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Pentecost:

The Voice of the Spirit of Truth

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Peace on Earth

and Goodwill toward Men

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The Christian Spirit

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

desolate” - Matt. 23:28), yet the hope of the Kingdom of God continued to pertain exclusively to the descendants of Jacob for some time afterward. Why?

I believe part of the answer is contained in Paul’s emotional reference in Romans 9 to . . .

Rom. 9:3 . . . my kinsmen according to the flesh:
4 who are Israelites; whose is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;
5 whose are the fathers, and of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

God’s relationship with Israel stemmed directly from His friendship with, and His promises to, Abraham. The Israelites were “beloved for the fathers’ sakes” (Rom. 11:28), and the ultimate blessings of both Abrahamic and Law Covenants were intended in the first instance for the sons and daughters of Israel. Why was that privileged position not forfeited at the crucifixion?

It would seem that God, having committed to them alone His “oracles” (that is, His word) up to the time of Messiah’s appearance, did not fail to complete that commitment, and at the time of Christ’s death the witness of God to this people was not finished. The evidence was not all in.

It is hard for us to put ourselves in the position of a Jew at that time. We live in a country of mixed heritage, and a poorly defined culture which is almost totally secular in nature. A religious life, if one has it, is personal and separate from the life of our nation. Most of us could not imagine what it would be like to be brought up in surroundings where cultural and religious life were totally bound up together, finding their basis in the divine revelation of the Law and the prophets, in which God’s very words were blended with the history of one’s own people. It was clearly God’s intention in creating such an environment to develop individuals whose conscience and hopes could be touched by appealing to what they themselves acknowledged as the source of wisdom, that is, the Holy Scriptures.

Without the testimony and proof that Christ had risen from the dead, the fulfilment of Old Testament scripture concerning the Messiah could not be demonstrated. Without that scriptural evidence, the devout Jew could not be expected to connect the apostles’ testimony with his religious beliefs, and without that connection he would not be responsible to make this crucial decision of faith.

God having intended that the Israelite mind should be prepared in this way to receive the Gospel, we can understand that He wisely allowed time for the process to come to fruition. It would have been inappropriate at that point for the message to be taken to the Gentiles.

Pentecost

The Day of Pentecost following Christ's resurrection must therefore be looked upon as a climax in God's dealings with Israel, and I would like to discuss some aspects of it that were of special relevance to the nation.

- Acts 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place.
- 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.
- 3 And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each of them.
- 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
- 5 Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.
- 6 And when this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language.
- 7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?
- 8 And how hear we, every man in our own language, wherein we were born?
- 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judaea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia,
- 10 in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,
- 11 Cretans and Arabians, we do hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God.
- 12 And they were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying to one another, What meaneth this?
- 13 But others mocking said, They are filled with new wine.
- 14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spake forth unto them, saying, Ye men

of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be
 this known unto you, and give ear unto my words.
 15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose; seeing
 it is but the third hour of the day;
 16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet
 Joel;
 17 And it shall be in the last days, saith God,
 I will pour forth of my spirit upon all flesh:
 And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
 And your young men shall see visions,
 And your old men shall dream dreams:
 18 Yea and on my servants and on my handmaidens
 in those days
 Will I pour forth of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

Peter pointed to the linguistic phenomenon that was occurring among the followers of Jesus as the fulfilment of Joel 2:28 & 29. If that was so, then the “last days” (or “afterward”, as it says in Joel) had arrived.

From the preceding verses in Joel, we can see that the prophet was speaking of Israel:

Joel 2:27 And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
 and that I am the Lord your God, and there is none
 else, and my people shall never be ashamed,

and then comes the part that Peter quoted. So, the pronoun “your”, as in “your sons and daughters”, “your young men”, “your old men” refers back to Israel; it identifies those upon whom God would pour out His spirit as Israelites.

“upon all flesh”

This kind of operation of the Holy Spirit was not without precedent. In the past God had given miraculous gifts to certain individuals as it suited His purpose at the time; Moses, Samson, Elijah, spring readily to mind; even an unsuspecting King Saul. (1 Sam. 10:10; 19:23-24). But “upon all flesh” draws a distinction between the previous, very selective operation of the Spirit of God and this Pentecostal outpouring. The Holy Spirit was now being given far more liberally, not as before to one or a few in a generation.

However, as time showed, “all flesh” did not mean the whole world, or even all of Israel, but referred only to the believers in Jesus Christ. They alone are identified from Joel’s prophecy as God’s “servants and handmaidens”, simply because of their obedience to a new commandment:

Acts 2:38

Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy [Spirit].

The tongues

What was the purpose of the gift of tongues? This gift, though ranked under other gifts by Paul (1 Cor. 14:4-5), is prominent in the New Testament and is described on two later occasions as the first manifestation of the Spirit in new believers (Acts 10:46; 19:6). Because this manifestation of the Spirit later appeared among the Gentile believers, we have tended to attribute to it some universal function in the Church. I have come to the conclusion, however, that such was not the case.

From the various nationalities listed there in Acts 2, it seems clear that the Spirit motivated the disciples to speak in languages of the world of which they had no previous knowledge; to one disciple a particular foreign tongue, to another a different language, so that the Jews from abroad said, "we do hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God". And the reaction was one of amazement and perplexity at the linguistic powers of these Galileans. Yet it would appear that the many languages were not necessary for communication, for although Peter stood up "with the eleven" as the leaders of the disciples, he alone spoke. And he was understood, so it would seem that Peter addressed the Jews in a language with which he was familiar, and which all present could understand.

The Scripture always associates the gift of tongues with spontaneous praise or prayer, the possessors of the gift being motivated to speak "as the Spirit gave them utterance", suggesting that not only was the language a gift of the Spirit, but also the message itself. From Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14 concerning the use of this gift in the congregation, it appears that although the things spoken were of no common benefit without interpretation, such interpretation was not always available, implying that the speaker himself did not necessarily understand what he was saying. The undisciplined use of this gift had actually made it counter-productive, to the extent that Paul wrote,

1 Cor. 14:23

If therefore the whole church be assembled together, and all speak with tongues, and there come in men unlearned, or unbelieving, will they not say that ye are mad?

A distinct purpose

Light is shed on the true purpose of the gift of tongues by the apostle in the same chapter. He quoted the prophet Isaiah:

1 Cor. 14:21

By men of strange tongues, and by the lips of strangers will I speak unto this people, and not even thus will they hear me, saith the Lord.

[cited from Isaiah 28:11-12]

And Paul explained,

1 Cor. 14:22

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to the unbelieving.

From the context in Isaiah 28, we can see that “this people” was Israel. The tongues were not intended as a sign to the believer in Jesus Christ. Having already been convinced and made the decision of faith, such a person required no sign. The sign was meant to register with those of Israel who had not yet believed, and in that manner we see it used on the day of Pentecost. The Jews from far-flung lands who heard their various native languages being spoken by the disciples were stunned, and sought an explanation, giving Peter the cue to begin.

What was the message?

While the fact that these unlearned men were speaking foreign languages amazed the hearers, it was the message so given that connected the gift of tongues with God. No specific utterance has been recorded, but we can glean something from what the Jews who were present said, “We do hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God”. They readily recognised what they heard and showed no trace of offence, which means to me that the “mighty works of God” were things recorded in the Law and the Prophets, things with which they were comfortable, acceptable things which they would identify with God.

It is only my opinion, but I feel that had the Spirit preached Jesus, their reaction would have been quite different.

We must remember that signs from God were to aid belief, not to hinder; therefore, this Spirit-inspired praise of God had the potential to act as a stepping-stone to the Gospel for the Jew who understood the particular language being spoken, recommending his attention to the apostle’s words which followed.

Two witnesses

So, we can distinguish between the contribution made by the Holy Spirit in this direct way, and its assistance of the apostles in their preaching. These eleven Galileans had been with Jesus while He had spoken the word of God to Israel, and to them privately; they had heard His wisdom and had seen the miraculous works that He did, yet that was not enough to equip them for the task that lay ahead. Jesus told them, “But the Comforter, even the Holy

Spirit, [which] the Father will send in my name, [it] shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you” (John 14:26).

“It shall teach you”; “it shall bring to your remembrance”: these functions of the Spirit were to be directed exclusively toward the apostles, assisting their own understanding, thereby making them able ministers of the Gospel.

The witness of the Holy Spirit

But then Jesus spoke specially about witnessing: “[it] shall bear witness of me. And ye also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27). This is very important to our understanding of the Holy Spirit’s contribution as a witness before Israel, because in saying this, Jesus distinguished the witness of the Holy Spirit from the witness of the apostles. This is supported by Peter and John’s testimony before the Sanhedrin:

Acts 5:32 And we are witnesses of these things; and so also is the Holy [Spirit, which] God hath given to them that obey him.

And in Hebrews,

Heb. 2:4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy [Spirit], according to his own will. (See also John 5:27-37; Acts 15:8; 1 John 5:7).

Therefore, it was not the gifts of the Holy Spirit which would constitute the apostles as witnesses, but their firsthand experience with Christ: “for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard.” (Acts 4:20). And the miraculous evidence of the Holy Spirit was to be a witness in its own right, a testimony not from men but from God, and we are reminded of the necessity under the Law of two witnesses to establish the truth. (Deut. 17:6; John 8:17-18).

Convicting the world

Jesus also expanded on this witnessing work of the Holy Spirit:

John 16:8 And [it], when [it] is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement:
 9 of sin, because they believe not on me;
 10 of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more;
 11 of judgement, because the prince of this world hath been judged.

Christ assigned this 'convicting' work to the Spirit itself, which suggests something proven not by words but by the very presence of the miraculous Holy Spirit. And that was so, because Peter later pointed to the appearance among the believers of the gift of tongues as proof that Jesus had ascended to the Father:

Acts 2:33 Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted,
and having received of the Father the promise of
the Holy [Spirit], he hath shed forth this, which ye
now see and hear.

The gift of the Holy Spirit to His disciples was tangible proof that Jesus was now sitting on the right hand of God, and that fact alone, as
(1) a vindication of Christ personally,
(2) a judgement upon those who had not believed,
and
(3) an assurance of Satan's eventual demise,
fulfilled Jesus' words in John 16:8-10.

Joel's prophecy: "blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke"

Where the apostles do not directly explain Old Testament prophecy we should tread carefully. Peter quoted more of Joel's prophecy than was needed to explain the gift of tongues, yet he introduced the whole passage with the words, "this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel", apparently placing it all in the same time frame.

Acts 2:19 And I will show wonders in the heaven above,
And signs in the earth beneath;
20 Blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:
The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before that great and notable day of the Lord come:
21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call
on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Paul also quoted the last part, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved", in Romans 10:13, applying it to those who were responding to the Gospel, which lends weight to the view that this whole prophecy had a contemporary application.

Once again, in interpreting these images, the importance of the Old Testament scriptures is underlined. "Blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke" is a powerful allusion to the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, the most memorable event in Israel's history, and that is surely how it would appeal to

the Jewish mind, invoking a vivid impression of the sanctity and terror of the mountain, the presence of God, the blood of oxen with which the people were sprinkled (Ex. 24:8), and the beginning of that covenant-relationship with Jehovah which had governed the life of Israel up to the time of Christ.

It is significant also, that a Jewish tradition existed which marked the day of Pentecost as the anniversary of the giving of the Law. There is no direct scriptural support for this, although the time, fifty days after Passover, would be about right, according to Exodus 19:1. However, there is adequate evidence in other writings that the day was regarded in that way, so that at Pentecost the Jews would have been more than usually reflective on that event a millennium and a half before.

Joel prophesied perhaps eight hundred years after Sinai, so that God, in saying "I will show wonders in the heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke", was not pointing back to the giving of the Law Covenant, but into the future, to an event similar in nature to the giving of the Law.

The sun and the moon

"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood". Once again, going back into the Old Testament we find similar expressions used, not always in connection with the same event, but generally depicting the demise, by God's decree, of some earthly regime. The shining of the heavenly bodies upon the earth implies stability, order; their darkening symbolises the end of that established order. Using almost the same words, Isaiah foretold God's judgement on Babylon:

Isa. 13:10 For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

Concerning God's eventual judgement on the world, in Isaiah 24:23 the prophet used similar imagery:

Isa. 24:23 Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, for the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

Again, Joel, in chapter 3, echoes Isaiah concerning the end of the kingdoms of the world:

Joel 3:15 The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

In Ezekiel 32, it is the end of Pharaoh's kingdom that is spoken of:

Ezek. 32:7 And when I shall extinguish thee, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light.

8 All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God.

In the Gospels and in Revelation we find these same symbols used with the same general meaning, that of the end of some earthly establishment (Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24; Rev. 6:12), and the fact that the Bible does not always apply this symbolic expression to the same event means that it has to be understood in its particular context. We must therefore respect Peter's application of this whole passage of Joel to the time at hand, and not remove it from its proper setting.

The close of the Law Covenant era

If we take these two prophetic images together, the one of an event comparable with the giving of the Law, the other of God's decision to terminate an existing arrangement, both of these things occurring around the time Peter spoke, then I think the meaning becomes clear.

The prophecy would seem to point out the end of the Law Covenant regime, and the inception of a new order, designated "the great and notable day of the Lord".

I am sure that the Jews would have been familiar with the symbols used, yet I greatly doubt that the significance of the prophecy was realised at the time Peter spoke.

If the message was as momentous as I have suggested, why did the apostle not give the interpretation of the second part of the Joel passage? Why did he not announce the end of the Law Covenant? I think we all know the answer to that question. We have only to read the rest of the book of Acts to be aware of the reaction of the majority of Jews at that time to any suggestion of an alteration to Mosaic customs. (Acts 6:14; 18:13; 21:28). To the Jew who had not yet believed, an announcement of a full end to the Mosaic covenant would have been completely and utterly unacceptable; the apostles would have immediately alienated themselves from their countrymen, and the Gospel would have been obscured from Israel.

Of the New Testament writers, Paul is the one who most eagerly embraced the liberty which is in Christ, yet despite his boldness, Paul well knew that in approaching the unbelieving Israelite with the Gospel, concessions had to be made if any good was to come:

1 Cor. 9:20 And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law.

The first priority was their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah; all else could be unveiled with the passage of time.

Jesus seemed to take into account the limited pace at which most human beings can adapt to great change, when He said to the disciples at the last supper, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:9). His patience with them seems also to have been extended to the whole nation, in His guidance of the apostles' ministry to Israel.

The "great and notable day of the Lord"

In view of all that, we might ask, why did Peter even quote those last verses of Joel 2 on the Day of Pentecost? I suggest that it was simply because that was where they belonged.

As Paul wrote to those who had been under the Law, God has "blotted out the bond of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14; RV; see also Eph. 2:15). The Law Covenant was finished, whether Israel was immediately aware of it or not, and something new began at Pentecost. What can we say about "the great and notable day of the Lord"?

As we know, to support their preaching of Jesus, the apostles appealed constantly to the Old Testament, not always as we do, quoting book, chapter and verse, but often gathering all the prophets together and treating their testimony as one. Later that same day, Peter spoke again to the people:

Acts 3:18 But the things which God forshewed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled.
19 Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord;
20 and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus:

- 21 whom the heavens must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began.
- 22 Moses indeed said, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me; to him shall ye hearken in all things whatsoever he shall speak unto you.
- 23 And it shall be, that every soul that shall not hearken unto that prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.
- 24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days. (RV).

In speaking of the prophets collectively like this, Peter was actually summing up Old Testament prophecy and reducing it to its elements: the death and resurrection of Christ, the necessity of obedience to the words of Jesus, repentance and remission of sins in His name; all now effective and being fulfilled in “these days”.

It follows that these things are the basis of a new arrangement, prophesied by Joel, which would supplant the Law of Moses. What greater and more notable day could there be, than the era in which the salvation of God was revealed, that to which the Law and all the prophets had pointed?

With the assistance of the Holy Spirit, Peter was recalling things which the Lord Himself had told the disciples after His resurrection. To the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus said,

- Luke 24:25 ...O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!
- 26 Behoved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?
- 27 And beginning from Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

And later, when they were all gathered together, He said,

- Luke 24:44 These are my words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, how that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me.
- 45 Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the scriptures;

- 46 and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day;
- 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

“Beginning from Jerusalem.” That is, beginning with Israel. Thus, Christ and the apostles teach the unity of Old Testament prophecy, by gathering the prophets under these major themes, which in reality are one great theme, that of the Messiah.

The Messianic age

And it shows us that the prophets did not prophesy of a discrete Gospel age, to be followed by a Kingdom age; these are concepts derived from the New Testament.

What they unanimously pointed forward to is the age of the Messiah, a “great and notable day,” which would begin with His revealing to Israel (Zechariah 9:9; Malachi 3:1; 4:5);

a “great and notable day”, during which there would be . . .

- an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:10; Zechariah 13:1; Ezekiel 36:25),
- reconciliation between God and men (Psalm 32:1-2; Genesis 22:18; Isaiah 53:11; 57:19; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 37:26),
- the going forth of the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3)
- the granting of God’s favour to Jew and Gentile through faith (Psalms 2:12; 22:27; 24:3-5; Isaiah 2:2; 42:1-6; 49:6; 55:5; 56:1-8; 65:1; 66:18)
- everlasting life for the faithful (Habakkuk 2:4; Psalms 30:4; 37:18; 49:14:15; Isaiah 56:5; Daniel 12:12)
- the establishment of God’s kingdom, with the son of David sitting on the throne of the Lord (2 Samuel 7:16; Psalms 2:6; 18:50; 45:6,7; 47:7-9; 89:33-37; Isaiah 9:6,7; 32:1; 55:4; Ezekiel 37:25; Daniel 2:34; 7:13-14)
- the resurrection of the dead and removal of the curse on mankind (Psalm 49:7-9; Job 33:24; Isaiah 25:7-8; 26:19; Ezekiel 16:53; Daniel 12:2; Hosea 13:14)
- the judgement of the world (Psalms 9:7-8; 67:4; Isaiah 2:4,12-21; 11:4; 61:2; Joel 3:12; Micah 4:1-3),
- and ultimately, the establishment of everlasting righteousness and peace (Psalms 37:9-11; 46:9; Isaiah 26:9; 32:16-18; ch.35; 51:6,8; 60:17,21; 65:21-25; Micah 4:3-5).



PEACE ON EARTH AND GOODWILL TOWARD MEN

by Russell Collins

*And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, **And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!**" (Luke 2:7-14; NKJV)*

This is part of the account of the birth of Jesus as recorded in Luke's gospel. Peace on earth and "*good will toward men*" will not be possible until Jesus establishes the Kingdom of God with power over all the earth. The day before Jesus was put to death, Pilate, the Roman Governor, asked Jesus, "*Art thou the King of the Jews?*" Jesus did not deny that He was a King, but also declared "*My Kingdom is not of this world*", meaning that His Kingdom is not of this order of things (John 18:33-36).

It is true that members of the Church of Jesus Christ are citizens of His Heavenly Kingdom now, in this present evil order of things. Members of Christ's Church must live and continue to live in a world generally opposed to the values and spiritual truths of the Heavenly Kingdom, but they may still experience spiritual peace and happiness as they strive to follow Christ. The words of John 18:33-36 apply now to believers in Jesus in advance of the "*new heavens and a new earth*" which are still to come (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13).

The peace on earth of Luke 2:14 is still future from our day.

Most nativity scenes portray three wise men or Magi, as they are often called. Magi is a plural word, the singular form being Magus, meaning an astrologer or magician of ancient times. The Bible does not say there were three wise men. No one knows how many there were, but because three gifts are mentioned it has been assumed that there were three men. We do know that the wise men were led to Jesus from their own country in the east by a 'star' (Matthew 2:2). According to the Biblical accounts, the star was seen by the Magi. There is no indication that it was seen or identified by anyone else. Certainly, if others had seen it and understood its significance, King Herod would easily have found Jesus.

The 'star' whatever it was, moved, leading the Magi until it stood over the house where Jesus was (Matthew 2:9). Whether the 'star' was an astronomical body, a constellation, or an angel or special guiding light, it was a miracle from God.

The Magi would have travelled a considerable distance from their eastern country. They went to Jerusalem first, and learnt that the King they sought had been born in Bethlehem, about ten kilometres to the south. The 'star' led them to Jesus, and they presented gifts to Him (Matthew 2:11), gifts of rare and precious substances, fitting tribute and honour for a King. They did not exchange gifts among themselves, nor receive any, and there is no indication or command in Scripture for the modern custom of Christmas gift-giving.

It is recorded in Matthew 2:11 that the wise men went *"into the house"*, not to the place where the manger was situated. Tradition has it that the wise men went to Jesus some two or three weeks after His birth, during which time some better accommodation could be found for the infant King. Since Bethlehem was Joseph's home town, it seems reasonable to assume that relatives or friends would offer Joseph and Mary shelter and hospitality when they became aware of the couple's new baby. In any case we are not provided with details, so we do not know.

It remains to us a wonder that the Son of God, the Lord of Glory, should be born in such lowly surroundings. Truly, He *"made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself"* (Philippians 2:7-8).

The Holy Spirit revealed to two humble, devout old people, Simeon and Anna, that the little babe was indeed the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world (Luke 2:25-38).

We note that the birth of God's most gracious gift to a sinful world was made known only to humble, devout people. Jesus Christ's birth was not made known to the Jewish leaders, or influential figures of the day. Reasons are not hard to find. Judah was a conquered nation ruled by Rome. The carnally-minded Jews looked for a Messiah who would throw off the yoke of Rome and lead the nation to a position of earthly prominence and glory such as the nation enjoyed under David and Solomon. The Jews did not understand their sacred Scriptures correctly (Acts 13:27), and did not realise that their deliverance and future blessings were spiritual realities, not earthly, material gratifications. The Jewish leaders were proud, haughty, self-righteous, hypocritical, and failed to grasp the lessons that the Law Covenant was meant to teach them (Matthew 23:23).

Times and Dates

The gospels do not tell us when Jesus was born. No one to this day knows the day, month, or even the year.

Notice what one author concluded in an article extolling the observance of Christmas:

'The exact time of the nativity of Christ can never be known. The twenty-fifth day of December has little in its favour beyond the fact that it was the day on which, in antiquity, the return of the sun from its winter absence was kept. ... It (Jesus' birth) could hardly have been at that season, however, for such a time would surely not have been chosen by the authorities for a public enrolment, which necessitated the population's travelling from all parts to their natal districts, storms and rain making journeys both unsafe and unpleasant in winter, except in especially favourable years.' (Holy-Days and Holidays, article 'Christmas at Bethlehem' by Cunningham Geikie.)

The Lord Jesus' earthly ministry lasted for three and a half years (Daniel 9:27). We do know the precise anniversary date of His death - the first day of the Jewish Passover - and we are instructed to remember His death and shed blood on *"the same night in which He was betrayed"* (1 Corinthians 11:23), that is, after sunset on the same night that the Jewish Passover feast is held. There is no instruction to remember His birth.

The anniversary of Jesus' death occurs either in late March or in early to mid-April. As His ministry lasted three and one half years, His birth must have taken place in late September or early to mid-October.

The choice of December 25, and January 6 or 7 as the date of Jesus' birth is shrouded in uncertainty, but there seems little doubt that the choice was strongly influenced by the dates and times of non-Christian festivals. So many activities that are carried out at Christmas time - trees, holly, decorations, feasting, giving and receiving presents, Santa Claus - have nothing to do with Jesus' birth; nor does the Bible mention any of these activities.

Conclusion

We are children of the day, we should be aware of the facts of Jesus' birth and act in accordance with the light so graciously given to us by the Lord.

Jesus was born to be a King. He will ultimately set up His kingdom over all nations on earth. All through His ministry He preached the Gospel of the Kingdom. In the four Gospels Jesus is quoted more than one hundred times referring specifically to the Kingdom of God.

The Bible is God's word and means what it says. The Kingdom of God is an order of things ruled by a King (Jesus Christ) governing by righteous standards over a territory (the earth) in which the subjects (most members of the human race) will live in peace and good will as God has promised.

This hope of the Gospel, this hope of the Kingdom of God, is the only hope for fallen human beings. God has commissioned His church of believers in Jesus Christ to take this wonderful message of the Gospel to others. We must proclaim this message and continue to proclaim it. It has as its basis Jesus Christ, the reality of His earthly ministry, His death as the ransom and sin offering for all people, His resurrection to glory, His role as Mediator, Intercessor and High Priest for all believers, and His future manifestation as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to rule over all nations. To all who believe these spiritual truths the Holy Spirit is given to help and guide them.

The message encompasses the solving of all the problems that plague the human race - strife, wars, greed, crime, drugs, pollution, illiteracy, disease, poverty and hunger - all of them.

Righteous government and world peace are what the world needs and needs to hear. These constitute the ultimate good news. Relief is in store for suffering mankind. Peace is on its way. A prosperous, peaceful and happy world lies ahead.



THE TREE OF PEACE

Oh fellow man, fold to thy heart the brother,
Where pity dwells, the peace of God is there.
To worship rightly is to love each other,
Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.

Follow with reverent steps the great example
Of him whose holy work was doing good.
So shall the wide earth seem our Father's temple,
Each loving life a psalm of gratitude.

Then shall all shackles fall, the stormy clangour
Of wild war music o'er the earth shall cease.
Love shall tread out the baleful fire of anger,
And in its ashes plant the tree of peace.

John Greenleaf Whittier

THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT

by Merv Buckmaster

Introduction

Through the prophet Jeremiah God made a promise to the Israelites, *“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah: ... after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law into their inward parts, and write it in their hearts”* (Jeremiah 31:31,33).

Through the prophet Ezekiel God defined the nature of the new covenant; *“And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them”* (Ezekiel 11:19), which would require a profound change from the physical nature of the old covenant.

Through the prophet Zechariah God showed that he knew that, symbolically, *“they made their hearts as an adamant stone”* (Zechariah 7:12), and through Ezekiel, clarified his promise of the new arrangement with the explanation, *“I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh”* (Ezekiel 7:19).

However, during the years which followed the time of the prophets the Israelites continued to be an *“impudent and hardhearted”* people (Ezekiel 3:7), and later, during the years of Jesus’ ministry and the ministry of the apostles, they were called *“a disobedient and gainsaying people”* by Paul (Romans 10:21). The Israelites were spiritually dead, as is shown by Jesus’ reply to the disciple who wanted leave to bury his father; *“Follow me; and let the (spiritually) dead bury their (physically) dead”* (Matthew 8:22).

The Spirit of Hope

God’s promise of a new covenant was fulfilled when that New Covenant was ratified by Jesus’ death on the cross. He had told the Samaritan woman *“the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him”* (John 4:23). The New Covenant is to *“love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ... and with all thy mind ... and thy neighbour as thyself”* (Matthew 22:37,39).

He had told the disciples that *“when the spirit of truth is come, it will guide you into all truth”* (John 16:13). Jesus’ promise to the disciples about the spirit of truth was fulfilled at Pentecost when the apostles were given the holy spirit with miraculous power, which gave them the understanding of everything that Jesus had told them.

However, the promise of the holy spirit was extended to all believers, not given with miraculous power as Jesus promised to the disciples in John 14:26-27, but to be a comforter and guide according to the nature of the holy spirit given as a gift, as shown by Paul in Galatians 3:14, *“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the spirit through faith”*. This was confirmed by John, *“And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us”* (1 John 3:24).

Since Jesus came to do God’s will, which was, *“He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second”* (Hebrews 10:9), he was, in effect, *“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances (the Law Covenant) that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross”* (Colossians 2:14). The believer is *“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God”* (Colossians 2:12).

These verses indicate that the New Covenant is spiritual in nature, the importance of which is firmly established by Paul’s exposition to those in the congregation in Rome, in chapter 8 of his epistle to them. The holy spirit from God who worked miracles throughout the time of the Old Testament *“beareth witness (testify jointly, Strong 4828) with our spirit”* (Romans 8:16), showing that it is a personal trait which is in agreement with God’s spirit, and that it is separate from it, while it has the nature of *“his spirit that dwelleth in you”* (Romans 8:11).

Also, to the Galatians he focussed on the significance of this spiritual aspect, *“For we through the spirit wait for the righteousness by faith”* (Galatians 5:5). The change to a spiritual nature is shown by the fruit of the spirit, which is *“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance”* (Galatians 5:22-23).

Without the spirit of love towards God and our neighbour, *“the body without the spirit is dead”* (James 2:26). And Paul wrote, *“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the spirit of God dwell in you ... And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of (imputed) righteousness”* (Romans 8:9-10).

The essence of this new dispensation by means of which God is acting *“to take out of them a people for his name”* (Acts 15:14) to be the new Israel of God, is encapsulated in Paul’s words to the Colossians; *“If ye then be risen with Christ”* (Colossians 3:1), which means if you have experienced this spiritual revival (revivify spiritually, Strong 4891). It is the spiritual revival that is the vital element of the nature of the New Covenant. The Israelites under the Law covenant were spiritually dead, while the believer in Jesus experiences a spiritual revival under the New Covenant.

Spiritual revival is ...

... responsiveness to God's call. *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations"* Jesus instructed the disciples (Matthew 28:19), and although not all the nations of mankind have heard the gospel of Jesus preached to them, those who have heard, need to feel that responsiveness to the new law to love God and to love one's neighbour, unreservedly (Matthew 22:37-39). Since God is love and since man was created to be like God, the spirit of loving kindness bestowed in that likeness is awakened and revived to bring the hearer to appreciate the light, or enlightenment of the gospel message; *"To show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light"* (1 Peter 2:9).

... intentional. It is not casual nor perfunctory but deliberate and purposeful; it must be sought, searched for. *"You who seek God, let your heart revive"* (Psalm 69:32; NASB). *"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found"* (Isaiah 55:6). *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 6:33). *"Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened"* (Matthew 7:7), and *"seek those things which are above"* (Colossians 3:1). Spiritual strength increases as knowledge of the grace bestowed through the New Covenant is gained by Bible study and practising the fruits of the spirit.

... progressive. The beginning of belief is to hear the gospel. *"How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"* (Romans 10:14). Paul began his preaching with the simple truths; *"yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil"* (Romans 16:19) and told the Corinthians, *"I have fed you with milk and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it"* (1 Corinthians 3:2). And to the Hebrews *"you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"* And he went on to show the progress of learning deeper truths; *"Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil"* (Hebrews 5:12-14; NIV).

... incremental. Progressive learning has to be incremental, beginning with a properly founded basis of information upon which finer details can be built and integrated with the fundamentals. This principle is set out in a straightforward manner by Peter with the exhortation, *"And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue (excellence); and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance (self-control); and to temperance patience (perseverance), and to patience godliness (holiness); and to godliness brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness charity (love)"* (2 Peter 1:5-7).

He also acknowledged a beginning to spiritual development; *“Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation”* (1 Peter 2:2; NASB). And *“grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 3:18). Paul praised the Thessalonians *“because your faith is growing more and more”* (2 Thessalonians 1:3; NIV).

... personal. This aspect was made clear by Paul to the Philippians, and to us, with the exhortation, *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Philippians 2:12). No longer, since the New Covenant was ratified, has God been dealing with an apostate nation, all of whom were judged together, but has sent out a general invitation through the New Covenant calling each on an individual basis to respond to his invitation, free of the entrapment of the wrongdoing of others, and each given the responsibility of making the choice to serve Jesus’ commands, to choose between the way of the Lord and the way of the world on a day-by-day basis. Jesus said, *“Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you”* (John 15:14).

... habitual. Spiritual growth is shown by demonstrating the fruits of the spirit, which are, *“love, joy (quiet delight), peace, long-suffering (patience), gentleness (kindness), goodness (benevolence), faith (fidelity)”* (Galatians 5:22), in as much as these traits become the expression of the personality, shown without artifice but as a second nature, supplanting the worldly nature of the unbeliever. The importance of this development was made clear in Jesus’ words *“by their fruits you will know them”* (Matthew 7:20). John the Baptist introduced the new prospect when he called on the multitude to *“bring forth ... fruits worthy of repentance”* (Luke 3:8), and it was given daily importance by Paul with the exhortation, *“being fruitful in every good work”* (Colossians 1:10).

... relational. Spiritual growth depends upon relationships, the prime one being the new relationship with God who has replaced worship by obedience with worship by supplication through the terms of the New Covenant. That new relationship is to *“love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul (breath), and with all thy mind”* (Matthew 22:37), and the relationship is extended to all persons in the words *“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”* (Matthew 22:39). The spiritual nature of these relationships cannot flourish in isolation, but is nurtured by *“increasing in the knowledge of God”* (Colossians 1:10), firstly to *“live peaceably with all men”* (Romans 12:18) and by *“study to show thyself approved, unto God”* thus *“rightly dividing (accurately handling; NIV) the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15).

... multifaceted. The development in the Christian character of the fruits of the spirit is a gradual process, forming in close association with the exhortation from Peter to *“Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour”* (2 Peter 3:18). Furthermore, that character of faithfulness is strengthened by adding virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love, *“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:8).

Growing in the knowledge of the truth means building on the foundation that *“There is one God and one mediator between God and men”* (1 Timothy 2:5). God created the heavens and the earth. God has a plan for mankind covering the ages of human history, and the fulfilment of that plan will not be delayed, nor will he deviate from it. The plan is centred on Jesus who shared in creation as the Logos, cared for the Israelites as Michael the archangel, became a human being to give a sinless life as the redeeming price to open the way of reconciliation between God and men, and will return to earth to carry out the reconstitution of all things during the kingdom age.

God’s dealings with nations and with individuals are recorded for everyone to study, and are *“profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”* (1 Timothy 3:16). Study of God’s word reveals the multiple aspects of his power, his knowledge, his mercy and his grace.

... confidential. As the mediator of the New Covenant Jesus opened the way for each believer to call upon God to give thanks for his grace and mercy, to be reconciled, to ask for forgiveness and to *“lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us”* (Hebrews 12:1). The manner of this spiritual attitude is through prayer; *“in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Philippians 4:6). Jesus gave an outline for prayer to the disciples (Matthew 6:9-13), having already instructed them to *“enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret”* (Matthew 6:6).

However, offering prayer in the presence of a congregation is also acceptable, since it was practised by the apostles after the ascension as shown by *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women”* (Acts 1:14). Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians indicates that the practice should continue; *“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit”* (Ephesians 6:18).

... disciplinary. Human nature soon reveals that human behaviour involves a continuous contrast between right and wrong, and the conflict to choose between them. The basis of the conflict was defined by Solomon with the assertion; *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep*

his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). This is impossible for human beings. *"There is none righteous. No, not one"* (Romans 3:10). *"For all have sinned (disobeyed) and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23).

It was David who acknowledged his need for help in the conflict; *"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:10). And the need is re-stated by Paul to the Ephesians, *"be renewed in the spirit of your mind"* (Ephesians 4:23). Paul commended the Thessalonians for *"their work of faith, and labour of love"* (1 Thessalonians 1:3), and while he was referring to their work for the congregation, the same ethos is in his instruction to the Philippians, *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Philippians 2:12). This is a life-long occupation which requires continual effort, and brings assurance according to Paul's words to the Corinthians; *"be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

... **liberating.** The promise of liberty, or freedom, is in Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28 *"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"*. The rest from labour and the nature of that freedom is defined as freedom from sin (disobedience) in John chapter eight; *"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (8:31-32), together with *"Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house forever: but the Son abideth forever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"* (8:34-35).

Paul comforted the Colossians with the words *"being knit together in love, and unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding"* (Colossians 2:2) *"of the mystery (secret) which has been hid from ages and from generations"* (Colossians 1:26), referring to the 'worlds' of 2 Peter 3:5-7 and God's plan of the ages.

"Therefore take no thought for your life" for food, drink or raiment, nor *"for the morrow"* (Matthew 6:25,31,34), but *"set your affection on things above"* (Colossians 3:2).

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

... **distinguishing.** Jesus prayed that his disciples would be kept from evil because they were not of the world as he was not of the world (John 17:14-15).

The believer is challenged “*to come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 6:17). The command to be separate from false doctrine and worldliness is clear and is difficult to obey. But Jesus, as the symbolic good shepherd knows the sheep of his flock (John chapter 10) because they are distinguished by their spiritual revival, through which their hearts and minds have been enlightened to God’s grace and mercy, established in the gospel message and the preaching of the apostles.

An Overview

It is Jesus’ gospel message that awakens a spiritual revival with recognition that there is a God, awakens admiration of his power demonstrated in creation, awakens a sense of wonder at his intentions, awakens worship for his goodness and purity, and supplication for his grace and mercy.

There are other laudable aspects of a spiritual revival to be found in the accounts of the lives of the men and women of faith recorded in both Old and New Testaments of the Bible. They challenge us to nurture that awakening to the truth which underlies the prayer “*thy kingdom come*” (Matthew 6:10) and “*seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:33), that is “*the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*” (Romans 11:33).

[With acknowledgement to ‘Spiritual Laws to Enhance Our Growth in Christ’ by D. Karavas, ‘The New Creation’, January/February, 2018.]



Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 6:4-6

- 4 *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,***
- 5 *And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,***
- 6 *If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.***

Verses 4 to 6 could be an issue separate from the context, because they point out how those who deny Jesus cannot repent again. In the case of the Hebrews, if they were not making progress in their understanding of the doctrines of Christ, then they were at risk of falling into unbelief (chapter 4 verse 11).

To have experienced, not just had an inkling of, enlightenment, and to have tasted the rewards of belief, particularly the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, but then to deliberately fall away or reject the principles of Christian doctrine and later try to return to the faith, is in effect putting Jesus to an open shame, that is, public disgrace. Since it is possible to fall away from the truth, it follows that the idea of 'once saved, always saved' is not correct. "*Enlightened*" is a translation of the same Greek word as that for "*illuminated*" in Hebrews 10:32, indicating that significant understanding of the scripture was involved in the warning not to fall away.

Since Paul mentioned the importance of repentance from dead works, which for the Hebrews were the works of the Law Covenant, if they returned to serving the Law it would be impossible for them leave it for a second time to renew their repentance, and regain the newness of life under the New Covenant. They would then be behaving as the Jews did at the crucifixion, mocking Christ and rejecting him and the heavenly Father.

There is a warning here for the recipients of the epistle to the Hebrews, Jews and gentiles, whom Paul admonished in chapter 5 verses 12 to 14, because they had not progressed from the milk of the word. In this passage Paul warned that those who reject Christ in this age or the next age forfeit the benefits available through belief into him. There is no recourse for those who have experienced the power of the truth and then defect, or fall away, which is apostasy, which comes directly from the Greek word 'parapipto' in verse 6. The same warning against apostasy was given to the Israelites under the Law Covenant.

However, there is also a principle here in that Jesus died only once, and the only way to repentance is through the merit of his sacrifice. He cannot be sacrificed again, as is stated in chapter 10 verse 26. For those who fall away there will be a sorer punishment, according to verse 29 of chapter 10.

Hebrews 6:7-12

- 7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:**
- 8 But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.**
- 9 But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.**
- 10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.**
- 11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:**
- 12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

There is an analogy in verses 7 and 8, which is further comment upon the Hebrews who did not make progress in their understanding of the principles of the gospel message. In the analogy the earth represents the mind, on which falls the rain or God's truth, which brings forth herbs or fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22) to the benefit of those who look after it. But if the earth produces weeds they are unacceptable and are to be destroyed. The analogy shows what is expected of those who have been enlightened by the truth, and since tending the earth to produce good fruit is a continuing process, it also shows that going on to maturity in the truth is a life-long commitment.

In verses 9 and 10 Paul acknowledged the good work the Hebrews had done, mentioning their ministering to the saints. This encouragement is in contrast to the warning of the previous verses, and is re-enforced in verses 11 and 12 where he pointed out that they should not be lazy, but be as energetic for the truth as those who have been faithful and patient, because they are to inherit the promises of everlasting life and brotherhood with Jesus (chapter 2 verse 11). Paul knew enough of their good character to be able to write to them with admonition. The Hebrews had the advantage of the gospel message but had not matured enough to be teachers, and he indicated that they should do better, and that he was confident of better things from them.

That being the case, this epistle may have been addressed to a group of Christian Jews and gentiles, scattered throughout the region, as was the case with the letters from Peter (1 Peter 1:1). They who had been patient and faithful may be the apostles or the saints of verse 10.



A Gospel Message

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ... And hope maketh not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.” (Romans 5:1,2,5).

“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” (Romans 8:24-25)

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;” (Romans 12:11-12).

“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13).



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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