

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



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

News

A PARABLE OF THE KINGDOM

by Colin Giles

Introduction

Parables are generally intended to give one lesson as in the 'Parable of the Sower'. The details of this parable are well known in that the seed is scattered by the sower and it falls onto different types of soil. Some seeds fall on the pathway, some on the rocky places, some on the places where there were thorns and some on the places where there was good soil, where it grew to result in an abundant crop. The disciples asked Jesus for an explanation of the parable and he explained some of the detail and the significance of where the seed fell.

Matthew 13:18-23

"Hear then ye the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the evil one, and snatcheth away that which hath been sown in his heart. This is he that was sown by the way side. And he that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that heareth the word, and straightway with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; and when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway he stumbleth. And he that was sown among the thorns, this is he that heareth the word; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. And he that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; who verily beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

In these verses Jesus explained the meaning of the symbols used. There is the seed that is sown on the pathways, the rocky places, amongst thorns and the seed sown on good ground. The meaning of these symbols is given in that it illustrates that what happens when seed is sown into the ground may happen when the truth reaches different hearers. But why was the parable given? What lesson does it teach us?

The disciples had originally asked Jesus why he taught in parables and they had received a reply with his explanation as to why he spoke to them in that manner.

Matthew 13:11-13

"And he answered and said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."

In Mark's gospel the distinction between the 'you', that is, the disciples, and 'them', that is, those not seeking the truth, is even more pronounced by the words, "**Unto you** is given the mystery of the kingdom of God: but **unto them** that are without, all things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them" (Mark 4:11-12).

So, it could be concluded that Jesus spoke in parables to hide the message from some who heard them.

An alternative understanding could be that the apostles would understand that when they went out to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was near they would receive a varied reception, depending on whether the hearer was ready to receive the word or whether they were not receptive.

Another possible viewpoint would be that the hearers of the message would have to realise that the understanding of the word of God does not come automatically, for there are many hindrances to receiving it. There is therefore work needed to prepare the mind to accept the message of a parable. Or the difficulty to understanding the parable may be a reminder that God's grace is necessary to prepare the ground and make it receptive.

So now to make some comment on the parable that I have chosen for this article, keeping the above lesson in mind.

The Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that was a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a shilling a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the marketplace idle; and to them he said, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing; and he saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard. And when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a shilling. And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a shilling. And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, These last have spent but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto

us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. But he answered and said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a shilling? Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last."

There are a number of observations that should be made about this parable.

First, it reflects the customs of the day in that casual labourers could be found in the market place to supplement the workforce of servants that the householder may have had. The fact that the householder paid his workers at the end of the day follows the requirement of the law. *"Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy sojourners that are in thy land within thy gates: **in his day thou shalt give him his hire**, neither shall the sun go down upon it (for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it); lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee"* (Deuteronomy 24:14-15).

The regular payment for a day's work was a denarius, which was also in line with a payment for a day's work that the householder agreed to when the first labourer was hired to work in the vineyard. That the regular payment was a sufficient sum is indicated in Luke 15:17 when the returning younger son said to himself, *"How many hired servants of my **father's have bread enough and to spare**, and I perish here with hunger!* (Luke 15:17).

It is in the reaction of the workers where the lesson of the parable lies, and in particular the first hired workers who had worked all day. One can hear them thinking, 'It's not fair', and certainly their complaint about the other workers who were hired later in the day was at the root of the matter. It is a lesson that we all have to learn as we grow up. How often as children did we make the complaint, 'It's not fair', when there was something to be shared and there seemed to be favouritism in the sharing?

It is the householder who had to point out that he acted quite honestly and justly in that the payment for a day's work was agreed when the labourer was hired. The principle that is being illustrated in this parable is that God considers other standards than ours when it comes to paying people. We may think it right that someone should be paid only for the work done, but God considers the needs of the worker and is quite willing to be generous when necessary. There may be many other issues in this parable that we may wonder about, like why were not all the workers in the market place early in the morning eager for work. But this is not part of the parable.

It is the closing words of the parable that highlight the lesson that Jesus was teaching. They are, *“So the last will be first and the first last”* (Matthew 13:16). What is meant by the first and the last in this context has to be interpreted by the meaning given by the parable, in that if there is a need to, God will pay the same to the last that the first had agreed to accept.

If we are looking for an application of the parable we should consider the case of the penitent sinner crucified on the cross at the same time as Jesus.

“And one of the malefactors that were hanged railed on him, saying, Art not thou the Christ? save thyself and us. But the other answered, and rebuking him said, Dost thou not even fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said, Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And he said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:39-43).

You could say that the penitent sinner was called at the last minute and his words indicated that he could be classed as one of the workers in God’s vineyard. He was given a promise of a believer’s reward. So this demonstrates a case where there could have been a feeling of resentment against a worker that had not borne the full heat and burden of the day.

Much also can be learnt about the reward that is promised to all believers by looking at the circumstances which led to this parable being given, which was when the rich young man asked Jesus, *“Teacher what good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?”* (Matthew 19:16). His further statement indicated that he had kept all the commandments of the Law. But he recognized that more was needed when he asked *“What still do I lack?”* (Matthew 19:20). His reaction when he was told to sell all that he had and follow Jesus was a disappointment to him because he was rich. His reaction then drew the comment from Jesus, *“I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 19:23). The disciples were greatly astonished at this reply, indicating that they also had to learn a lesson on the basis on which God pays for work done in his service.

Mark’s account is more pointed in that there is reason to believe that the correct translation is *“How hard is it for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God”* (Mark 10:23), indicating that all people experience the struggle to enter the kingdom of heaven, and emphasised by the disciples’ further question that if it was so difficult a task, how could any be saved?

The way in which the rich young man put the question to Jesus is illuminating. *“What good thing”* indicates that he was seeking to find some worthy exercise to gain merit with God. The parable that followed of the workers in the vineyard was given to correct that expectation.

There is also the aspect of what the reward is for those called to work in God's vineyard. There is no record of what the Lord promised his disciples when he called them. In fact, Peter's enquiry of the Lord in the words, "*We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?*" indicated that he was thinking along the same lines as the rich young man. The account is in Matthew 19:27-29. "*Then answered Peter and said unto him, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee; what then shall we have? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life.*"

The rewards mentioned in these verses would seem to include:

- the work of judging Israel, which I understand is what the disciples were being trained for;
- the loss of family friendships to be replaced by many more friendships, even at this time;
- the promise of eternal life, which I believe is more than just living forever.

Further consideration could be given to the thought that the wage we agree to work for in God's vineyard is eternal life. The parable of the talents or of the pounds indicates that there is a promise of a reward to be given in proportion to the zeal displayed, but that reward seems to me to be a work that we will be given to do and into which we enter with joy. Matthew 25:21 is appropriate here. "*His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*"

May we all find joy in the work we do for the Lord.



THE SUPERIOR WAY

by Darryl Roe

The letter to the Hebrews, probably written by the apostle Paul in Rome around AD 63, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, was intended to prevent the Hebrew Christians living in Jerusalem from throwing away their new faith because of persecution. According to Josephus, the apostle James was asked to proclaim from the temple gallery that Jesus was not the Messiah, but instead, James cried out, 'Jesus is the Son of God and the judge of the world'. At that, he was mobbed and stoned to death by the Jews. The death of James in Jerusalem had obviously shaken their new-found faith in Jesus and his message of salvation.

The early Christians in Judea seemed to be under the impression that if they accepted Jesus as their Messiah, then all they had to do was to be faithful to their calling and Jesus would return to collect them, make Jerusalem the capital of the world and set up his Kingdom on earth. Instead, the opposite took place; they were bitterly hated and oppressed by the Jewish leaders and in 70 AD the Roman army came through destroying their Holy City and with it their beloved temple, leaving just Herod's three north-west towers standing as a memorial. Yet all this had been prophesied by our Lord prior to his death (Luke 21:20-24).

Paul may have realised that all this destruction was about to happen, so he wrote his letter to the Hebrews to warn them about their complacency and to explain how Christ, and the Gospel message of salvation was **superior** in so many different ways to the Jewish arrangement brought through Moses. Throughout his letter Paul showed these despondent, despairing Christians that animal sacrifices were no longer necessary, that animal blood could not remove sin, that Christ was **superior** to the prophets, to the angels, to Moses, to Aaron and to Joshua, and that his priesthood, his covenant, his sanctuary and his sacrifice had superseded those of the old Mosaic Law for all time.

The apostle explained that in the past God chose to speak through the prophets, but now he speaks through his own Son. And God had not chosen any of his angels to bring redemption to the world, but he chose his own Son, who, in verse 8 he called "*god*" (meaning 'a mighty one') and whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he has made the entire universe. "*About the Son, He says, 'Your throne O God will forever and ever and righteousness will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy'*" (Hebrews 1:8-9). This quotation comes from Psalm 45:6-7.

The Apostle tells us, "*After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven*" (Hebrews 1:3), and in so doing He has become **superior** to the angels. "*To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?"*" (Hebrews 1:13). The role of the angels is clearly shown to be that of ministering spirits sent forth to serve those who will inherit salvation, while the Son of God is even **superior** to them, for his position is at God's right hand where all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (Matthew 28:18).

We know of four occasions where God has indicated that his Son was acceptable to him:

- in announcing his birth (Luke 1:32);
- in endorsing him at His baptism (Mark 1:11);
- in expressing his pleasure in him at his transfiguration (Luke 9:35); and
- in declaring him *“with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead”* (Romans 1:4).

Jesus was raised from the dead to:

1. confirm God's promises to him which were made before the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8);
2. destroy the devil (Hebrews 2:14); and
3. provide a **better** way whereby people of all nations could come to God, have their sins forgiven, and gain everlasting life (Acts 5:31).

The Jews highly revered Moses for his writings, his prophecies, and for their nation's deliverance out of Egyptian bondage, but the apostle showed Jesus' **superiority** over Moses by comparing the servant of a household with the son in that household. He wrote *“Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses ... Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future, but Christ is faithful as a son over God's house ...”* (Hebrews 3:3,5-6). *“Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the Apostle and high priest whom we confess”* (Hebrews 3:1). Paul told the Hebrews to focus on Jesus the Son of God, and what he has done both for them and for all mankind.

Next the apostle compared Joshua and the promised rest in the land to Christ and the heavenly rest. Back in the days of Moses and Joshua nearly all of the children of Israel failed to enter the Promised Land because of their sinfulness and unbelief, and God was angry with them (Hebrews 4:3). He made them wander around in the wilderness for forty years until the older generation had all died. Even Moses himself was not permitted to go into the Promised Land because of pride, but God did allow him to view it from Mount Pisgah just before he died.

But the rest that is now offered to Jesus' followers is far **superior** because they will enjoy an everlasting rest and co-existence with their Saviour and Lord in the heavens. The apostle wrote, *“If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God ... let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience”* (Hebrews 4:8-9,11). Paul alluded to his own forthcoming rest in 2 Timothy where he said, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the*

race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day” (2 Timothy 4:8-9). That day will be at Paul's resurrection to be with Jesus.

Under the Law Covenant arrangement the priesthood came only from the tribe of Levi, Aaron being the first high priest, followed by his sons and grandsons after him. The apostle tells us that the priesthood and the animal sacrifices on earth were only shadows of the real things in heaven. He explained that in every respect Christ's priesthood and Christ's sacrifice were **superior** to those of the Levitical priesthood.

Aaron was specially chosen by God and anointed with olive oil and he wore a special eight-piece garment in accordance with God's requirements and had to wash himself thoroughly before entering the tabernacle. Once a year, on the tenth day of Tisri, Aaron entered the Holy of Holies (or sanctuary) where God dwelt, and sprinkled the blood of a bullock and the blood of a goat, called the blood of atonement, on to the mercy seat, which was the solid gold lid of the Ark of the Covenant, to take away the sins, first of his own household and secondly those of the nation of Israel. Year by year this same ritual was carried out by the Jewish high priest and God would accept these sacrifices and forgive them for their sins. (See Leviticus 16.)

The apostle explained that Jesus also was chosen and anointed by God and as a perfect man Jesus was well equipped to represent and to sympathise with his fellow human beings. He explained that, like us, Jesus was tempted in every way; yet he committed no sin (Hebrews 4:15). Unlike Aaron, Jesus did not have to offer up sacrifices for his own sins, for he had no sin. Unlike Aaron, Jesus' title was the Son of God, confirmed by God's own voice on a number of occasions. Unlike Aaron, who lived but a short time, Jesus, now lives with the Father, and has become a priest forever; having an unending ministry (Hebrews 5:6). Unlike Aaron, Jesus has become a priest of a far **superior** order, like the order of Melchizedek, who was both a priest and a king in Abraham's day and whose ancestry has not been recorded (Hebrews 7:1-3). Abraham, in fact gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of his battle with the four kings around Sodom (Genesis 14:20).

The Levitical priests were all sinful, weak, dying men and their animal sacrifices had to be repeated every year. Jesus, on the other hand was holy, blameless, pure and set apart from sinners, and had sacrificed himself once for all mankind for all time; therefore God has highly exalted him above the heavens and given him a name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth (Hebrews 7:26; Philippians 2:9-10). Before his ascension Jesus had told his disciples

that all authority had been given to him both in heaven and upon earth (Matthew 28:19). Since he lives forever, he therefore intercedes constantly for those who come to the Father through him.

The apostle warned believers five times throughout his letter not to lose heart and fall away. In chapter 2, verse 1, he warned them not to drift away into unbelief. In chapter 3 he reminded them of sin's deceitfulness (verses 12 and 13). In chapter 6 he wrote that it's impossible for those who have tasted God's Word and the powers of the coming Kingdom to be brought back to repentance again (verses 4 to 6). In chapter 10 he wrote that if we deliberately continue to sin then "*there is no further sacrifice for our sins*", for we would be insulting God's spirit of grace (verses 26 to 29). And finally in chapter 12 he warned against refusing God's call, telling them that they would be in danger of being destroyed, for we must all worship God in due reverence, respect, and thankfulness for what he has done for us (verse 25).

The apostle then compared the two sanctuaries. The first belonged to the tabernacle in the wilderness, which was only a shadow or picture of the real sanctuary. The second sanctuary, Paul explained, is the heavenly one where Christ sits at the right hand of God interceding on our behalf, in order that our sins may be forgiven. The former arrangement was only a temporary arrangement, the latter arrangement is **superior** because it is permanent. Both involved blood sacrifices (for without the shedding of blood there was no forgiveness [Hebrews 9:22]). In the former it was the blood of animals; in the latter it was the perfect blood of Jesus, which was accepted by God once for the whole world of mankind. No further sacrifices are required since Christ's blood was without blemish and was accepted by God as a sin offering and as a ransom or redeeming price. On the Day of Atonement, the bullock, the goat and the scapegoat all pictured Christ's perfect sacrifice, which was made once for all.

The apostle went on to compare two covenants and two mediators. The former covenant was known as the Law Covenant, which had Moses as its mediator. A mediator is defined by Dr. Strong as 'a go-between, a reconciler and an intercessor' (Strong 3316). The latter covenant, Paul wrote, is the New Covenant which has Jesus as its mediator or intercessor. Just prior to his death, during the last supper, Jesus held up the wine to his disciples and indicated to them that the wine represented his own blood of the New Covenant. He said, "*This cup is the New Covenant in my blood. Do this ... in remembrance of me*" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

The first covenant was between God and the nation of Israel, with its rules and regulations, but it was not able to bring about reconciliation because of the sinful nature of both the priests and the people. In Romans 8 the apostle clearly showed the necessity for the second covenant, the New Covenant,

and how it has superseded the Law. He wrote, *“What the Law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man, to be a sin-offering”* (Romans 8:3). In Colossians 2 the apostle explained, *“When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code (that is, the Law Covenant) with its regulations, that were against us ... He took it away, nailing it to the cross”* (Colossians 2:13-14).

Under the Law arrangement, the high priest was permitted to enter into God's presence once a year by bringing the blood of the bullock and the goat and passing through the curtain between the holy place and the most holy place of the tabernacle. But we are told that at the moment of Jesus' death, the sun stopped shining, darkness covered the land and this beautifully woven curtain inside the temple in Jerusalem was torn in two, signifying God's removal of the old Law and the introduction of a new and living way to him — through faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:51).

The apostle clearly showed this **superior way** in Hebrews chapters 8 to 10. *“He sets aside the first (covenant) to establish the second (covenant). And by that will (God's will) we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all* (Hebrews 10:9-10). The apostle was quoting from Jeremiah 31:31. *“The Holy Spirit testifies to us about this. First it says, 'This is the Covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts and will write them on their minds. Then it adds, Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more”* (Hebrews 10:15-17). The apostle explained this new relationship. *“How much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences ... that we may serve the living God!”* (Hebrews 9:14). *“For this reason Christ is the Mediator of a New Covenant, that those who are called might receive the promised inheritance”* (Hebrews 9:15). That inheritance is eternal life in God's Kingdom (Hebrews 12:28).

Having compared the failings of the old to the **superiority** of the new, the apostle turned his attention to the dangers of faithlessness and the importance of perseverance. He urged the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem to hold on to what they had, to develop strength to endure persecution and to love each other while always looking to Jesus, the great author and perfecter of our faith. He wrote, *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — all the more as you see the Day approaching ... do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere, so that when you have done the will of God you will receive what He has promised”* (Hebrews 10:25,35-36).

The faith chapter (Hebrews 11) gives us outstanding examples of those who served God faithfully despite great hardship and opposition. People like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel and others are described as faithful, yet none will receive what they had been promised until the Son of Man raises them from their graves and all of Jesus' faithful followers share in his heavenly glory (Hebrews 11:39,40). We believe that they will all receive human perfection and will live to serve the Lord on the earth as part of his new administration to bless all the families of the earth. Jesus and his nominal bride however, will inherit a heavenly reward (Matthew 8:11; 1 Peter 1:4).

While the apostle urged us to fix our eyes only on Jesus, we should be aware that, as the children of God we must expect to be disciplined by him as part of our character-development. He wrote, *"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a Son"* (Hebrews 12:5-6). The apostle urges us to diligence in Philippians 2 where he wrote, *"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose"* (Philippians 2:12-13).

And in Ephesians 2 Paul wrote, *"It is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... not by works so that no one can boast; for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works"* (Ephesians 2:8-10). God is working out his will in us as we submit daily to his will.

The apostle then compared two mountains — one physical, the other spiritual which are pictures of the old and the new arrangements. Israel came to a mountain of fire, darkness, storm and terrifying gloom, but we come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem — city of the living God, to thousands of holy angels, to the church of the firstborn, to the Living God himself, to all the righteous heroes of faith, to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, whose blood is **superior** to that of Abel and all others. God's voice once shook the earth. Next time it will shake both heaven and earth, but we should not fear, even though our God is like a consuming fire.

The apostle's final words in chapter 13 apply both to the believers in Jerusalem and to us.

We must show love for each other as brethren (verse 1) even though there are individual differences which tend to divide us. For it is very clear that while we are in the flesh, spiritual harmony and unanimity of doctrine will always be a difficulty. Nevertheless, we must always strive for perfection in mind and character.

We are to be hospitable to all (verse 2). In the past, some have entertained angels without realising it (a reference to Abraham and the three strangers who were sent with a message from God). Paul, Peter, James and John all emphasised the importance of hospitality and care for the people of God and for those who are in need in the world.

Remember those who are suffering (verse 3). We are to share with them in both the sorrows and the joys of the Christian experience. We must help those who have been unjustly treated and pray for those who are being persecuted.

We are to keep marriage sacred and holy (verse 4). God is the righteous judge of all adulterers and the sexually immoral. In his own due time and in his own way he will bring all men and women to a correct understanding of what is right and what is wrong.

Be content with what you have (verse 5). We are not to love money or crave after wealth and material possessions. Neither of these can give us satisfaction, happiness or joint-heirship with Christ. *Has not God chosen the poor of this world, who are rich in faith, to inherit the Kingdom?* (James 2:5).

Imitate the faith of your elders (verse 7). These people in our congregation and at Christian Conventions have been instrumental in helping us to understand God's Word of truth. They have set a good example for us to follow. Paul said to the Philippians, *"Whatever you have learned or received or heard or seen in me put into practice and the God of peace will be with you"* (Philippians 4:9).

Ignore all strange teachings (verse 9). Teachings that have no direct scriptures to support them are either unreliable or erroneous. All the words and writings of men are of little benefit to us without a *"Thus saith the Lord"*. Only God and Christ are the authors and suppliers of truth. And we must remember that it is only God's anointing which helps us to know what is truth and what is error (1 John 2:27).

The apostle reminds us that we (believers in Christ) have a **superior** altar (in heaven), a **superior** sin offering (which is Jesus, a **superior** high priest) and a sacrifice which has **superior** blood (verses 10-12) than that of animals. In every respect, Jesus' death and resurrection to God's right hand has brought rest, peace, forgiveness, salvation and righteousness to all those who believe in him.

Just as Jesus suffered for his obedience outside the city (that is, outside Jerusalem) so must we (verse 13) by being ambassadors for him in a world of sinners, when our own citizenship is really in heaven (Philippians 3:20). We belong to him and his kingdom, yet while we remain in this world we must also be faithful witnesses for him.

Our praises to God in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs are acceptable sacrifices to God (verse 15). Our bodies are also considered acceptable as living sacrifices in God's service (Romans 12:1). Our prayers which rise like sweet incense to heaven are considered by God as a sweet-smelling savour to him (Revelation 5:8).

In conclusion, this wonderful, profound and glorious letter to the Hebrews clearly and eloquently explains the **superiority** of Jesus' sacrifice and has undoubtedly become one of the precious jewels amongst God's treasure-house of sacred truths.



PEACE

A devotional presented by Sylvia Giles
(All references are quoted from the KJV unless otherwise stated.)

Jesus said, I am leaving you with a gift, something the world cannot give. It is the gift of Peace of mind and heart. So, we never need to be afraid whatever our circumstances, as the Peace of God is always available (John 14:27).

We so much need this Peace in this dark world of sin. The world is in such a dreadful state with wars and rumours of a Third World War that men's hearts are failing them for fear of what may be coming on the earth (Luke 21:26). We know that God has promised a time of Peace and He is in control. For our part we are looking forward to a new heavens and a new earth, and this gives us hope and Peace of mind.

Peace is one of the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit, of which there are nine mentioned in the list in Galatians 5:22-23; *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control: against such there is no law"*. We all need to develop this Peace in our lives as Christians walking in the Spirit. We need to concentrate on this quality or attribute lest we fail. It could be one of the most difficult to attain in our lives. Our Peace can be so easily disturbed and shattered by unexpected events in our lives or even by an unkind word, especially if given by a fellow believer and if untrue.

What Is Peace?

Peace is defined as 'a quiet calm, harmonious relationships, peaceable, leading to peace' according to the Oxford dictionary. Where envying and strife are there is no Peace (James 3:16). Peace is a state of rest, tranquillity and freedom from anxiety, and is capable of expanding our faith as in 2 Peter 1:2, "*Grace and peace be multiplied unto you*". How do we achieve Peace in our relationships when there is no harmony?

There are four references in the Bible in the way Peace is used. They are: Peace **with** God, Peace **from** God; Peace **of** God; and Peace that is to come **on** the earth.

The first way that it is used is **Peace with God**. Peace with God is a condition of being reconciled with God, as being no longer an enemy with him through sin. It is recorded in Romans 5:1, "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ*". This Peace is the work of Christ and is given when the individual enters by faith. "*For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh*" (Ephesians 2:14-17).

The second way it is used is **Peace from God**. This emphasises the source of all true Peace. "*Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 1:3). The apostle Paul used this salutation in all his epistles including in Romans 1:7, "*To all that be in Rome, beloved of God called to be saints, Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*".

The third way it is used is **Peace of God**. This is an inward Peace. Peace is a quality inherent in God our Father as well as our Saviour. The Peace of God is a divine quality which, through the Holy Spirit, can be imparted in the heart and life of a believer. God is the very God of Peace who will sanctify you (1 Thessalonians 5:23). He is the God of Peace, as recorded in 2 Corinthians 13:11, "*Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you*". Also, Colossians 3:15, "*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts ...*".

Christians can have this Peace of God through prayer, having first entered into Peace with God. They have a close relationship with Him by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, letting their request be made known to God.

Therefore, they have committed all their anxieties to him through prayer, and having this Peace of God *“which passeth all understanding”* shall keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Not that we are completely free from thoughts and caring, but we are not to be over-anxious about our lives. *“For this reason I say to you do not be over-anxious about your lives, as to what you are to eat or what to drink, nor about your bodies, as to what clothes you are to put on. Is not life more precious than food, and the body than clothing?”* (Matthew 6:25; Weymouth). We need to take reasonable care about what we will eat and the clothes we will wear as this is our responsibility, but we are not to be over-anxious as we know that the Lord knows our every need giving us Peace. *“He cares for the birds of the air, for they sow not neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, for your heavenly Father feedeth them”* (Matthew 6:26; Weymouth; also recorded in Luke 12:24). We are of more value than they. He cares about the very details of our lives. We don't need to focus on our worries so as to leave room to focus on God and his Kingdom. *“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God”* (Matthew 6:33; see also Luke 12:31) and then your worries will begin to fade.

Jesus told his disciples not to be afraid because he was leaving them but to have Peace of mind. The disciples' lives did not always go smoothly or end well. All of them suffered and some of them were even martyred. Jesus didn't promise them Peaceful circumstances, but he did promise them, and us, Peace of mind and heart. Knowing that God is with us we need not be troubled or afraid. Jesus said, *“... I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

How does this help with our relationships with others?

It is by continuing in prayer and walking in the Spirit and in wisdom, letting our speech be always with grace seasoned with salt so that we may know how we ought to answer every man (Colossians 4:2,5-6). We will develop more of all the qualities of the fruit and experience more of the Peace of God by the renewing of our minds. If we continually bring hurtful things to mind we will never have Peace of mind. We must put them in the past, having learnt a lesson from them, and leave it all with Jesus. He has paid the price. Then we have the Peace of mind that our Lord has promised to those who have believed in him and put their trust in him. We are being tried and tested for our faith. *“That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 1:7).

This could mean a change of behaviour as needed to perfect our characters. Take courage and pray for strength for our spiritual growth.

If we live in the Spirit, we also walk in the Spirit. We require all attributes of the fruit to be filled with the Spirit. By walking in the Spirit the fruit will grow. There are two verses referring to walking in the Spirit in Galatians 5. *“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh”* (verse 16), and *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit”* (verse 25). Verse 16 is different from verse 25. To walk in the Spirit in verse 16 from the Greek word is to walk by yourself. So by walking in the Spirit you will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. Whereas in verse 25, walking really means to march in the Spirit in step with others. We need both; to walk by ourselves and a walking in step with other Christian believers.

The fourth way Peace is used is **Peace on earth**. The whole of Psalm 72 forms a complete vision of the Messiah’s Kingdom, and verse 7 says, *“In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace as long as the moon endureth”*. There will be universal Peace as recorded in the well-known verse in Isaiah 9, verse 7, which says, *“...of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end”*.

Isaiah 11 is a prophetic picture of the glory of the future Kingdom where there will be Peace; *“They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”* (verse 9). In this new heaven and new earth, we are told in Revelation 21:4, *“God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away”*.

In that day there will be Peace and great rejoicing.



Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 8:7-13

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of

Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

The comment was made that the Law Covenant itself was not faulty, but rather it could not be permanently effective because of the sinfulness and disobedience of the people and the priesthood. The weakness of the Law Covenant was the people themselves. As Jeremiah 31:32 tells us, they broke the Law Covenant. And so it was necessary for a better arrangement to be introduced to provide salvation from sin. That better arrangement was the New Covenant as foretold by God through the prophet Jeremiah.

The New Covenant was offered to the whole nation of Israel: the ten-tribe kingdom to the north and the two-tribe kingdom of Judah and Benjamin to the south, centred on Jerusalem. It was preached to them for three and a half years.

It was wondered why Hebrews 8:10 mentions only “*the house of Israel*” and does not include the house or Kingdom of Judah as well, but we concluded that both houses were sometimes referred to as Israel by the Lord and by the prophets. Jesus said that he came to the lost sheep of Israel, meaning both the northern and southern kingdoms, even though both these had been conquered by Gentile nations.

Under the New Covenant all will come to know the Lord, as stated in Galatians 4:9. The new law is written on the hearts and in the minds, and that is the case now and will continue into the age to come.

God purposed to have His Israel. The nation failed, and a new people, the Israel of God succeeded and superseded the people of the old arrangement. The old arrangement was a shadow; the new is the substance.

Ezekiel 11:19 tells us that God will give His new Israel a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone, and also a new spirit.

Hebrews 9:1-4

- 1 Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.**
- 2 For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary.**
- 3 And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;**
- 4 Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;**
- 5 And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.**

These first five verses of Hebrews 9 list the items of furniture in the original Tabernacle organised by Moses according to the details given to him by God when he was on Mount Sinai in the wilderness. There were two sections or enclosures. The first room, the Holy Place, contained the lampstand, the table of shewbread and the altar of incense. The second room, the Most Holy Place, sometimes called the Holy of Holies, contained the Ark of the Covenant, a chest which held the jar of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the two stone tablets of the Law. All these items signified the importance of and reminded them of the events involved with their national history.

Sitting over the Ark were two cherubim, between which God's shining glory was said to have been displayed. Some Bible scholars have called this the 'Shekinah light', but although we were unable to find this term in any Bible concordance, it was discovered that 'Shekinah Light' has the meaning 'the dwelling of God', which was thought to be appropriate to symbolise God's presence between the two cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle.

These details are included in Exodus chapter 25.

Verse four seemed to indicate that the altar of incense was situated in the Holy of Holies, but the Diaglott footnote indicates that this altar of incense should have been included amongst the items in the Holy Place, or the first room of the Tabernacle, in accordance with God's instruction to Moses in Exodus 30:6.

Also in Exodus 25 is described the Mercy Seat which was situated above the Ark of the Covenant. Some versions say “*atonement cover*”, while the New Testament, in Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2 and 1 John 4:10, uses the Greek word “*propitiation*” which is equivalent to the Hebrew word. The word, or term describes God’s forgiveness given to those who approach him with repentant hearts, and their sins are expiated or forgotten altogether because of his mercy (Romans 11:32).

Hebrews 9:6-10

- 6 Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God.**
- 7 But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:**
- 8 The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing:**
- 9 Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;**
- 10 Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.**

One of the duties of the priests is described in Luke 1: 5,10, as Zacharias the priest had been chosen by lot, according to priestly custom, to burn incense in the temple, where the angel appeared to tell him of the birth of John the Baptist.

According to the NIV notes, there were actually five main Law Covenant sacrifices offered by the Aaronic priests: the burnt offering, the grain offering, the fellowship offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering (Exodus 29:25,28). Each involved a particular animal or element, and each was for a particular purpose to serve as a propitiation for wrong-doing amongst the people.

It was noted that in this letter to the Hebrews Paul stated that the high priest entered the Most Holy only on one day in the Jewish year with the blood of the animals. That day was to be the annual Day of Atonement, (see Exodus 30 and Leviticus 29) when first the bullock and then the Lord’s goat were slain and their blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat in the Most Holy place (Exodus 29).

Another goat, called the scapegoat, which had received the confession of the people’s sins on its head, was sent into the wilderness, to carry those sins out of sight, a symbol of God’s forgiveness.

Regarding the consecrated bread situated in the Holy Place, it was noted that David and his men were permitted to eat the bread which should have been eaten only by the priests, because David and his men had fled from Saul's soldiers and needed to be fed (1 Samuel 21:6).

Verse 7 indicates that the types of sins confessed over the scapegoat were those committed in ignorance by the people, while verse 9 indicates that the blood of the animals was also symbolic and could not be a permanent method of taking away sin. It was agreed that the blood of Jesus was the reality or fulfilment of the symbolism of both sacrifices. Also, Jesus' high priestly position is far superior to the position held by Aaron and the Levitical priesthood.

There are four points made in verse seven:

1. only the high priest was allowed to enter the holiest place of the tabernacle;
2. he was allowed to enter only on one day of the year, a first time with the blood of the bullock, and a second time with the blood of the goat, (Leviticus 16:14-15);
3. the sacrifices had to be made every year;
4. he had to enter with the blood under pain of death.

It was suggested that the sacrifice could be either a goat or a sheep, but the passage in Leviticus describes only a goat, while other references specify a sheep (lamb or ram) for the burnt offering, not for the sin offering.

In the parable in Matthew 25:31-32 the sheep are separated from the goats, but in the Old Testament sheep and goats are not usually differentiated. In verse 19 of this chapter of Hebrews calves, that is, cattle, and goats are mentioned, but not sheep.

Verse 8 points out that entry to the holiest place in the Jewish tabernacle was prohibited to the people while the old arrangement under the Law Covenant applied, and verse 9 shows that it was symbolic until the time 'of reformation'. The sacrifices could not clear the conscience of the priest nor the people, although it was necessary for the high priest to enter the holiest place, that is the presence of God.

The inner veil of the tabernacle barred the Israelites from the presence of God, symbolising how the inner awareness of sin bars the believer from God's presence. Isaiah 66:1-2 indicates that God required not those who carried out sacrifices mechanically and without the inner change of heart, but those who were of a humble and contrite spirit. Obeying the Jewish Law

could not clear the conscience, but Jesus has cleared the conscience of those who believe into him, so that they can go before God at any time, anywhere.

In verse 10 *“the time of reformation”* is given as *“time of the new order”* (NIV) or *“time of setting things right”* (Green’s interlinear). The new order is the New Covenant arrangement, which was established by Jesus’ death. If the New Covenant had not come into effect the ordinances of sacrifices and washings would have still been required. The new order had a time element, being set up at God’s chosen time; and also its newness contained a freshness and vigour that the old order lacked.

Hebrews 9:11-14

- 11 *But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;***
- 12 *Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.***
- 13 *For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:***
- 14 *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?***

In verse 11 the *“good things”* to come (KJV) were anticipated during the period of the Law Covenant since they were prophesied through the promise of the Messiah (Daniel 9: 25, John 4: 25). The NIV has *“already come”* indicating that they were available at the time the epistle was written. The Diaglott has *“future good things”* which refers to the good things that follow from Jesus’ gospel message, both at that time and throughout the gospel age, and into the next age.

The Law Covenant tabernacle was made by the Israelites, by specialist craftsmen and women who were instructed by God through Moses. It was built of wood and metal and fabrics to a complex design, whereas the new tabernacle is established in heaven, built simply upon spiritual truth.

Under the Law the blood of bulls and goats, as in verse 12, gave the high priest the authority to enter the holiest place, his standing acknowledged by God with his presence there. Jesus’ blood made his sacrifice acceptable to God and gave him the right to enter God’s presence in heaven. Forgiveness

of sins under the Law was for the whole nation, but only through the high priest. Also during the Jewish age God had direct dealings concerning other matters with individuals, such as the prophets, who went to him in prayer.

In verse 13 the ashes of the heifer mixed with water were for ceremonial cleansing, especially for those who had been close to one who had died (Numbers 19). This ritual was for external cleansing, and is contrasted in verse 14 with the internal cleansing by the Lord's blood, as he told the disciples in Mark 7:14-20. In response to repentance he provides spiritual cleansing of the heart and mind, a purging of the inner sinful nature and clearing of the conscience.

The many details of the tabernacle rituals contrast greatly with the simplicity of the terms of the New Covenant, the simplicity of which is founded in Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:3), which also shows up the ordinances of Christendom, contrived by man, to be complex and futile.

The "*eternal spirit*" in verse 14 was identified as God's holy spirit which was given to Jesus without measure (John 3:34-35), empowering him to be willing to shed his blood and give his life as a sacrifice to redeem mankind.

Whereas the conscience of the Israelites was not cleansed by gifts and sacrifices as is shown in verse nine, the blood of Jesus' perfect sacrifice can purge the conscience from works which are worthless and lead to death. The Israelites were required to make sacrifices daily, but Jesus' single all-sufficient sacrifice enables the believer to ask for forgiveness daily (1 John 1:9), if we are able to forgive those who trespass against us (Matthew 6:12).

This spiritual cleansing is obtainable only through Jesus, and although the flesh may still serve the law of sin (Romans 7:24-25) so that the guilt remains, condemnation is removed by serving the law of God, the law of love (Matthew 22:37-40) in spirit and in truth (Romans 8:1-2).

The Israelites were given forgiveness through their repetitive offerings but their inner sinful nature brought them to sin again, the commands of the Law Covenant to make daily sacrifices reminding them through their conscience that they remained sinners. Their cleansing could not be completed until the resurrection when they could come under the terms of the New Covenant.

For those accepting the sacrifice of Jesus, who is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1-2), the sinful inner nature and the consciousness of it can be purged, from dead works, thus achieving a cleansing in God's view, because

he has promised to remember sins no more, firstly in Jeremiah 31:34, and repeated in Hebrews 10 verses 16 and 17.

Those “*dead works*” of verse 14 are given as “*works of death*” in the Diaglott “*lifeless observances*” (Amplified Version) and as “*useless rituals*” (NIV footnote). These “*dead works*” or “*useless rituals*” were the rituals of the law which brought death, according to Romans 7:7-12. The law did not give life, but the Israelites, who were condemned by Adamic death, were also condemned by the law. In verse 12 this is contrasted with eternal redemption through Jesus Christ. Therefore, those who serve under the New Covenant can be cleansed from all unrighteousness.

NEWS

Vale Dorothy Grinsted

We were deeply saddened to learn of the death of our beloved sister in Christ, Dorothy Pearl Grinsted, on 14 August 2022 at the age of 94. Dorothy was a passionate follower of Jesus and a great example to all. She lived a life of great faith and demonstrated love for all with whom she came in contact. We will miss Dorothy’s infectious enthusiasm and joy, shown especially when she spoke about God’s wonderful promises of a glorious future. We also look forward to the time when those promises will all be fulfilled and we shall meet her again in His Kingdom. Dorothy is survived by her son Donald and daughter Felicity.

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 understandings 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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