LORD said, in effect, ‘Edom will not be the only one to drink upon my holy mountain. Edom will be superseded, and all the heathen (a reference to Gog and his armies spoken of by Ezekiel) shall drink there’.

During the first years of the Babylonian captivity Judea had not been completely desolated. Judea was a fertile, well-cultivated country, and could withstand much plundering treatment. But Edom and Moab and other neighbours of Judea would be driven out by the Scythian invaders from the north, and these new invaders would *“drink continually, they will drink and drink”*, and become so drunk with their conquest of the wonderful country of Judea that they would become *“as if they had never been”*. These words describe the condition of an extremely intoxicated person; confused and muddled and then so sound asleep that he sees, hears and knows nothing.

This drunkenness on the part of the northern invaders prevented them from realizing that another world empire, the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, had superseded Babylon, and that Darius was even then on his way with a conquering army. So the invaders perished on the mountains of Israel and Edom in a great slaughter by the forces of Darius (Ezekiel 38:17-23; 39:1-16).

Application of the Prophecies

The prophecies from Obadiah 17 to 21, inclusive, are sometimes interpreted by commentators as a prediction of events to occur after our own time when the Jews are finally established in their ancestral land. Some prophecies do clearly refer to the restoration of the Jews to their own land, probably as individuals or families rather than as a coherent nation, to be *“no more pulled up”* as in Amos 9:14-15, but Obadiah’s prophecy does not seem to reach so far into the future. Its fulfilment was reached rather more clearly by the return of the Jews from Babylon under Zerubbabel and other leaders following the decree issued by Cyrus authorising them to rebuild their cities and re-occupy the land under government patronage.

Obadiah 17: *“But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance”.*

Here was a contrast between God’s dealings with Edom and the fulfilment of his promise through Jeremiah to bring his people back after seventy years of captivity. The deliverance *“on Mount Zion”*, carried out by Cyrus and Darius, was a deliverance in the sense that Zion symbolised God’s sovereignty over Israel. Zion was called the stronghold or fortress of David, but it was a symbol of God’s power because David *“... sat on the throne of the LORD”* (1 Chronicles 29:23), God being the real ruler of Israel and Judah. The people of Judah were to return to their own land, but God declared in verse 18 that *“there will be no survivors from the house of Esau”*, meaning the complete destruction of Edom and its people.

In verse 19, *“People from the Negev”* (*“they of the south”*; KJV) seems to be a reference to Judah, which was the southern kingdom of Palestine. Ezra told of the fulfilment of this prediction, and how the people of the captivity on their return were settled, every person as nearly as possible in the part of the country to which his or her tribe had belonged. The word *“Sephadar”* in verse 20 is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible and is un-identified. It seems to be a reference to the place or city at which the Jewish captives were located by their Babylonian masters from where they returned to their own cities as foretold in Jeremiah 32:6-15,27,43-44; and Ezra 2:64-70; 3:1.

Obadiah 21: *“Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD’s”.*

A deliverer is one who brings freedom or gives needed assistance. Obadiah's prophecy of deliverers on Mount Zion was an assurance that when the time came for the Jews to be brought back from Babylon to their own land, God would bring in deliverers who would achieve their release, conduct them back to their own land and establish them there. These deliverers included the chief of the leaders of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and the Levites who petitioned the king, Zerubbabel, the leader of the returning expedition, Joshua the high priest, and later Nehemiah who came as a governor appointed by Artaxerxes. All of these were godly men who returned and guided the destinies of the Jews as they rebuilt the temple and settled in their own land. *"And the kingdom will be the LORD's"* was a prediction that these deliverers were to serve under God, and that the people restored to Judah and Jerusalem would be recognised by God as his people at that time. These developments seem to be the fulfilment of Obadiah's prophecy, rather than the extension of his prophecy into events to occur after our own time involving the current nation of Israel.

There are also further predictions that Mount Seir or Edom should become desolate. In Ezekiel 35:7,9,14-15, Jeremiah 49:7-22; and Isaiah 34:1-17 the desolation of Edom is described in particularly strong language. Malachi, who prophesied some hundreds of years after Obadiah, also testified against Edom in Malachi 1:2-4. The country today remains a testimony to God's prophets, a scene of desolation, bare hills, a few remnants of temples and tombs, ancient deserted cliff dwellings, and ruins covered in brambles and inhabited by wild creatures.

Some Lessons for Us

Of what relevance to us are Obadiah's prophecies of the doom and desolation of Edom? First of all there is the verification of historical facts of the existence of countries and cities named in the prophecies. Secondly, to Christians nowadays, everything in the Bible is important that contributes to further knowledge of God and of his dealings with people and nations, for by these dealings we are given more understanding of God's character, his methods of reasoning, his patience with and his care for his people. Thirdly, Obadiah's prophecies are helpful because they give us confirmation of God's foreknowledge, for in the visions given is predicted what no human being could foresee; the complete destruction of the house of Esau. Fourthly, the judgment of Edom is, like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, an example of what will happen to ungodly people, as Peter tells us in 2 Peter 2:6-9. False teachers introducing destructive heresies will bring swift destruction on

themselves (2 Peter 2:1). God is patient, and will always give people time to repent, but if they persist wilfully and do not repent, destruction will be swift and thorough when it comes.

In the fifth instance Esau is held up in the New Testament as an example of a personal disposition to be guarded against. The apostle wrote in Hebrews 12:16-17; *“See that no one ... is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the eldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit his blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears”*.

The lesson here for us is not to neglect the divine call to joint-heirship with Jesus Christ, and not to be led astray by the world’s allurements and amusements, and what is often called ‘the good life’ of eating, drinking and making merry as seen in worldly people’s lives. We cannot have it both ways (Matthew 6:24). We are called to a life of dedication and self-denial to prepare us for our contribution to the great blessings of the age to come, the Kingdom of God. We have responded to the call from God, the judge of all men, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant who has told us what he expects of us. Therefore *“let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire”* (Hebrews 12:22-29).

Every member of the true *“Israel of God”* (Galatians 6:16) should possess the spiritual mind, with the affections set on those most valuable things above, where Jesus is, for where our treasure is, there will our heart be also (Colossians 3:1-3; Matthew 6:21).



LIVING IN THE JOY OF THE LORD

Devotion given by Lynne Roe

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Aussies are great complainers, and I must put myself in that category too. We can always find something to moan about: the weather, the price of petrol, working conditions, the next-door-neighbours, mismanagement by all levels of government. In the latter instance, we could usually do a better job ourselves — or so we think! But could we really? Can we possibly understand or work out all the ramifications and consequences of our ‘good ideas’ for running the country? I suspect that our government doesn’t either, but there is one who does, the only being who knows the end from the beginning — our creator and Heavenly Father.

At present our globe is beset by a great many crises, from wars and violence to extreme weather events and the COVID-19 pandemic. Isn’t it a relief to know that it’s not up to us to fix all the world’s problems, but that they will all be resolved by our all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving God? Sometimes, therefore, we need to step back and say “I don’t know when you’ll fix it, or how you’ll fix it, but I know that one day, God, you **will** fix it, so please give me the strength and patience to cope with it now”.

We are so lucky to live in Australia, and most of the time we take it for granted. People who struggle just to find food or to avoid the warfare around them don’t have time to worry about how often the lawn needs mowing, or to lament over a garden wilted and browned off by the drought. Because we already have all the necessities of life, we start to worry over the luxuries we would like to have, and I’m definitely guilty of this too! But while we know that there will always be people in this world who are physically worse off than we are, as well as people who are financially better off than ourselves, spiritually, as Christians we are amongst the richest people on this planet.

As we read earlier in Isaiah, Christ has come *“to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners ... to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”* So, let’s try and act in a manner appropriate for those who have received these wondrous gifts. Let’s make a conscious effort to put on our crown of beauty, our oil of gladness and our garment of praise each day — to put aside our earthly worries and live in the joy of the Lord.



Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 6:1-3

- 1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,**
- 2 Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.**
- 3 And this will we do, if God permit.**

By learning, remembering and applying the truth, the believer should “... go on unto perfection ...” that is, maturity (verse 1) and not have to spend any effort to re-make the foundation of belief.

The principles of doctrine are defined here as repentance from dead works, faith toward God, baptisms, laying-on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement.

While baptisms were mentioned first, it was noted that John the Baptist called for people to repent before he baptised them. The Diaglott has “*reformation*” in place of repentance, but in either sense a change has to take place; from “*dead works*” which are probably the works of the Law. The NIV has “*acts that lead to death*”, its footnote suggesting “*from useless rituals*”; which include all evil deeds. Galatians 5:19-21 identifies these sinful activities as “*works of the flesh*”, which should be replaced in the behaviour of the believer by “*the fruit of the spirit*” (Galatians 5:22).

Thus, the believers were first baptised into obeying John, but after Jesus came, they were baptised into obeying him (Acts 19:3-5). Therefore, baptism is the sign of the change or reformation of mind and heart within the believer, so that repentance follows belief into Jesus; and that belief is based upon faith in the sacrifice which he gave (verse 1). Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction that God’s promises will be fulfilled (Hebrews 11:1).

There is no specific reference to baptism in the Old Testament, and the reference by Paul to the Israelites passing through the Red Sea as baptism (1 Corinthians 10:2) is symbolic; whereas Christian baptism has to be total immersion in water of the individual, again symbolic of the inward change.

In verse 2 the Greek word for “*baptisms*” has a different ending (perhaps the plural) from that in Ephesians 4:5 which refers to “*One Lord, one faith, one baptism*” (singular). The plural may indicate that it concerns the ceremonial washings of the Law Covenant described in Numbers 19:6-7. Those washings involved the ashes of a red heifer mixed with water, and referred to in Hebrews 9:10, the believer being freed from them by baptism into Jesus.

Apart from the washings of the Jewish Law, verse 2 states that there is “... *the doctrine* (singular) *of baptisms* ... (plural)” and it was found that there are also four baptisms described in the New Testament:

1. John’s baptism to repentance;
2. baptism into Jesus;
both being immersion in water;
3. baptism with the miraculous holy spirit which was for the apostles (Acts 1:5 and 11:16);
4. baptism by fire (Matthew 3:11).
It was thought that the fire referred to Christian zeal or perhaps the means of purification from, or destruction of false doctrine and pagan ideas.

Of these four baptisms, the baptism by the holy spirit and by fire may be the same occurrence, thus leaving three baptisms. However, according to Ephesians 4:5 there is only one baptism, and that is the baptism by water as the seal of committing of one’s obedience to Jesus’ commands.

There were two aspects of baptism by the holy spirit, each different for different people according to God’s purpose with them. Firstly, the miraculous holy spirit given to the apostles, and secondly the passive transfer, upon request (John 14:13,26) of the holy spirit that works in the believer to strengthen faith and give comfort.

It was suggested that zeal, that is, baptism by fire, resulted from the influence of the holy spirit. Also, that belief and baptism into Jesus followed from the effect of the holy spirit, because immersion in water was the outward sign of, or witness to, the inner change, the reformation, or repentance of verse 1. The holy spirit is also the seal of the actual change which must occur before the rite of physical baptism can be undertaken sincerely. Ephesians 1:13 indicates that “... *after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy spirit of promise*”.

The matter of purifying, that is, ceremonial washings is mentioned in John 3:25-26. Under the Law Covenant purifying made the Israelites ceremonially clean, but they were not necessarily cleansed spiritually; in their hearts and minds. The need for repeated washings should have made them aware of the necessity for inner, spiritual cleansing. Thus, Christian baptism is different from ceremonial washings because it is the witness to that inner change of cleansing by faith. Romans 6:3-8 shows how baptism into Jesus is acceptance of his sacrifice, cleansing from the consequence of disobedience and accepting the privilege to "... *walk in newness of life*" (Romans 6:4).

In verse 2 "*baptisms*" is followed by the "*laying on of hands*". In many instances this is another symbolic act. For example, the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh by Jacob placing his hands on their heads in Genesis 48:14, and the placing of the sins and iniquities of the Israelites onto the scapegoat by the high priest laying his hands onto the head of the goat, in Leviticus 16:21. Also, the transfer of authority to Joshua by Moses laying his hands on him in Numbers 27:22-23.

In the New Testament the laying on of hands by Jesus was more than symbolic because the act healed the sick and the maimed by his doing so (Mark 6:5). Also, the apostles conferred the holy spirit by the laying on of hands to some who had already been baptised (Acts 8:14-17). The act was also used to authorise some of the disciples in Jerusalem to "*serve tables*" so that the apostles could be free to continue their teaching (Acts 6:2-6). The apostles themselves could also perform miracles of healing by the laying on of hands (Acts 5:12), but there appears to be no directive that the practice was to continue beyond their activities.

The act of laying on of hands as recorded in some of the New Testament miracles was also symbolic because it was not necessary in all of them. For example, not with the wine at the wedding in Cana, nor for the raising of Lazarus. Also, with Paul, in that handkerchiefs or aprons from him cured diseases and banished evil spirits from those afflicted (Acts 19:11-12). And when Jesus appeared to the disciples after the resurrection and gave them the holy spirit by breathing on them (John 20:22) which was before Pentecost.

In general terms the laying on of hands was used to confer special benefits, including the power to perform miracles, and establishing the authority of positions in the congregations. Also, the act was to increase

the number of people recognised as serving the members of the Christian congregations, by keeping order among them and allowing the apostles to continue the promulgation of the gospel message.

And, according to 1 Timothy 5:22, it was not to be done suddenly. Furthermore, it was also to be a comforting gesture, just as a kind and gentle touch is used today to express sympathy and support for someone in need.

The next one of the principles of the doctrines of Christ, that is, from Jesus, not about him, was "*the resurrection of the dead*" (verse 2). Resurrection is a standing up again from death, which is the state of non-existence, and is unique to the Christian gospel message. No other religion has the promise of a resurrection, and not all the Jews believed in a resurrection. John 5:26-29 explains that there will be a resurrection to life and a resurrection to judgement. And 1 Corinthians 15:44 reveals that resurrection for some will be as spirit beings and thus to a heavenly reward, whereas for others resurrection will be as human beings for life on the restored earth.

Jesus is the first of the resurrection to spirit inheritance (1 Corinthians 15:20) which only came through his sacrifice and is only for those who are established as his, through the mercy of God promised in the New Covenant. Those who died before the ransom was paid, that is, those in the ages before the gospel age, and those who do not make their calling and election sure during the gospel age, will be raised as human beings during the kingdom age.

The incorrect teaching of Christendom, that at death an immortal soul goes to heaven, is a consequence of Satan's original lie that man would not die upon disobedience to God's command, the idea of a soul being imported from pagan religions.

The next topic of chapter 6 verse 2 is "*eternal judgement*". The Greek word for "*eternal*" may mean 'age-long' or 'without beginning or end'. As a principle of the doctrine of Christ, the latter meaning would be appropriate, in that any judgement made by Jesus would stand forever. However, an 'age-long' judgement could refer to the judgement carried out during the kingdom age. There are two Greek words for 'judgement'. In verse 2 (krima) it has the sense of a process of assessment with a verdict, so 'age-long' seems to be the understanding required there.

Another case in Romans 8:1, 'condemnation' (katakrima) has the sense of a verdict against and the passing of sentence.

As servants under the Mosaic law, the Hebrews understood the responsibilities of a judge from the records of the Old Testament judges, who taught the Israelites the practice of the law, made assessments in cases of civil dispute, and made assessment of and passed sentence in criminal cases. Paul named Jesus as the righteous judge (2 Timothy 4:8), and as the supreme judge of the kingdom age (2 Timothy 4:1).

In previous studies judgement has been found to involve three aspects: firstly, assessment in order to reach a verdict; secondly, the passing of a sentence: and thirdly, the execution of the sentence, either as promotion or punishment. For the believer during the gospel age, judgement is the life-long process of assessment, at the end of which there will be a verdict that will be everlasting; an eternal judgement. Under the terms of the New Covenant the judgement is for each individual, "... *every man in his own order*" according to 1 Corinthians 15:23.

During the discussion of "*eternal judgement*" of verse 2 the thought was expressed that it may mean the second death of Revelation 2:11. But verse 6 is about renewal unto repentance, not about death. Also, in that verse the word "*seeing*" is rendered in other versions as "*while*" or "*as long as*". From this it was suggested that repentance was impossible while Jesus' sacrifice was ignored, and that repentance could be renewed upon returning to faith. James 5:19-20 indicates that a believer who convinces anyone of the error of falling away from the truth will save that one from death. And 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 directs that anyone guilty of fornication should be excluded from the congregation, but 2 Corinthians 2:5-7 indicates that if anyone who has been punished for misbehaviour (perhaps the same guilty one) and repents, then comfort and forgiveness should be offered.

From verse 3 it seems that Paul wanted to leave the principles and go on to maturity or more important matters (verse 1) if it was God's will, as though the principles just mentioned in verses 1 and 2 are as the milk of the word of God. He was earnest in teaching them the meat of the word because he was a chosen vessel unto the Lord, and thus it was God's will that he do so.



NEWS AND NOTES

Sunday Meetings

We have recommenced face-to-face meetings on Sunday mornings (always subject to current government coronavirus restrictions) and continue to offer a Zoom connection for those unable to attend in person. We aim to intersperse weekly Bible studies with talks and other presentations every few weeks. All interested persons are welcome, so please contact info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au for details or the meeting link if you would like to join us.

Autumn Conference

Once again we made the difficult decision to postpone our annual autumn conference at the Foothills Conference Centre in Mooroolbark and have rebooked the centre for Friday 22 – Sunday 24 April 2022. Please reserve these dates in your diaries. More information will be provided closer to the date once we are certain that we will be able to proceed. We have offered those who were scheduled to speak at our 2020 conference the opportunity to present their thoughts at our regular Sunday meetings throughout this year. Please contact us at info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au if you would like to be advised of our service program.



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 the members of the group, and readers are requested to heed the words: ***“Prove all things”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:21).



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