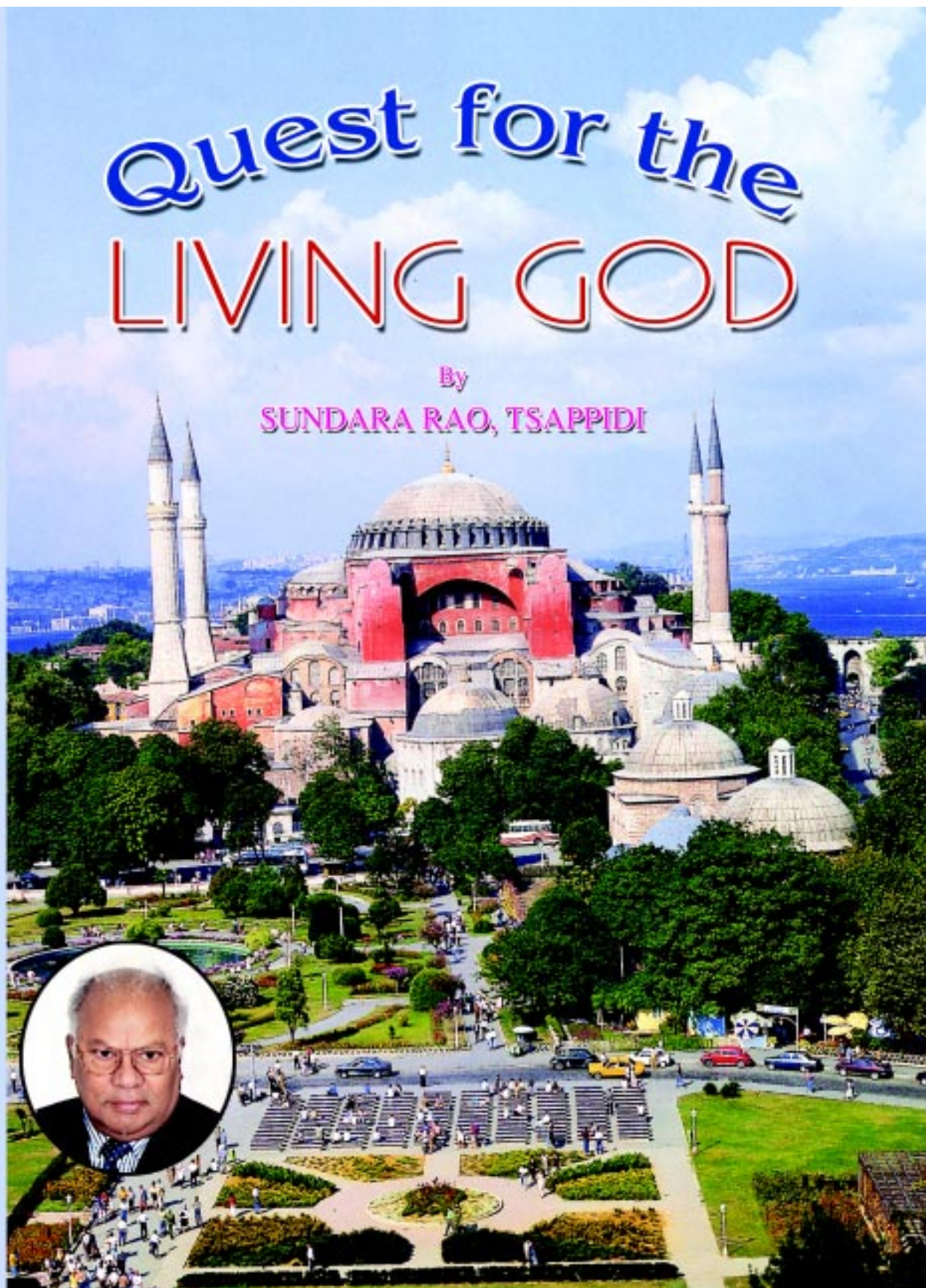


Quest for the **LIVING GOD** SUNDARA RAO, TSAPPIDI

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By
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Sundara Rao Tsappidi**

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QUEST FOR THE LIVING GOD

Sundara Rao, Ts.,

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PREFACE

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you! And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world, Amen.” (Matt 28:19,20).

“Praise and glory to God”

My heartfelt thanks are due to our Almighty and Merciful Saviour, Jesus Christ for giving me this gift of art of writing, I made use of this gift for my first book entitled, “The Legacy of God’s People” published in 2008, which won the appreciation of many. With the publication of this book I was able to spread the word of God as far as possible in India and certain parts of America. The information “The Legacy of God’s People” contained could not be found in the Bible and I got it from various sources.

The experience of the first book prompted me and encouraged me to go for the second book called “Quest for the Living God”. As I did for the first book, I looked into the books on the history of the Bible for more information. The writers I mentioned in the following list have been serving the Lord by their preachings and writings. Their writings helped me to contribute my own humble share to spread God’s word through my publication. This way we are co-workers in the vineyard of the Most High.

I would like to present some salient features of the topics of the present book entitled “The Quest for the Living God”. I found that the people of Old Testament gave priority for the meaning of the names of their children. For example Rachel the wife of Jacob named her two sons, Joseph and Benjamin.

The importance of the Scripture to the Israelites about the prophecies – the importance of four gospels – Queen of Sheba – Persons who became Martyrs etc.,. Then, some wonderful stories from a magazine called “Zion’s Fire” patronized by various writers. So the writers of all those topics helped me to write my book. I am always thankful to the following:

J. Ellsworth Kalos	–	<i>The Old Testament</i>
N.T. Wright	–	<i>The Lost World</i>
John Piper	–	<i>Future Grace</i>
Karem Armstrong	–	<i>The Bible</i>
John Kennedy	–	<i>Jesus</i>
Garry Wells	–	<i>What is Gospel meant?</i>
Thomas Carnhills	–	<i>The Gift of Jesus</i>
Robert Strand	–	<i>In the Company of Angels</i>

Then stories collected from	–	<i>Zion's Fire</i>
Mr David Ettenger	–	<i>1. Women of Zeal</i>
	-	<i>2. Queen of Sheba</i>
Dr Bill James	–	<i>1. The Temple of Israel</i>
		<i>2. Moses and His Five Excuses</i>
Mr Stan Rosenthal	–	<i>Messianic Prophecy and Fulfillment</i>
Dr William Vatner	–	<i>Jesus as Prophet, Priest and King</i>
Sherkat Kumar	–	<i>From the book of Turkey</i>
		<i>- History of St. Nicholas</i>
Christine M. Thomas	–	<i>The Seven Churches. Ephesus etc.,</i>

I am again thankful to all the above mentioned writers for their valuable contribution to the Christian world. As Christians, we belong to one God, one church and one faith. I pray to God to bless them with long life and good health, so that they can do some more service to Christian community by writing many more books.

Christ came into this world to do two things.

1. To heal the sick, both physical and mental.
2. To preach the Gospel.

Therefore let us offer our humble services as far as possible basing on the dictum “*service to humanity is service to divinity.*”

Vijayawada

Yours in Christ,
Ts Sundara Rao

*This book is dedicated to
my parents*

Ts Philips and Mrs Rojamma Philips

FOREWORD

Our gracious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ bestowed on Mr Sundara Rao Tsappidi, the gift of writing to spread His word and preach. After serving over three decades as lecturer in English at K.B.N. College, Vijayawada, retired and went with his wife Mrs Grace Vijaya to US to live with his children.

When he was shattered in health, he had a dream. In the dream he saw that he was dead and went to heaven. The Lord took him into His hands and showed him the houses and a church. He asked him to go and tell people all about Christ and salvation. This incident became a turning point in his life. Though he lost 40% of eye sight, he determined to live for God. He recovered from illness partially. When he came to India he built a church at a village Ramannapalem near Vijayawada and named it "Jehovah Jireh." His Holy Land tour, with his wife also brought exceptional change.

In America, instead of taking rest, he read various books from the library for the blind using lenses and started writing. His first book came out with the title "The Legacy of God's People" in 2008. This book brought him good response from the children of God, both in India and America.

Prompted by the Holy Spirit and encouragement from his readers and the members of the family he wrote the second book entitled "Quest for the Living God" This book will certainly win the hearts of the children of God and they will be greatly benefited by the information of the history of the Bible. "Quest for the Living God" contains eight chapters with thirty one sub-titles. Each article centres round God as the Saviour, the Redeemer and the Comforter of humanity. The information in these articles will satisfy the thirst of the readers.

Though Mr Sundara Rao Ts. is 73, with poor eye sight, he has the thirst for reading books and he wants to spread the Word of God in India and in the US by writing books. May the Lord our Saviour provide him with good health and wisdom to come out with more and more books on the Bible.

Vijayawada
27-11-2009

D.S. Sundara Rao, M.A., M.Phil.
S.A.S. Degree College, Vijayawada

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FAITH IN FUTURE GRACE

The writer is of the opinion that humanity is not a popular human trait in the modern world. It is not turned in the talk showed or celebrated in the valedictory speeches or Commercial Diversity Seminars listed with corporate core values and if you go to the massive self help section of your sprawling mall, back stores, you don't find many items celebrating humanity.

It is not difficult to find its main reason. As humanity can only survive in the promise of God, wherever God goes humanity will go with Him. In fact you might say humanity follows God like a shadow. We can expect to find humanity applauded in our society.

A writer accordingly found some important news in the local news paper recently in the guest editorial which captured the atmosphere of our times about humanity and also about humility. Those are some mostly cling to the "nostalgic" mainly to God. The average church goers take a few hours, out of the work to experiment the sacred.

But the rest of time he is immersed in the society that no longer acknowledges God who is an Omniscient, Omnipresent and Omnipotent force to be blessed and worshipped. Today, we are too much sophisticated for God where we are able to stand on our own legs. We are prepared and ready to choose and define our own existence, at the same time our own faith.

In such atmosphere humanity cannot survive. When God is neglected, the runner up God takes his place, mainly man. And by definition, he is the opposite of humanity, namely the highly spirited called pride. Therefore, the atmosphere in which we live is opposite to humanity.

1. AN APPETITE FOR GOD IN THE HEART

We have to mention an important point in this connection that is a hearty spirit is its form of unbelief and the only way to fight that unbelief of pride by faith in future grace. The

trusting God and using arrogantly are its two opposites. Man sets up strife but who trades in the Lord shall prosper.

A popular writer Stephen Chumoch Said, “A proud faith is as much as a contradiction as a humble denial.” To see why faith and pride are opposite to each other, we need to remember ourselves what faith is. The heart of Biblical truth is that Jesus will come to him for the satisfaction of that God is for us in Him. So Jesus said in John 6:35 *“I am the bread of life, who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst”*. From our quotation we have drawn out truth, that belief in Jesus means coming to Jesus for the satisfaction of all that God is for us in heaven. This disbelief will be turning away from Jesus in order to seek satisfaction in other things.

Belief is not simply an agreement with faith. It is also opposite to God in the heart which fastens on Jesus for satisfaction. What Jesus had said is, *“he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst”* Therefore eternal life is not given to the people who merely think Jesus is the Son of God. *“The water I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life”* (John 4:14).

He is also the bread of life and those who feed on Him for nourishment and satisfaction live by Him. I am the living bread that comes down from heaven. If any one eats of this bread shall live forever. These images – drinking and eating are to make clear the essence of water and food. And it is more than believing Jesus as life giving water and food. Faith is coming to Jesus and drawing water and eating food are the gifts so that we find our hearts satisfied in Him.

With this background, we can see and understand more clearly that pride is a species of unbelief and this disbelief will turn away from God and His Son, in order to seek satisfaction in other things. Therefore, pride is turning away from God, specifically to the satisfaction in life. It is also said that pride goes before one’s fall.

So pride is one specific form of unbelief, and its antidote is awakening and strengthening of faith in future grace. All the information we looked into so far can give impression that this form of unbelief is the unbelief of pride. It is also self-determination and self exaltation lie behind all these sinful disposition.

Anyone turning from God for anything presumes of autonomous or independence that is the essence of pride. Turning from God one assumes he knows better than God Himself. This pride lies at the root of everything away from God. It is the root of every act of distrust towards God.

To explain this important point more accurately, pride is not so much the root as it is the essence of disbelief and its remedy is faith in future grace. Therefore, battle against pride

means battle against unbelief and fight for humility means fight for faith in future grace.

Biblical references to this pride can be categorized as different ways of distrusting God. Each test on pride reveals that we refuse to trust God for more especially each one knows what we prefer to find in ourselves. According to prophet Jeremiah God says “let not a wise man boast of his wisdom and let not a mighty man boast of his might and let not a rich man boast of his riches” In these three phrases God makes his great competition for the boast of human heart. For each one’s wisdom might earn riches, tempts us to take satisfaction about them. It is radically humbling to confess the source of all our joy.

2. GOD WILL NOT EXTEND HIS GLORY TO THE PROUD

The writer is giving some of the proud and arrogant people. The king of Assyria illustrates pride that rests in the heart. When both wisdom and power conspire to lure the heart from God to self. God made the king of rod of His righteous wrath against the people of Israel. Yet the king did not delight in God’s enabling power and guidance. But he took credit for himself and said “By the power of my hand and wisdom I did this for I have an understanding and I removed its boundaries of the people and plundered their treasures and like a mighty man I brought down their inhabitants” (Isaiah 10:13).

This is not smart and God will not share His glory with the proud. In fact He promises “I will punish the fruit of arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and pomp of its hautiness. The antidote to kings desire and pride is to believe this threat and find his greatness in God’s power and wisdom but not his own.

3. THE PROUD IS MADE TO EAT GRASS LIKE AN OX

A man who ate too much grass in the history of Israel was king “Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon for his proud nature. *“Is this not Babylon the great which I myself have built as a royal resident by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty”* (Daniel 4:30). For that ego or pride God humbled him and made him eat grass. Like an animal in the open fields until he learned to exalt God’s supreme and sovereign power far superior to him.

“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing but he does according to His will in the host of heaven and the inhabitants of earth and no one can ward off his hand or say to Him what hast thou done? Now I, Nebuchadnezzar praise and exalt and honour the King of Heaven for all His works are true and His way is just and also His ability to humble those who walk in pride.”

The antidote to Nebuchadnezzar’s pride was not simply a new knowledge in the head but a new exaltation in the heart. His pride and exaltation renewed the awakening of faith

and gladness that God reveals the future with the Omnipotent grace to establish His plan and humble the proud. He was satisfied with God's programme to do as he pleases in the sovereign freedom of His justice and grace.

4. WE NEED NOT BOAST FOR GOD'S GIFTS

So far, we have understood wisdom and might are perhaps the greatest tempters to pride. We can purchase the resources of intelligence and power that we may not have in ourselves. God gave us a good example of the proud people for their arrogance in the book of Hosea.

The result is described by God (Hosea 13:6). *"As they had their postures, they became satisfied and busy satisfied. Their hearts became proud. Therefore, they forgot me"* Pride is an issue of where your satisfaction is. As they have their positions, they are satisfied which is other way of saying, pride is an issue of what you are trusting in for your future. Hence God used the language of trust.

Israel trust in treasures is made for the security from invading armies. Her faith is not in future grace and that is the problem. She had been lured into a delusion of false delights and treasures of which themselves are the gifts of God's grace. Therefore, they prune the hand if they lean on themselves instead of God.

The Apostle Paul might ask these people as he questioned the Corinthians in the same manner. The question is *"What do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive why do you boast as if you had not received it?"* (1Corinthians 4:7). Today in a simple manner whatever we have we must have received from God only. It lies in his heart to leave or to take to turn for us or against it.

A true Christian lives by faith only. Then whatever we possess we must believe we got it not with our effort but it is the gift of God for our faith. That is why Bible never tells us some examples of truth. The king is not saved by a mighty army. A soldier is not delivered by great strength and a horse is a false hope for a victory not it deliver any one by its great strength.

We trust in His holy name. The trust that looks away from our own resources and rests in God is what I mean by faith in future grace. This is the only remedy for our pride.

5. PRIDE LEADS TO ATHEISM

When you are sure of yourself to all kinds of temptations to self-reliance, wisdom, riches and might that form a powerful endorsement to war. This is the ultimate form of pride that may be called Atheism. A famous quotation worth to mention in this connection *"war is the child of pride and pride, the daughter of riches"* So the safest way to stay supreme in our own estimation is to deny the above. This is why the proud pre-occupy themselves with

looking down on others. A proud man always looks down on things and people and of course as long as you are looking down you cannot see anything.

In order to preserve pride it may be a common thing to proclaim that there is nothing to look at. The wicked in the haughtiness of his countenance does not seek them. All these thoughts prove that there is no God ultimately the pride persecute themselves to say that there is no God.

One of the reasons for this is that God's reality cannot be comprehended in all the details of life. Pride does not allow and tolerate the intimacy and involvement of God in running even the ordinary affairs of life.

For example, James the brother of Jesus diagnoses pride behind the simple presumption of planning to go from one city to another. Come now you who say today or tomorrow we shall go to such and such city spend a year and engage in business in order to make a profit. You didn't realize you are only a vapour in the sight of God. It appears for a while and then vanishes away. Instead of that you must say if the Lord wills, we shall live and also we can do this work or that. But if you boast in your arrogance, all such arrogance as well as boasting is nothing but evil.

Pride does not like the sovereignty of God. Therefore pride does not like the existence of God because God is the sovereign power. We must express this by saying, "there is no God" or it might be expressed by saying "I am driving to New York for Christmas. James says "Don't be so sure" Instead of this you must say if the Lord permits, we shall live and we shall go anywhere for Christmas. That means "if the Lord wills."

This is extremely offensive to the self sufficiency of pride. Not even to have control over it. James says it is not good in not believing the sovereignty of God to manage the details of your future arrogance. In such conditions, you must whole heartedly accept the omnipotency of God.

Therefore, the good solution to battle arrogance is to surrender to the sovereignty of God in all the details of life and rest in His infatigable promises to show Himself on our behalf to preserve us with goodness and mercy every day and to work for those who wait for Him and to supply with all we need to live for His glory. In other words the remedy to pride is unwavering faith in future grace.

6. THE VOID IN SELF SUFFICIENCY

It is really ironic to say self sufficiency should free the proud person from the need to be made much of it by others. This is what self-sufficiency means. But evidently there is a word in this so called self-sufficiency. Then that was never designed to satisfy itself or depend upon itself. It can never be self sufficient. We are only the images of God's not to real thing.

We are the shadows and echoes. So there will be always emptiness in the soul that struggle to be satisfied with the resources of power.

The empty covering of pride of others signals are the future of pride and absence of faith in future grace. Jesus saw terrible effect of this itch for human glory. He named it in the glory “*How can you believe, when you receive honour and you do not seek the everlasting glory that is one only from God*” (John 5:44).

The answer is, you cannot itch for glory from other people who make faith impossible. Why? Because faith is being satisfied with all that God will forgive in Jesus and if you are bent on getting the satisfaction of our itch from the search of others claim, you will turn away from Jesus.

But at your turn from that self as the source of satisfaction (repentance) come to Jesus for the enjoyment of all that God is for us in Him. Then the faith that itch would be replaced by a “well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

7. THE CAMOUFLAGED PRIDE OF ANXIETY

Anxiety is pride. It appears to be weak. And the admission does not kill the pride until that proud heart is willing to look to the one who controls the future and rests on Him. Until then the pride are handing on to the right of self sufficiency even as it crumbles on the horizon of future.

The remarkable, historical evidence is found in two places. The first one is when God indicts the anxious Israel by showing them the pride beneath their fear. I then I am, he who comforts who are you that you are afraid of a man who dies and of the son of man who is made like grass that you have forgotten the Lord your maker who stretched out the heaven and laid foundation of the earth that fear continuously all day longer.

In other words, who do you that you are afraid of mere man. You must really think that you are somebody to be afraid of like this? Now that is an odd rebuke. But the meaning is plain. Your fearing of man is a form of pride.

Why is anxiety about the future a form of pride? For this question God gives the answer. In the Lord your master – “I am He who comforts you who promises to take care of you; and those who threaten you are mere men who die. So you fear the most men but you do not trust me. You must think your protection hangs on you.

Even though you are not sure of your own resources will take care of God, yet you opt for fragile self reliance, rather than faith in future graces. So, all our trembling weak as it reveals pride. Then what is the remedy for this? Turn from self reliance, selfishness to God and put your faith in all sufficient power of future grace.

In this context let us look into the grammatical structure of the following. In the quoted example from the Bible verse, “Humble yourself”. It is just a phrase. Under the mighty hand of God, casting all your anxiety upon Him. Then humble yourself by casting anxieties on Him. This is only a subordinate clause. That means casting your anxieties on God is the way of humbling yourself under God’s mighty hand.

It is like saying “eat politely, chewing your mouth shut, Drive carefully keeping your eyes open, be generous inviting someone on Thanks giving”. Similarly “Humble yourself casting your anxieties on God” One way to be humble is to caste your anxieties on God, which means that undue worry is a form of pride. Now why is casting our anxieties on God; the opposite of pride. Because pride does not like to admit that it has any anxiety. And if pride as to admit that, it still does not like to admit, the remedy might be trusting some one else who is wiser and stronger, that is God Himself.

The conclusion of this topic about pride is that it is a form of unbelief and it does not trust in future grace. Faith admits the need to help, pride will not do such things. Faith banks on God to help others who wished for that but pride won’t. Faith leaves the anxieties on God, pride won’t. Therefore, the way to battle the unbelief of pride is to admit freely that you have anxieties and check the promise of future grace in the words “*He cares for you*”.

Let us conclude this topic with the final glimpses at the council of God through Jeremiah. Earlier we heard him say, “*let not a wise man boast of his wisdom and let not a mighty man boast of his might, and let not a rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boast of his this and that, understands and knows me that I am the Lord. Exercise loving kindness, justice and righteousness on earth for I delight in those things’ declares the Lord*”.

All discussion on the topic that is the rock bottom is the Biblical answer to the question, How best we can fight with pride. Be stunned and satisfied that we know God and He knows us.

ISRAEL – PEOPLE OF GOD’S KINGDOM

We must be curious to understand what the meaning of the ‘Kingdom of God’ and consider the role of Scriptures within it. The question of God’s kingdom or kingship raised in the Old Testament and subsequent Judaism, by the presence of radical evil within the God’s creation and within the covenant of people themselves.

Can God be king if things are as they are? Or can we call God as earthly king? The affirmation of God’s presence or future kingdom therefore means the affirmation that God will act as to deal with the problem to rescue His people and complete the purpose for the whole of His creation.

The two purposes (rescuing His people and completing His creation) are intimately connected as seen in stories and passages from Genesis to Revelation. God’s call of Israel to be His people and live under His rule has itself designed as the central move in putting the world in correct position.

So, Israel became God’s part of problem (being composed of sinful human bodies). This generated a second order problem, mirroring the direct parallel between the Babylonian exiles and expulsion from the garden of Eden as both witnesses. In both the cases (humankind in general and Israel in particular) idolatry generations all kinds of lession, truly human way of living both outside and inside Israel. This produces double problem which determines much of the Old Testament and Jewish thought and writing; as how Israel to be rescued and how the whole world is to be put to proper condition.

If there is no problem of evil, then there will be no need of speaking about praying to God or invoke God’s kingdom or authority. It is apparent as a present reality, to speak of Gods kingdom means to invoke God as the sovereign one. He has the right duty and power to deal appropriately with evil in the world in Israel and the human beings. This fresh gracious and forgiving purpose is about new creation put into preaching through the renewal of the Covenant.

Then our question can be sharpened by the permanent role of Scripture within the “Divine purpose”. If this is what God’s authority looks like and what part does an authoritative scripture play. When full allowance is made for the striking differences of genre and emphasis within the scripture, we may propose that Israel’s sacred writings were the place and where the means by which Israel discovered again and again.

He was the true God and the purpose of His kingdom purpose being taken forward. Recalling the Scripture control to worship for God’s kingdom is your hope in your heart.

In view of YHWH “word” in the Old Testament is very instructive. It is like an enormous creative treasure, full of “Divine wisdom” and power into which the prophets and other writers are attracted by God’s call and grace. The notion of “speech acts” which we referred to is always fairly new in philosophy. It would have surpassed ancient Israel prophesy. The imagery is of a powerful sovereign, who utters a decree from the throne.

1. ISRAEL THE SCRIPTURE HEARING PEOPLE

From the very beginning the people of Israel were constituted from one point of view as the people who heard God’s “Word” in call, promise, liberation, guidance, judgment, forgiveness, further judgment renewed liberation and renewal promise. This sequence is needed as a summary of the entire Old Testament narration from Abraham to post exile period.

This is what the writer meant. The scripture can be reduced to the notion of record about revelation. This is with the sense of mere writing down of earlier and assumedly prior to religious experience. If we imagine that would be super impose categories entirely foreign to the Old Testament authors, editors and listeners. We can not reduce that says “YHWH” to Jeremiah without squashing our own from work on top of others and indeed on their experiences as well.

Scripture did not reflect the experiences of religious awareness, social and cultural turmoil. So the faith of God’s people through of course did all that as well. Again and again the point of Scripture was that they adhere first prophetic word to Israel. This was done in the midst, with very ambiguous experience breaking into Israel’s own word of mistakes – facts in verbal form; what God Himself was doing, in breaking into the world and into Israel; Their life was left with judgment and mercy at the same time.

Though it is in the prophetic books that we can see this most clearly through the autobiographical passages through which the prophet’s call for struggle within God’s word. In this point a full account of the note of Scripture within the life of Israel would appear as a function of Israel election for the sake of the world. Through Scripture God is equipping Israel, His people to share His purposes.

Actually equipping is the same which inadequates short hand multiple text that the scripture

accomplished. Through scripture only Israel was given order for her national life; a structural worship, wisdom for daily conduct of life, or rebuke or praise through the prophets.

2. INSPIRATION AND THE WORD OF “YHWH”

The Israel got the notion of inspiration at this time only. The inspiration is the short hand way for telling about the belief and by the spirit of God guided every different writers and editors, so that the books they produced were the books that God intended His people to have.

But this is not the subject of the present book. We have to be reminded of some kind of “divine inspiration” and the scripture was taken for granted in most of the ancient Israelites. We have to remember one thing that is the Scripture played a vital role in influencing Israel and the early Christians.

The emergence of a “Canon” (principle) of Scripture though it has been controvertial in some respects, in recent discussion was at the heart an attempt to track the way, still those books had become formulative to the life of God’s people. It is to renew the Israel to honour and attend themselves appropriately. But the powerful idea of God’s “Word” not as a synonym for the writers of the Scripture, but as a strange personal experience of creating, judging, healing and finally recreating.

The word “YHWH” was heavenly made and all the host of Him breath of His mouth. *"Is not my word live afresh and like a hammer that breaks the rock into pieces? All the flesh is like the grass. It withers and fades, but the word of God will stand forever. It is like the rain and snow coming down and watering the earth. So shall my world be that goes forth from my mouth. It will not return to me empty but it will succeed in the tasks for which I send it."* The word is near you on your lips, further living embodiment of YHWH’s call and promise.

It was written to stage and direct the life of God’s people. The inner and puzzle of Old Testament was one thinks for instance the apparent clash between Deuteronomy and the story of Job. That story suggests virtue is rewarded at the end of this life itself. The Israel have to recognize as bearers of God’s healing promise not only to themselves but also to the whole world. They were also people who belong to the world and who stand under the same need of judgment and healing.

The word “Authority” is frankly too narrowly followed to do justice to all. To attempt and to sum up the role played by the Scripture within Israel, we need to say some thing like God’s sovereign authority for Israel by means of His spoken and written word. And to put it in a more simple way God’s sovereignty operating through Scripture, God spoke and it was done. The word itself is in who carried power and now life (Isaiah 40:8).

3. SCRIPTURE IN SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

During the second temple period about fourth century B.C., it was observed that the Scripture authority was operating in at least two interlocking. Controlling story in which Israel to find its identity also destiny. They were the covenant people for whom God's justice would ultimately break upon the word. The controlling story itself became a controversial in the ancient world. But their story was heard in different ways.

Jewish scripture and their observed problems did not present the Scripture precisely this way within the Judaism of Jesus day. It was followed accordingly by living under scripture as controlling narrative which helped as a guide for daily life. The Scripture was read by them, taught, prayed and sung in the temple, in the synagogues, in the Qumran community daily, weekly, at the great festivals and finally in solemn feasts. Why all this was done because for more sharpening Israel as real people; who have been waiting for God's kingdom for a long time.

The multiple and weakly changing types of Judaism in Jesus day came to be placed in terms of different ways of understanding and attempting to live. The Israel preferred this kind of life by following Scripture, then work, pray and wait for God to bring the story in which they were living to its proper condition.

Israel was thus continued from one point of view, as the people who heard God's call of promise of liberation, guidance, judgment, forgiveness and then further judgment, renewal liberation and renewal promise (this sequence is intended as the summary of the entire post exile period).

The main purpose of Scripture is simply about giving information of the people who had religious experience. In addition to that the Biblical writers were telling the story of Israel which was in order and preserved. Their story also contained some facts about their way of life. The story was told in order to generate once more the sense of Israel as the people called by "YHWH" for His purpose to do something in this world. This writing and telling the story was found for the testing embodiment of "YHWH" call and promise. Finally the most important point about the writing was to shape and direct the life of God's people Israel.

WHAT CAN FAITH DO?

The people who were called for the fellowship of Christ, for them the ocean of future grace is free, inexhaustible, unmerited, unearned and unconditional. This is not a contradiction. It is pervasively Biblical according to the former reference and that information is not contradictory to the main theme of this topic. The sanctification is by faith in addition to meritorious works. But there is a problem herein behind the continuity of future grace.

We should believe that faith in the future grace is the only means by which we can become free from the deceptive promises of sin and gain strength and courage to live. This is no doubt a radical and risk taking in a true christian life. On the other hand the condition of future grace appears to say that our life is completely depending upon promises which have power.

To say in some other way, promises will enable us to be good. We are not required to perform faith before what faith can alone perform. But to keep this in the correct track, we need to make clear that the conditions of future grace are of certain type. In this connection there are ten conditions for "future grace."

They are:

- 1) Loving God
- 2) Being humble
- 3) Going near to God
- 4) Crying out to God from the heart
- 5) Fearing God
- 6) Delighting in God
- 7) Hoping in God
- 8) Taking refuge in God

9) Waiting for God

10) Trusting in God

There is also eleventh condition, which is 11) keeping covenant with God.

1. HOW THE SOUL ACTS WITH FAITH?

The common condition of our inner spiritual act is of course towards God. It is not outside act of the relationship with other people. Therefore all the above said conditions will represent certain kind of heart, they describe the heart that receives grace. These are not meritorious performances of the heart with all attention to our worth so that God will be indebted to our values. They are the acts of turning away from self and our emphasis to all that God is for us.

For example, loving God, delighting in God, and drawing near to God mean looking to God as beautiful, waiting and precious waiting for God, and taking refuge in God, hoping in God and crying out to God means looking for Him as a valiant rescuer. Trusting God means counting on His trustworthiness to meet everything that is needed.

Then fearing God means, standing in and at the infinite chasm, between His holiness and power on the one hand, our sins and weakness on the other. If we possess this kind of heart that shows the inner condition of our keeping covenant with God.

If we start to meditate upon those ten conditions that are mentioned above, they begin to look like less and less distinct of requirements more and more like different ways of describing the heart of faith. The heart that is fully satisfied that God is for us in Jesus, who is exemplified by all these things. Then all these acts of the heart are overlapping reactions with saving faith. Faith is not identical with any one of them, not their faith, but the element of each woven into what faith is.

As a matter of fact, saving faith loves God, and delights in God as sum of all that could ever satisfy the soul. Saving faith is humble because by nature it despises of self and looks to God. Saving faith draws near to God, and cries out to God and waits for God. The saving faith also takes refuge in God, believes in God and hopes in God because the essence of faith is to embrace God and God alone as the sum of all it will ever need.

The saving faith trembles at the very thought of offering such a great God to disbelief in His promises. All the conditions of future grace that we have observed so far are not additional to faith, but they are the expressions of faith.

2. CONDITIONS OF FUTURE GRACE, NOT FAITH

According to the previous information we have seen the conditions of future grace, that

outward actions towards other people are the inner acts of Israel towards God. Actually those conditions are not part of faith. How do they fit in? How are a few of these conditions of future grace that are not faith but come from faith?

Jesus Christ once said an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall come forth. Those who did good deeds to a resurrection of life. Those who committed evil deeds to a resurrection of judgement (John 5:28-29).

Therefore, the future grace of resurrection of life is guaranteed to those who have done good deeds in their life time. On the other side of this promise, is the warning mercilessly given to evil doers in this life time. "To be clearer those who practice such evil things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21). The future grace of inheriting the kingdom of God is contingent are not preaching to the works of flesh.

John gave the same type of warning with regard to the specific importance to love. "We know that we pass out of death into life because we love the fellowmen. He who does not love meets the death" (1John 3:14).

In such position we cannot be in the best of future grace of eternal life if we do not love. Then "one who does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1John 4:8).

Jesus Christ has His own specific impression about love, and makes it the condition of future grace of God's ongoing forgiveness on us. He is of the opinion that if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men then your father will not forgive your transgressions.

The writer of the Hebrews sums up conditionally about future grace with holiness. Sanctification with all men and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. The condition, we have added and discussed are different from the ten conditions, that are already noted. They are actions or attitudes towards other people. But they are not just inner acts or heart towards God. Now the dilemma, we passed earlier is put more keenly. We do have to meet these conditions before we can know, the resources of final future grace. By confidence, they are the fulfillment of those conditions.

3. LOVE IS THE FULFILLMENT OF LAW

If we observe carefully, we can notice that all conditions seemed to have lifted in love. Apostle Paul said concerning doing good and obeying the ten commandments that is what precisely and what love does. Love does no wrong to a neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of law. Forgiveness is essentially an expression of love. Paul also says that love is the essence of holiness or sanctification. May the Lord cause you to increase you rich in love so that you may establish your heart in holiness. So to say, all the behaviour that is required for a Christian, may be summed up in love.

“Let all that you do be done in love” (1Corinthians 16:14).

What we have seen there in the ten conditions of future grace discussed already that we are summed up in faith. And the behavioural conditions we have just discussed are again summed up in love. That means, we may now say the conditions a Christian must meet to go on enjoying the blessings of future grace are faith and love.

There is a remarkable confirmation that we are going forward on the right track in this summary. Apostle Paul said the whole law is to be perceived by faith and says that the law is fulfilled with a phrase “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Romans 13:9).

These two words faith and love are so to say inspiration in the Bible as the summation of all that God requires for His people.

John put it in a striking way in his first letter. *“This is His commandment, that we must believe in the name of His son Jesus Christ and love one another” (1John 3:23).* It is surprising to find here is that the word commandment is used as singular though he mentions two. This is singular commandment to believe and to love. For John they are a singular but inseparable, also indistinguishable, commandment and love in his mind is to love one another while the faith is toward Christ.

If we look into the writing of Paul, faith and love mentioned together again and again as a kind of sum. What in his mind appears to be that he expected this from the churches.

“I heard of the faith in Jesus Christ, which exists among you and God’s love for all the saints” (from Ephesus). “The grace of our Lord was more than abundant with faith and love which we find in Jesus Christ”

These examples would be enough for our conclusion, that it is not by accident one but condition from future grace is summed up by faith and the other is summed up by love. This must have been the correct way observed and followed by the apostles.

4. FAITH AND LOVE OF FUTURE GRACE

We are now in full confidence to question and clarify doubt. Is it the condition of loving others means that before we claim a promise of future grace, which is designed to help us but with a radical, risk taking person of love? We perform before faith, what faith meant to perform.

In answer for the above question is negative because the reason is that faith towards God and love towards people (man) are not co-ordinative conditions. They do not remain side by side in the heart. Faith arises first and begets love. This is now quite clear in Galatians 5:6. *“for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor un circumcision anything but faith working through love”.*

Therefore, faith produces all that God requires and does it through love. It means that love is not expected of us before faith, as faith is the root and source of love. We need to be confused because of earlier statement that love is the part of essence of faith. That was a reference to love for God. Then how we have to talk about love for other people who are not required to love others before we become people who trust in God whole heartedly? Again trust means believing in future grace.

So, it is possible indeed necessary to bank on the promise of future grace before we are transformed into a type of people who love others. We do not have to perform before faith, what faith is meant to perform and what faith performs is sometimes unspeakably hard.

Jesus was carried and sustained in His love for us by the joy set before Him. That means His love was made permanent by faith in future grace. And man is modeling for us how to take upon our cross and follow Him; on the Calvary road of love. Jesus entrusted Himself to this faith and followed His hope on the resurrection and the joy of reunion with His father and redemption of His people's faith, in his faith worked itself through love.

5. IS LOVE A CONDITION OF FUTURE GRACE?

When it is said in the Bible about good conduct of love, or some form of it, as a condition of future grace, we have to remember two things in this connection. One is to love others. It does not sprint forth, that is already in full bloom from the soil of faith. The condition or future grace is not perfect love but real love.

The puritans used to speak of a new principle of love in heart as soon as we are born again. The behaviour of love is not on warnings of this example of love rooted in the soil of faith. Therefore, we need not think that mere immediate blessings of future grace, but we must wait till our love takes its long time to prove itself. God can see our heart and He knows what is the inner being.

There is a second thing, we must know, when the Bible mentions that loving others is a condition of future grace. So we must keep in mind that love relates to faith as existence to origin.

Love is necessary evidence of Faith. Faith appears and embraces spiritual beauty and worth of all that God is for us in the promise of future grace. The spiritual awakening to the glory of God in promises is the answer, which God unites us to Christ and to the spirit flow of future grace.

But this kind of faith eventually works through love so that love confirms the authority of faith. This is exactly what Peter had in his mind and confirms our calling and election through love. It is also the same thing which John has in his mind when he says, "we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren."

So the Bible sometimes makes love the condition of ongoing and final experience of future grace. It does not mean love must practice faith in the promise. On the contrary it means faith in the promise must be so real that love which it produces, proves its reality of faith. This love for others is a condition of future grace in the sense that it confirms the primary condition as faith is genuine. Then we can call love for others is a secondary condition that confirms the authority of primary condition of faith.

Then the writer gave a beautiful comparison of brethren love and light. The light and love are both conditions of future grace. If God does not find in you those two things, He will know that you are not plugging into the power of future grace given by faith, He will call you and tell you that light is lessened and loneliness will not be given the benefits of future grace.

Therefore, faith and love are conditional of future grace but not in the same way. Faith presents the glory of God in the promises of future grace, and embraces all that the promises rend of what God is for us in Jesus. This spiritual apprehension and delight in God is the self authoritative evidence that God has to be a beneficiary of His grace. The evidence frees us to bank on the promise as our own and this banking on the promise, empowers us to love others; which in turn confirms that our faith is real.

The world is desperate for a faith that combines two things. One straight apprehension of unshakable divine truth, and utterly practical round the clock power to liberating difference in it. There is a great God of grace, who magnifies His own infinite self sufficiency by fulfilling promises to the helpless people who trust Him.

* * *

THE FUTURE GRACE OF SUFFERING

The main purpose of dealing with this particular topic is not just to show that the days are evil and the path of righteousness costly, but the promise of the Bible that God's people must suffer in this world. As it is said, "*many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord would deliver them out of all such calamities.*" (Psalms 34:19).

Paul advises to all the young churches that through many tribulations, only we can enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said to His disciples, "*if they persecuted me, they will persecute you also*" (John 15:20). Suffering is not a strange and uncommon thing for Christians. Indeed who desire to live godly life will be persecuted like Christ Himself.

In fact the way of life that comes from living by faith, in future grace will very likely involved more suffering. When you know that you are in the hands of all powerful, all knowing and all wise God who promises you that He would work all things for your good, you are free to take any risk that love demands no matter the cost of it.

It is a Biblical truth that the more we earn, we become the salt of the earth and light of the world. And also the more we are devoted we become to reaching the unreached people of the world who are expecting the works of darkness and losing the bonds of heaven, then prone to sin and satan and suffer more in their life time.

This kind of suffering always threatens us to destroy and discourage our faith in future grace. If we are well taught in the 'word' and if truth is God, it will go deep into our 'soul' and we will not be shaken under any circumstances. Instead of that we will see the suffering that not really the consequences of living by faith in future grace, but it is another gift of future grace.

1. WHAT MARTYRS MEANT TO BE?

At the end of the New Testament period, the apostle John got a vision from heaven and found under an altar some souls of those who were dead. They all shouted desperately and wondered how long they should wait in their graves. According to God's answer to

each of them was given a white robe and a pastor has given a piece of advice that they must rest a while until some more are to be added to their number. In other words there is a number of martyrs appointed by God and that number must be fulfilled for the consummation centre.

With a span of three hundred years Christianity grew in the soil which was soaked with the blood of martyrs until the emperor Trajan. It was he who actually started the persecution which was neither official nor legal in his time. But from “Trajan to Dacius” they made this persecution legal and implemented it during their rule.

Dacius who was the hater of Christians, and their impact on his reforms until the first edict of tolerance. He made this persecution not only legal but also put it in regular practice, widespread and general.

Horror and disappointment took place among the Christians who renewed their faith. when threatening became enormous there was no lack of honour but to remain firm and suffer martyrdom rather than yielding to persecution as it grew wider and more intensive. But at the same time, the enthusiasm of Christians and their power of resistance became stronger and stronger.

For about 300 years men to be called Christian became risky for their life, for their profession and their families. It is only because they love the ‘Word’ and the extremity of that was martyrdom. Regarding martyrdom there was a sovereign God, who appointed certain number for that purpose. There was a special planning (for that) in this connection to make the mouth of satan shut who continuously says that the people of God serve him only because life goes bitter.

Martyrdom is not merely some thing accidental. It does not take God off guard. It is also not emphatically a struggle or a defeat for the cause of Christ. But it is a plan in heaven that human struggle would ever conceive or could ever design. It will triumph for all these, who can bear or endure till the end by faith in future grace.

Penalizing and causing some kind of suffering to Christians became a common feature all over the world in those days. Let us examine some countries which have this kind of experience. The suffering of Christians in ‘Somalia’ was like putting the Christians in a lonely place. Then they were tortured, without food till they die. The second was the churches themselves became killing centres. The third place was ‘Nigeria’ which had always experienced tension for Christians and Muslims. Many Christians were brutally killed. The fourth place we can mention is China where millions of Christians were harassed and driven to underground because of persecution.

If the suffering and persecution continues, the figures may change from time to time.

This is all due to their faith towards God. This shocking and heartfelt news makes us believe that Christians are born to suffer and die. That is their destiny.

2. ABOUT THE DISCIPLES

The most democratic countries like U.S.A., it appears there is some antagonistic temperament among the intelligencia towards the evangelical church. The biblical vision of faith and righteousness among people are not shared not even admired in the society. Even the contents of the first commandment are somehow managed and misrepresented to the secular society.

The very name of Jesus is displeasing to some in the society and blasphemed by some institutions even. And in the present circumstances because of the discouragement from the society Christianity may not grow in such conditions. Two hundred years later St. Jerome said "The church of Christ has been founded by shedding His own blood, but not that of others by entirely outrage and by influencing it. But still persecutions have been made it grow and martyrdoms have crowded in."

3. SUFFERING SHAPES US WITH UNSHAKABLE FAITH

We find in the Bible, the more we suffer the more unshakable we will be in our faith in future grace. James says in this context "consider it all joy my brethren, when you encounter various activities, knowing the testing of your faith produces endurance."

God likes to love faith in future grace. His test will be stronger even to the breaking point because He wants to keep it pure, perfect and stronger. The best example for this test is of Paul who said in 2nd Corinthians 1:8-9, "*we don't want to be not aware of affliction that came to us in Asia that we were burdened heavily by over strength so that we hated even our life. Indeed, we had the sentence of death, within ourselves in ordeal that we should not trust in ourselves but in God, who raises the dead.*" So God had some purpose, when He made us suffer excessively. This extreme suffering made Paul not to depend upon himself for anything but on God only; especially to future grace of God in raising the dead.

Therefore, God values our sincere and wholehearted faith in future grace that He accepts it graciously. Everything in this world that we might be tempted to rely on even in life he has a right to take it away. God's aim is that we must grow deeper and deeper in our faith and confidence. He wants us to be able to say with the psalmist "*whom have I in heaven but Thee and besides Thee I desire nothing on earth.... My flesh and my heart may fall, God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever*" (Psalms 73:25-26).

It may be difficult to believe that everyone will respond to suffering in this way. Since

people may break after some experiences or problems. Jesus knew this and described it in Mark. In the parable of four soils He said, that some people who have the “word” received it, first with greatness. When they hear the word they received immediately with joy and they have no firmer in themselves but are only temporary.

When the affliction and persecution arise because of the word, immediately they fall away. Then we must be able to understand that affliction does not always make faith stronger. Sometimes faith crashes due to some unavoidable circumstances and then come to the paradoxical words of Jesus “*whoever does not have even what he has shall be taken away from him*” (Mark 4:24-25).

This is a call for us to face suffering with firm faith in future grace so that our faith may grow stronger and stronger and not to be proved vain.

The grace of suffering is clearly mentioned in the book of Romans. In this, apostle Paul says, “Christians exalt in the hope of glory of God”. That is our faith provided in the future grace of seeing God. Then Paul adds immediately that not only this but also we exalt in our tribulation of knowing that tribulations would bring about perseverance proven character, and proven character hope.

4. RESULT OF AFFLICTION

There are three important results of affliction mentioned in this connection. The first tribulation is about perseverance or patience and endurance. This we can find in Perisians who have the spirit of Christ and who continuously open their eyes to grace the effects of affliction. Until difficulties into our lives essentially, hardships for the sake of Christ and for the sake of His righteousness. We must not hesitate to exhibit the depth of our own faith as true Christians.

This experience leads us to the second stage and result of affliction. The result of perseverance is proven character. The result of proven character is the experience of being tested and approved. You are a perseverer with faith in future grace, that means you came out of that experience with a stronger sense that your faith is real. Then you prove yourself, you are more sincere, honest and trustworthy. You are not a hypocrite. The tree of trust was bent upon your fidelity and loyalty even put to test. And your sincere effort makes you pass that test also. Then they have a proven character God is also well pleased with your faith. The gold of your faith was put in the fire and came out trustworthy, refined but not consumed.

As George Keith in his work expressed the following verses:

“How firm a foundation

*When through fiery thrives they pathway shall lie
My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply
The beam shall not hurt thee I only design
They drass to consume and its gold to refine.”*

That is the second result of the affliction the perseverance in faith and in future grace.

It also brings about the surety of provenness. Then the third result comes from the sense of being tested and totally approved and finally refined. This again takes us back where we begin. We are correcting in hope of the glory of God. The fundamental principle of Christian life starts with hope in the promises of God and the Gospel. And also it moves painfully up through the affliction towards more and more hope – that is more faith in future grace.

The reason is that approvedness brings about more hopes as our hopes grow. Then we even experience the reality of our town authenticity through testing. We learn through pain as God is faithful and He confirmed our faith as real. The people whoever they may be with unwavering in their hope are tested most deeply. Some people who look more earnestly to the hope of glory and those who have established comforts of their life, will be stripped away through tribulations. These are the forent of all the people. Their love cannot be decreased by the threats or calamities

5. SUFFERING REFERS TO CHRIST

Another plan disapproved by God for the suffering is that it magnifies Christ's worth and power. This is the grace that Christians really derive the greatest joy. It is the Christ magnified in our lives. When Paul was told by the Lord Jesus, that the thorn in the flesh will not be taken away. He supported Paul's faith by experience. Why the Lord said, like that ? *“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is more perfect in weakness”* (2Cor. 12:9).

God ordained that Paul must be made weak, so that Christ would be made stronger in Paul's belief. If we feel and look self sufficiency, we will get glory but not Christ. Therefore, Christ wants to select the things or persons and with that no man can boast of himself before God. And sometimes, God appears to make strong people weak so that the “divine power” will be more conspicuous and real. Through the Bible we know that Paul gained this experience as grace because he rejoiced in it.

So, Paul said in the 2nd Corinthians *“I am hopping to boast of my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me. With that I am well content with the weaknesses. With insults, with persecutions, and also all kinds of difficulties for the sake of Jesus for whom I am weak, but I will become strong.”* When we say we are living by faith in future grace, means we are satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus. Therefore, faith in future grace, will not shrink back from what resources and magnifies all that God is for us

in Jesus.

This is the outcome of our weakness and suffering. We have this treasure, God has kept for us in earthen vessels (pots). It is the surprising greatness of the power of God and not from ourselves.

Therefore, faith in future grace is glad with the apostle Paul to see the surprising greatness of God in our afflictions. The more we suffer in this material world, the more incentives or benefits in the next world called heaven. So our suffering helps us to understand that God is everything and He would take care of all we need. There are some other purposes for God also in our suffering. Through our suffering God is preparing for us an eternal height of glory beyond death.

God is working out His plans and purposes together in all the elect from all nations of the world and bearing in the consummation of His Kingdom. The critical point is this, the suffering that seems to threaten the future grace, is the reality of grace upon grace. To know this and to see how it can be so well helps you, before that when all around your soil gives that the Lord is all your hope and stay, peacefully and happily.

* * *

THE SCRIPTURE

Some of the exiled people that returned from Babylon planned to construct the “second temple” on the same foundation, but they could be successful only to some extent. They were unhappy as it was not completed. The Judaists were under the impression, life would be continued as before. At the same time, they were upset by the spiritual differences. The main reason why Israel were not happy over the issue of temple because it was not completed in construction and it was not like the legendary splendour of king Solomon’s structure.

The “Golah” (the exiled people that returned from Babylon were called so) made a strong opposition regarding the foreigners who came and settled in Judah in the absence of these exiles. The remaining Israel in Jerusalem hated the foreigners who came with honour. Added to that the temple priests also became lazy and inactive in their duty.

In such disturbed and unhealthy atmosphere the Persian king “Cyrus” happened to send Ezra, his minister to look after the affairs of Judah. So Ezra came to Jerusalem to do something. This incident took place in fourth century B.C. As soon as he came to Jerusalem, he started his work. He made the previous miscellaneous teachings an absolute value, so that it became “Torah” (law). The Persians under the able guidance of Cyrus and Ezra planned to revive the legal system of all their subjects to make sure they were happy and comfortable with the security of the empire.

Ezra was an expert in Torah. So he worked out a satisfactory method, then to implement that to Israel. But when he came to Jerusalem and studied the situation, he found the people were completely in different condition. First they were not “holy”. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were surprised to see the king’s envoy Ezra, who set on the public street by tearing his garments in deep mourning. He called the entire Golah for an emergency meeting. He put a rule that if anybody refused to attend the meeting, he would be expelled from his community and his property shall be confiscated.

He read out that text by standing on a wooden dias as he was asked by the authorities

to do so. He explained the meaning also. The people never heard such words before, so they burst into tears. They were actually frightened by those unfamiliar demands. Then Ezra encouraged them not to weep. They could understand then only what the proclamation was about. It was a season of festival time also.

Then Ezra explained the law that commanded Israel to spend the month in special booths (Sukkoth) in memory of their ancestors who wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Immediately people rushed to the hills to pick up the branches of olives, myrrh, pine and palm leaves and appeared all over the city. It was really a ceremonial atmosphere as they assembled every evening to listen to Ezra's exposition.

He began to craft a spiritual discipline based on a sacred life. The Torah and its writings had been now elevated above the other writings and for the first time it was called "the Law of Moses". The most important element of this Torah spiritually was Ezra himself. He was a priest, a diligent scribe, in the Torah of Moses and a guardian of traditions. He was also in charge of religious affairs, a scholar who set his heart to investigate the Torah of YEHWEH and to teach law and oracle name to Israel.

The spiritual authors were making a point of telling us that the hand of Yehweh rested upon them. Torah's study was not an academic exercise but a spiritual quest. Ezra's reading and preaching by threat of expulsion and seizing the property made the people to assemble in front of the temple, in shivering because of the torrential rain. Through his speeches he warned Israel to be away from foreign wives. The law he read was clearly unknown to them who wept in fear as they heard it for the first time.

The "Chronicles" a historic narration which were written by priestly authors instantly a commentary on the "Deuteronomic" history of Samuel and Kings. When those two translated into Greek, they were called "Pathalipomina" the things omitted. Some other books that were written with wisdom explained to unsolvable problems of the suffering of the innocent people of the world ruled by God. The book of Job was based on folklore tales. According to that book God gave permission to Satan a legal persecutor of "Divine Assembly".

God gave permission to Satan to test Job's virtues by afflicting him. He tested Job with unholy and unsolvable calamities. And Job eloquently resisted against his punishment. He refused even to accept any of the conventional explanation by his friends who tried to console him. Eventually, Yahweh answered Job by referring to the events of the Exodus forcing him to contemplate to the master plan that governed creation. Job was forced to admit "*I have been holding forth on matters, I cannot understand on marvels beyond me and my knowledge.*"

The sage acquired wisdom by meditation on the marvels of physical world; but not by studying Torah. But during the second century B.C. some wisdom writers came closer to

Torah.

Among such people was “Ben Sirach”, a devoted sage in Jerusalem. She was an important woman writer, a gifted figure and a member of “Divine Assembly”. Then the Torah remained no longer a legal code, but an expression of the highest wisdom and most transcendent goodness.

At the end of second century B.C. there was an exploitation of apocalyptic piety, in this, Jews discovered eschatological visions in which God intervened powerfully in human affairs. He smashed all priests and introduced in all generations an age of justice and purity. As they struggled to find out a solution, the people of Judah split into myriad sets, each insisting on that which was the true Israel.

The “Canon” (means – principle of adding books to the main text) of the Bible had not yet been finalized. There is still not an authoritative scripture and no law of the sets found to be traditional realization of law and the prophets. Some even thought of taking liberty to write completely new Scriptures. The diversity of late second temple was revealed when the library of Qumran community was discovered.

Qumran was the culmination of Jewish history the true Israel. They were of the opinion that God would soon ensure a new world order and after that he would find a reality of the children of right and then think of a massive temple which was not made of human heads. It would be constructed and Mosaic covenant might be re-written. In the mention of Qumran community there was a pure symbolic temple that would replace the temple in Jerusalem.

Regarding Qumran, it was an extreme way of essenes movement, which had about four thousand members by the first century by itself. Most of the essenes lived in tight knit communities. But these members that lived in towns and villages had the permission to marry and have children. They had the communal meals in which they looked forward to the coming of God’s kingdom though they anticipated the destruction of temple, they continued their working there only.

In those days, the Pharisees, another set which comprised about 1.2% of the population were highly respected in the society. And their approach to the law and prophets was more conventional. They were open to such ideas as per the general resurrection, the dead would raise from their tombs to show God’s final triumph.

Majority of the Pharisees were lay people. But they made delicate efforts to appear like priests. They observed priestly laws in their own homes as though they were in the temple, came for the service. They were totally opposed by the Sadducees, who were conservatives and who interpreted the written text in a different way. They did not accept the idea about personal immortality.

There was a desperate search for a new way of entering divine presence for new scripture and some way of being Jewish. So, sets were completely rewritten to order texts.

If God really wanted to exterminate the human race in the flood, by commanding Abraham to kill only his begotten son and drowned the Egyptians army in the Sea of Reeds (Red sea is wrongly translated from the Hebrew Bible). God did not really want to exterminate the human race on the earth because after all we are his own creation. He never interferes in the affairs of human beings. But the suffering of people around us was the evil work of the Satan and his demons.

In the first century A.D., there was a widespread expectation regarding “Messiah” an anointed one would be coming to keep the world in order. In spite of occasional reforms it remained as undeveloped issue among people. In the late second temple period, God would be establishing a new order without human assistance. At that time, there was a mention of king David, who would inaugurate the kingdom of God set forever for the judgment.

Another text spoke of the order, who would be called the Son of God and the Son of man, bring peace into the world. But all those things were changed when Pompey the great Roman emperor conquered Palestine in 63 B.C. and it became a province of Roman empire which caused some benefits to them to some extent.

King Herod, who reigned in Jerusalem from 37 B.C. to 51 B.C. rebuilt the temple in general and the pilgrims flooded into the city to celebrate festivals. Just at that time, the Roman government became unpopular, and some of the prefects notably Pontius Pilate went out of the way to ensure Jesus and some prophets tried to mobilize the people to revolt. A prophet by name “Kemon” an Egyptian persuaded four thousand people to congregate over the mount of Olive in order to storm the Roman fortress built near to temple. Unfortunately they were suppressed by the Romans. Actually both Jews and Christians experienced hell in their reign. Once it is said, the Romans happened to crucify two thousand Jews at a time outside Jerusalem.

During 20 A.D., John the Baptist an escetic prophet, who must have belonged to the essence movement was able to draw the attention of a large number of people to Jerusalem desert. He preached and baptized them, he used to say to whoever come to him that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He mercilessly attacked Jews, who were hypocrites, by saying to be ready for the great judgment. They were also asked to confess their sins and take baptism in Jordan river. The Jews were even warned to take oath, to live honest and blameless life. But he never preached anything against Romans.

John the Baptist was a relative to Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who was also called a Galilian, a healer and exorcist, who announced the immanent arrival of the kingdom of God. And about the same time anti Roman feeling came into the minds of people. Just at that

peak time Jesus was crucified under the authority of Pontius Pilate.

This incident took place, when Jesus came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival. But His death was not the end of that movement. Some disciples were convinced of the rise of Christ from His death. They claimed they had seen Him in visions and His personal resurrection was heralded.

Everybody was of the opinion as Jesus would soon return in glory, to inaugurate the kingdom. The leader of the disciples James was the brother of Jesus. He was also known as “TzAddir” which means the righteous man. James had good relationship with Pharisees and essenes. But the movement which was started earlier, regarding their hatred towards Romans attracted Jews also who spoke Greek.

Jesus movement was unusual in particular whose many sets were hostile to the gentiles. There was a large Jewish community in Alexandria with different attitude. It was a wonderful city created by Alexander himself which later became a major center for learning. Alexandrian Jews studied sports and games, spoke Greek, including Jewish culture and a few of them spoke Hebrew also. In spite of all that they could not understand “Torah”.

Some of the learned Jews planned to translate their scripture into Greek during the third century B.C. on the island of Pharos first at the coast of Alexandria. This project of translation was initiated by particularly Alexandrian Jews themselves. It was a great success and continued for some years. It acquired a mystical aura (may be improvement). The Greek king of Egypt was impressed by the Jewish translation work of scriptures. Then he asked the high priest in Jerusalem to depute six elders from each of the tribe (twelve tribes) to Pharos. They all worked on this text and did a wonderful job of translation.

The king was very much impressed by their effort and their perfectness. He wished for the preservation of those translations for future generations. So the king planned to keep them in an unperishable condition. In honour of the seventy plus translations which were known as “Sopthagist”. The seventy translations proved to be prophets and priests of the mysterious word of God in the same way as the Biblical authors themselves.

The last story was told by a famous Alexandrian “Phio” (70-40 B.C.) who came from a wealthy Jewish family from Alexandria. Although Philo was the contemporary of John the Baptist, Jesus and Hallel (one of the most distinguished of the early Pharisees). He inhabited a very different intellectual world. Philo was a Platonist. He preached a large number of commentaries on Genesis and Exodus which were transformed into “allegories” of “Divine logos”.

Philo did not insist on the allegorical method in his works. He must have followed classical writers like Homer and other Greek writers and philosophers. By inserting this allegorical method into the Biblical narrations, Philo did not think he was side tracking the originals. He

took the literal side of stories very seriously. As a Platonist, Philo believed in his time loss dimension as reality was more real than its physical or historical dimension. So while Jerusalem temple was undoubtedly an actual building, its architecture symbolized its “Cosmos”. The temple was also an eternal manifestation of God who was the truth.

Philo wanted to show the Biblical tales were what the Greeks called “Mythos”. And the people became more faithful and spirited in their day to day life. The process of allegory which translated gave a deeper meaning of the stories into the inner life of readers. The allegory was a term used by historians to discourse. When that was used, its meaning is different from its surface meaning. Philo introduced this method for his work.

The term “Hyponovia” means ‘higher or deeper thought’ because he was trying to reach a fundamental level of truth. Philo wrote four “thesis” on the story of Cain and Abel in an attempt to discover its underlying philosophical significance. Finally he described the main theme which was battle between “love of self and love of God”. Self love was represented by Cain and love for God by Abel. Cain wanted to possess everything for himself because of such nature, he might be called a selfish man. Abel means who referred everything to God only. These noble qualities are presented in the person of Abel.

In other confession, the story illustrated a conflict between true and false. Abel could not give proper response to the argument of Cain. He remained tongue tied and selfless until his brother murdered him. This incident was clearly and accurately explained by Philo as such things happen when “Egoism” got out of the hand and destroy the love of God within us.

Through Genesis Philo gave to the Greek educated Jews of Alexandria, the structure and symbolism to enable them to contemplate. It might be a difficult thing but revealed the basic truth and spiritual life in it. He also brought some refinement in the Biblical conception of God. He made them enormously important distinction between God’s essence which was entirely incomprehensible to human beings. But we can apprehend God’s activities and powers in the world.

Like “Ben Sirach” Philo too believed that when we got a glimpse of Logos in creation and Torah we would be taken beyond the reach of discursive reason to a rapturous recognition. Philo commented on the first book of the Bible Genesis and read the first chapter in which it is said God created the world in six days. The number six was a symbol of perfection. He noticed there were two different stories about the creation in Genesis. The first one described the creation of “logos” the master plan of the universe, which was God’s first born. And the second might be more earthly account. Then the second chapter symbolize the fashioning of national and universal by the divine craftsmanship.

Philo was not simply a clever manipulator of names and numbers, but he had a spiritual practice also. Like any other Platonist he experienced knowledge as remembrance known to him already at some profound level of his being. He some times struggled within himself with his books and appear to make no progress.

At the time of Philo's death, a programme has been arranged against Jewish community in Alexandria. Through out the Roman empire, there was widespread fear of Jews. The rebellious Jews called "Zealots" caused this threatening but the authorities had decided to handle the situation in a ruthless manner. In 70 A.D., the Roman emperor finally seized Jerusalem. The soldiers broke into the temple and inner court. Inside the temple the Roman soldiers found six thousand Jewish zealots ready to fight till they die. But to their surprise they saw the temple in burning flames while some of those zealots could not see that. They also jumped into the flames. And some other group took their swords to fight tooth and nail in honour of their Almighty.

Once they saw the temple was in flames, they desperately withdrew themselves from the attack. They lost interest to save the church and to defend themselves. They watched the city also in flames. The officers of the emperor Titus efficiently demolished what was left of the city. The temple remained in the hearts of Jewish people for centuries because it was central part of Jewish religion. Unfortunately the temple was attacked for the second time also but it was left with minor damage.

THE EXILES

In the year 597 B.C., the tiny state of Judah in the high lands of Canaan, broke its treaty with Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. His was the most powerful empire in those days. It was undoubtedly a catastrophic blunder on the part of Israel, they believed. After this, the Babylonian army besieged Judah's capital city. The king immediately surrendered to the Babylonian king. But he did not remain silent. The young people were taken to Babylon along with ten thousand Israelites as exiles.

The exiles before they left Jerusalem, must have had a last glance at the temple built by king Solomon in between 970-930 B.C. It was actually the centre of their national and spiritual life. Their fears were realized only 586 B.C. after another attack took place in Judah. The king of Babylon came again and attacked and destroyed Jerusalem including Solomon temple to the ground.

But the exiles in Babylon were treated well. Some people like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshak and Abednego had special treatment there. They must have been lodged with common people in the regular houses. In spite of that good treatment, they had their own unhappy situation because they left their people and the country. They had no political independence and also no freedom of religion. "They were the people of Israel, who believed in their own God, YEHWEH".

This God made a promise with Israel that if they worship Him exclusively, they would live in their promised land peacefully and properly forever.

The Jerusalem temple where YEHWEH was living among His devotees became essential for His cult. But those people were left in the alien land Babylon. This appears to be divine punishment for the Israel. Time and again, the Israel had failed to keep up their word or covenant with YEHWEH. Some of the exiles assumed the leaders of Israel to rectify the situation. At the same time, they could not worship YEHWEH without the temple because that was the only way and means to gather and worship.

Five years after they were taken to Babylon, a young prophet came to that place. His name was Ezekiel. He had a gift of getting visions. He knew that he was in the presence of Yahweh. God had left Jerusalem and put it in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, in order to punish the Israel, because they forgot God completely. So Ezekiel came to live with the exiles in Babylon.

A hand was stretched towards Ezekiel holding a scroll and then a voice came. The voice asked him to feed himself with the scroll and be satisfied. And God added “I am giving you”. When Ezekiel forced that into his mouth he felt some pain. In spite of that pain he experienced, he found it was as sweet as honey. It was a prophetic moment. But the exiles wanted to feel for their temple in Jerusalem.

Their repentance was purely temporary which made them to wander in wilderness for forty years to reach Canaan and after reaching Canaan God again helped them to conquer the high lands from the indigenous inhabitants. At Gilgal the local tribes celebrated Israel’s wonderful entry into the promised land.

By about 1000 B.C., however, the tribal system was not longer in existence. The Israelites became two monarchs in the Canaanites high lands. They became two kingdoms in 922 B.C. at the time of king Solomon for his sins. They were called the southern kingdom of Judah with 2 tribes of Judah and Benjamin and the Northern kingdom of Israel with the other 10 tribes of Israelites.

We did not have any historical evidence about the cult of Northern kingdom. In addition to that the Biblical historians had a bias towards Judaism. It came out eventually the Israelites were very much influenced by the cult of “Baal” (a heathen god) of the neighbouring countries.

Yahweh made an unconditional covenant with king David a favourite father of Judaism or Judaean dynasty. God promised to David that his dynasty or descendants only shall rule in Judah forever. During the eighth century B.C., there was a literary revolution throughout the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. The king at that time became selfish and commissioned those documents. They glorified their scripts and their reign. Then they housed those texts in the library.

Those exiles brought a number of scrolls from Jerusalem along with the Babylon texts. These they started reading them and praised the documents for their contents. If they were allowed to go to their native land the recorded history and cult would have played very important role.

There were some tell tale stories in those days that went from mouth to mouth about the engraved stones (called the Ten Commandments or Ten words) given by YEHWEH to Moses on the mount of Sinai. The prophet Moses could have the privilege of talking with God face to face. And the Israelites told the same engraved stones stories to other people

in ancient world. They had handed over their traditions by a word of mouth. In the early days of their nation in about 1200 B.C. they lived in twelve tribal units in the Canaanite high lands; but they had faith in their common ancestry.

From the early fragments embedded in the early Biblical narrations, we can understand that the Israelites believed in their ancestors. It is also said they were nomads but Yahweh had brought them to Canaan and promised them that their descendants would possess the promised land of Canaan.

For about 430 years they lived as slaves in Egypt where they repented and remembered their God, YEHWEH. God listened to their cry and liberated them under the leadership of Moshe (Moses). Yet at the time in Israel and Judah the historians began to combine the old states and they were preserved like the first five books of the Bible. During the eighteenth century B.C., YEHWEH commanded Abraham to leave the home land of "Ur" in Mesopotamia and settle in Canaanite high lands. Then God had a covenant with Abraham promising him that his descendants would inherit the entire land comprising Judah and Israel.

As per the command of God Abraham left Ur and lived in Hebron. Then his son Isaac lived in Beersheba and his son Jacob who was also called Israel lived in Shechem. Jacob with his eleven sons happened to settle in Egypt with the help of Joseph who was already there in good position under Pharaoh. They all settled in a rich land called "Goshen."

They flourished well in that place, and God blessed their population abundantly. The rapid growth of Israel population made Egyptian king afraid of them. So he took all possible steps to check the population and finally made them slaves. Then they cried unto God after spending 430 years and finally in 1250 B.C. they were liberated from the bondage of Pharaoh.

However, the archeologists who had been (trying to) excavating the regions since 1967 did not find any clue of evidence to corroborate this story. There is no indication of foreign invasion or men destruction and no sign of large scale change of population. Egypt ruled the Canaanite city states since nineteenth century B.C. and they had withdrawn their authority at the end of thirteenth century. Then we hear about Israel for the first time in that region in 1200 B.C.

Some scholars were of the opinion and argued that Israel were the refugees from the fallen states in the coastal plains. Those Israelites might have joined with the other tribes and from the states and brought with them the God "YEHWEH" who appeared to have originated at Southern region or at mount Sinai.

Abraham was a man of faith. His career and covenant God made with him looked forward to king David. But he was more interested in Jacob, a Northern character in Shechem. Amos the prophet preached in Israel in the middle of eighteenth century. He argued that to punish them, Amos also poured scorn against the Northern kingdom.

Israel of Jerusalem was more consented the oracles of them and confirmed completely to the royal ideology of the house of king David. He had received his prophetic commission in the temple where he saw Yehweh was surrounded by His “Divine Assembly” of celestial beings.

He also heard the Cherubim angels singing songs 'holy, holy, holy' in the celestial language.

Yehwey gave Israel a grim message saying that the country side would be devastated and the inhabitants of that place be put to flight. Regarding the people of Assyria, Israel did not lose heart. He had seen Yehweh’s glory filled the earth. As long as he was enthroned in the temple Judah would be safe. Yahweh the divine warrior was once again marching forward to fight on behalf of His people Israel.

But the Northern kingdom could not enjoy such privileges when the king of Israel joined with local authorities. The Assyrian king destroyed them and their beautiful capital Samaria. But the kingdom of Judah remained safe and secure from the Assyrians. The people of the Northern kingdom fled to Jerusalem because of the threat from Assyria. The Israel that fled and took shelter in Jerusalem brought with them the oracle of Hosea and Amos who had foreseen the tragedy of these people.

During the dark period, Israel was comfortable with the birth of royal baby, a sign that God was still with the house of king David. A young woman “Alman” was with a child and gave birth to a son who would become the future king. His birth seemed to be an indication of hope and a great light to the people of north; who walked in darkness and in deep shadows at that time.

When the baby was born, he was named “Hezekiah” and prophet Isaiah imagined the entire Divine Assembly enjoyed the birth of royal child including king David and other kings. Everybody thought he would become a divine figure and a member of Divine council. Then on the day of that boys coronation, he would be called with many names like “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace”.

Although the Bible historians revoured Hezekiah as a devoted king who tried to outlaw the worship of the foreign gods, his policy became distasteful because of the ill advice. So in 701 B.C., Jerusalem was completely destroyed and Judah reduced to a rump state which the Assyrians fought for their supremacy. Judah was left for its own device for its survival.

There was a surge of national feeling and in 622 B.C., “Josa” began to repair Solomon’s temple the symbol of memorial of Judah’s golden age after Israel split into two kingdoms.

The historians began to rewrite the history of Israel; adding fresh material. They also wrote history of two kingdoms of Israel and Judah which we can find in the books of Samuel

and Kings in the Bible. They argued at that Davidic narrations were the only legitimate rulers of the whole Israel.

Their story was culminated in the reign of Josea, a “new Moses” and greater than David for his efficiency. Israel were really happy over the reforms introduced by Josea and they celebrated that happy occasion. It reached golden era, but unfortunately Josea was killed by Egyptian king within a few years of his reign.

Many people still believed Josea would be in supremacy as long as Yehweh dwelt in the temple. Josea’s conquest left Israel on the borders of the promised land. Towards the end of 539 B.C., after the coronation of king Cyrus a small party of the exiles were set out for Jerusalem. But most of the Israelites wished to remain in Babylon only because their stay in that place made an important contribution to the Hebrew Scriptures.

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GOD AND HISTORY

History is the most neglected subject today in the curriculum as people say. It is also looked down upon by modern educationists and readers. It has been hated by students, forgotten by the politicians, intellectuals and journalists. Ironically it is set aside even by historians who really enjoy and value history feel to grasp the importance of this blessed subject. But we can confidently say, history is the most understood subject on the earth.

Whether you are enjoying history or not, chances are that you also underestimated the value of studying the past, probably you might not have grasped the real truth about history. What is the truth? The truth is that the secular history proves the real existence of God. The document (ed) history tells about the Sumarians, in Mesapotamia, Assyrians, Persians, Phoenecians, Greeks, Romans, Nepolean or Hitler. They were all real, and their civilizations were all the proof of God's existence.

THE SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

The relationship between the scripture and history should not be overlooked; and it may be a surprising thing to the readers. God tells us plainly, guides us, and mentions the events of the world with His power. Let us remember in this connection, the question from the Bible. God said in the book of Isaiah *"for I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is no name like me declaring the end from the beginning and from the ancient things not yet done saying. May counsel shall stand and I shall accomplish all my purposes."* (Isaiah 46:9-10).

God did not want to allow history to unfold haphazardly. King David of Israel knew this. *"Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the people of the world stand helplessly before God for He spoke. It came to be commanded and it stood forth, God put earlier plans to the people and the plans to be implemented that the Lord stands firm and the purposes of His heart through all generations"*

The apostle Paul also recognized God's role in secular history and was not afraid to tell a crowd of Greeks when he visited Athens. Paul said, "men of Athens, in every way I presume that you are very religious but you cannot see the one true God who made the world and everything in it."

God made parts of oneness and every nation all over the world. Even Paul praised the wonderful creation, the allotted period and boundaries of habitation.

Apostle Paul knew the raise and fall of the entire civilization. And then the geographic location of people who were determined by God. He said all men of the Bible were recognized as they possessed profound and amazing truth. And men of the Bible knew that history was a product of God Himself. It was a unique work and power. People also knew much of the history was written by God Himself before it actually happened. It was shaped and determined by God before it was occurring.

Then is it not really wonderful that history itself provides the existence of God with evidence? That means history books are collecting dust in your shelves. The history you study in your schools, colleges and even in the universities as a special subject now became useless and valueless. How it was ignored and neglected by most people today added proof to God's existence. In spite of all God's wonderful creation and other things how many of the human beings feel the presence of God in secular history?

Let us keep God to the test in this take it for granted you are sincerely doing deep study on ancient Egypt or Assyria, or Roman empire or Greece, Persia or some other civilizations. Then use the Bible as a text book in your study. You will certainly be surprised to see the events recorded in the secular history books with events recorded almost in the Bible.

If you study the world history especially the western civilization you will certainly believe that Bible is one of the profound and enlightening studies. If you are interested in learning more about Bible, and secular history, then you must study "Proof of the Bible" by Herbert N. Armstrong. In this context let us consider one of the closest and most powerful accounts of secular history proving God's existence and proving God's word is true.

The success of dominating empires in the western civilizations began in 7th century B.C. That period was widely occupied by great historians and eminent scholars throughout. The success of the empire, which God can find was mostly explained in the general history, which is as follows:

According to chronological order the world's first ruling empire was Babylonian Chaldean empire. It was the most dominating power in the 7th century B.C. and the famous king was Nebuchadnezzar. He conquered Assyria, Syria and Judah.

The second dominating civilization was the Medo-Persian. This became prosperous under the able administration and innovative leadership of king Cyrus the great in the 6th century

B.C. He miserably defeated Babylonians and acquired the territory from the shores of the Arabian sea to the shores of the Mediterranean sea.

The third dominating empire was Greece. It was established by “Alexander the Great”. It was a vast and influential Grecian empire in the mid 4th century B.C. As he went on conquering the countries one after another, he met with sudden death. He was only about 33 years at that time and became the conqueror of the world at that age. After his death, his empire was controlled by four military generals.

The fourth and worlds largest one was Roman empire in the 1st century B.C. This became powerful even in its western civilizations to certain degrees for the next two centuries. These four empires were widely occupied by the historians and thus wrote widely in the history books about them in the whole world. In addition to these civilizations there were some other civilizations and the people. They were very influential and impressive in their activities and they lived along with the poor.

In spite of all that, these four were the most powerful people during their rule, and so to say, they were the back bone of the entire history. The history books were doing a wonderful job of describing the raise and fall of different civilizations and their powers. But the Bible is describing the purpose of their coming into power.

The most remarkable of such example is the truthful incidents of the life of Daniel that were found in his book. The time setting for the book of Daniel was about 6th century B.C. If you read the 1st chapter of Daniel’s book, you will see the description of the sacking and seizing of Jerusalem by king of Babylon in 586 B.C. and his relocation of Jews back to Babylon. The secular history described the same incidents that are mentioned in the Bible exactly and at the same time.

Among the ten thousand Jews that were exiled to Babylon after Jerusalem was seized, Daniel was one of them. He was quite young at that time. God gave him the gift of understanding the dreams and explain them perfectly which even the Babylonian priests and magicians of the king could not do.

In such conditions, one day the king happened to dream. The king somehow was not happy with the dream. He wanted to know the exact meaning of that. He called all the people concerned, like the learned elite of his kingdom. There was none to answer him. The king finally came to know about Daniel that he would answer his dream.

Then Daniel was called for. The king himself could not tell his dream to Daniel. But God explained the imagery and meaning of it to Daniel and then he explained the same to the king in detail. The king heard the meaning of the dream in detail and was much impressed by the answer of Daniel.

According to the dream the king saw a great image or statue which was devided into four parts. The head was of gold. Breast and arms were of silver, its belly and thighs were

of brass, its legs were made of iron with the feet of a mixture of iron and clay.

Then the image was hit at its feet by a flying stone that caused the image crush and fell to the ground. Whereupon the image debris were blown away and the image no longer existed. The dream was further explained by Daniel to the king which became very important in the world history. After relaying the dream to the king Daniel explained the meaning also.

Following is Daniels explanation:

"Thou O king, the head of gold; and after that arise another kingdom, inferior to that the third kingdom of brass which bear the rich, and the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron." Daniel interpreted the dream to Nebuchadnezzar that he being the king of Babylon Chaldean empire, the Lord of gold and the worlds great empire. This fact was recognized and confirmed by history books.

After the Babylonian empire which was pictured by breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass and the legs of iron would come later. After Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman civilizations at their times and reign tell about their glory through the prophecy. God was revealing through this image that they would become world wide dominant powers in their respective period. Daniel prophesied the ruin and fall of the four world ruling civilizations.

How can we know God was revealing the four civilizations? Particularly because of the documented, historians who filled millions of pages of text books of those people unfolded exactly as God said. Let us take the example of Daniel here in this context. God revealed that the second world ruling empire pictured the breast and arms in Daniels image would be the combination of the people by two dynasties that would come together to dominate the civilization.

If we study the Persian history we can know that it was the joint effort of the Medes and the Persians. They defeated Babylonians and established great and powerful empire. God revealed similar details about Greek and Roman empires. But they could not emerge as the world dominating civilizations until two or three hundred years.

If you study the book of Daniel you will realize it is filled with the history recorded before it actually happened. Therefore, there are countless and thrilling details revealing God's presence and role in history. Daniel is simply one example. And to learn more about him, the book of Revelation will unlock the proof of the Bible. You will be surprised at the wonderful connection between the secular history and the Bible.

So, let us stop rejecting and underestimating the study, the past in the context of the Bible. If you study it gives you moving experience and makes you understand the existence of God and His works.

HOW GOD'S WORD WORKED IN APOSTOLIC CHURCH?

In the early church the “word” offered the fulfillment of Old Testament promises as well as a call to accept spiritual life-changing power and authority in the present. The earliest Apostolic preaching was neither a Jewish standard message with Jesus added at the end, nor a free standing announcement of a new religion out of from its Jewish roots. But it was only the story of Jesus which people understood as the fulfillment of Old Testament covenant. It was simply narrative and its theme is “Evangelism”, the good news gospel – the creative force - which called the church into being that shaped its mission and life.

It is the Biblical story rather than some other that provides interpretation and accompaniment of Jesus made the sense it did. The completed and multiple themes of Old Testament has shaped the life thought of Israel raised in practical and theoretical terms. It is nothing but the good and evil of Israel, nations of empire and the resistance above all, the sovereignty, justice, the saving purposes of our creator and the covenant of God are to be remembered in this context. These questions are raised in this spiritually shaped to which Jesus kingdom movement, climaxing in His death and resurrection offered to God given answer for every doubt.

In this context, apostle Paul quoted an early popularity and summery of Christian message, “*the Messiah died for our sins, in accordance with scripture and raised on the third day according to the scripture*” (1Corinthians 15:3-4).

Paul does not mean he and his friends found one or two proof tests to back up their claims but these events have come as claims to the long and winding narrative of Israel's scripture. The authority of Old Testament in the early church, at its heart meant what God had done in Jesus Christ was to be seen in terms of a character. And this must be done with in a particular story a portrait in a particular landscape where everything in the story of landscape points us to a face of who that central character is and what He has accomplished.

We can trace the earliest Christians oral traditions and the earliest sermons reconstructed what Paul wrote from the “word”. That word of truth or gospel in simple way. So, before the New Testament, there was already a clear understanding in early Christianity that the world of God to which the apostles were committed themselves, when refreshing to engage in extra administrative duties lay at the heart of churches missions and its life.

It is not difficult to summarize the ‘Word’. It is the story of Jesus Christ told is climax of the story of God and Israel. This offered itself as both a true story of the word, as well as a foundation emerging force for churches mission. The exact information expressed by Paul is discovered by all apostles regarding the ancient story climaxing now in Jesus carried power. The power that could change minds, hearts and lives of many, the gospel is God’s power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

The apostles and evangelists were behind the power that scripture contained. It was God’s own power that works through spirit calling into being the covenant people that restored Israel for the world. The word is not just an information about the kingdom and its effects but through the ways God’s kingdom was accomplished in Jesus and that was making its way in the world. The kingdom we are reminded was always about the creator God. He is acting sovereignty to put the world in order by judging evil and bringing fragments and finally new life to His people. That is the prime important work done by the “Word” and that is accomplished in those people who had it in faith and obedience.

We can find the roots of Christian theology here only and also scriptural authority. This was originally planted firmly in the soil of missionary community. The friends of the Word with happy news of God’s kingdom which is refreshed by the spirit growing particularly through preaching and teaching by the apostles. Man’s belief is that it would bear fruit in the transformation of human lives. This is the wonderful plan and project of God to keep the entire universe in proper order.

Our omnipotent God successfully implemented those things and the early church believed through the word. The story of Israel now told as reading its climax in Jesus and God’s call to Israel is now transmitted into God’s call to His renewed people. And it was this Word, which came through the work of early writers, who could express in writing in New Testament as we know it.

The church had been in existence from the very beginning characterized as transformed people of God as a special community. It was crafted by God’s call and promise summoned to hear the word of gospel in all its fullness. The earliest Christians called it into existence and sustained in that existence.

The powerful reflection and authoritative word of God, written in the Old Testament

embodied in Jesus. This fact was announced to the world and also taught in the church. That was the real heart of churches mission and the characterization of eternity. As a matter of fact one of the apostles like Paul and some of their colleagues also their immediate successes happened to write books which were intended to contain this on a wider scale.

According to recent studies of letters and intention of gospels writing emphasized self conscious way in which the New Testament writers believed themselves. They called themselves as teachers to exercise their calling themselves authorized teachers. John sums it up in a sentence which happened to tense the commentators. The law John mentioned in his works was given through Moses, grace and truth through Jesus Christ. He was of the opinion that it is necessary as readers we must properly understand grace and truth which came from Jesus only. John deliberately left rest of the gospels as ambiguous one.

The early Christians use of Old Testament was like double edged position. It was due to emphasis on unique accomplishment of Jesus Christ. That is to say Old Testament could not continue to play exactly the same role within Christian community. Therefore Christianity could not repeat earlier "sages" of story any more. But it repeated achievements by Jesus. When we consider the beginning of Jesus ministry and the work of Paul, we find constant references to the fact that fulfillment would come as a new movement in the story. But example of this line of thought anywhere in the New Testament was one of the earliest where Paul argued that God gave Mosaic law for a specific purpose which has now to function. It has become a good thing as the task is accomplished. But the people of God renewed through Jesus and Spirit can never forget the road on which they travelled.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN BIOLOGICAL RELATION WITH ALL HUMAN CULTURE

Under these circumstances, the New Testament emerged as written expression of that "Word" and in such conditions the early Christians knew to be living. Those people really forced in all its fulness. It was assumed from start that word had broken in and would continue to break into human life, culture, aspiration and assumption. This written word is expressing and embodying the living word of primitive gospel. It was like spirit empowered agent through and which our creator God was reclaiming the "Cosmos." It offered the way to a living human life and also the way to fulfillment of God's plan to Israel. It stood against other interpretations, that failed to recognize Jesus as "Messiah."

The unique parable of Jesus Christ and the emerging Christian writings both affirmed and redefined the existing participations. The really important questions were proved what the true answer might be. The apostolic writings like "word" which they wrote down were not simply about the coming of God's kingdom but they were also intended to transform

people into life of Christ like in order to achieve salvation.

People who read those writings discovered from the early books continued the same power and authority in action and characterized initial preaching of the "Word." It can be explained in a simple way that the writers of New Testament did not realize they were writing Scripture.

Among such writers Paul was the most conscious of his writings, as he was authorized by the apostolic call he received from Christ. In addition to that he received the Holy Spirit too to bring life in order in the churches by His words. If one starts reading his book in the following manner – "in the beginning" was the Word, and the Word became flesh, and concludes it by telling his readers as these words are written to you to make you believe in the "Messiah". The Son of God as Jesus, so that by blessing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

CONFIRMING AND DISCONFIRMING AMONG EARLY CHRISTIANS

The early Christians were forced into thinking through the questions of conformity and disconfirmity. The real controversy was because of the admission of non-Jews into God's people (whether they needed to be circumcised or whether they should need to obey Jews laws like Sabbath regulations etc.,). A detailed argument was articulated by Paul in Galatians 2,3 chapters about the way in which God was fulfilling the covenant that was promised to Abraham by creating a single "multituanic family. Those regulations were then the Mosaic Laws which explicitly marked the Jews from their own non Jews neighbourhood. The non-Jews were set aside not because they were not good or not given by God but because they had been given for a temporary purpose which was now completed.

The inauguration of New Covenant in Jesus and by spirit meant Christians had to workout renewal of the same covenant as a new one. Some of the obvious disconfirmity are all over the place. The ancient Jewish purity of laws are no longer releasing not to a community in which the gentiles are welcome on equal terms.

Regarding Jerusalem temple and the sacrifices made in those days were no longer focal points of God's meeting his people. Though a deep rooted sense worked out theologically and practically that everything concerning scripture had been summed up in Jesus Christ and also itself summing up the message of that book with that now the project of God a new covenant and new creation had begun.

What all this means significantly is one can never answer any part of a certain thing ancient or modern. It is automatically endorsed or rejected. There was much in Jewish world, which was endorsed as it stood within the early Christianity and made for good theological reasons. So there was much in Jewish world which the early Christians could take up. The

How God's Word worked in Apostolic Church?

central idea of what Paul spoke was to obey Christ. He wanted to keep a commonality between the world's perception of good and evil and those to which Christian churches should adhere.

Let us think about goddess Diana of Ephesus for a while and the riots which Paul faced there. In spite of all such problems and hardships, the word he spoke and wrote summoned people to confession and redemption renewal through dying and raising with Christ in Baptism. Again and again it was the apostles' proclamation eventually coming to expression in the New Testament writings.

Those writings actually guided early church in determining relationship between cultural contact and path of new renewal humanity. It has everything to do with understanding as human renewal as the beginning point. It is the means of God's eventual eradication of evil from the world and bringing to birth the creation of life.

Therefore, the early Christians believed that God's Word does not work by spirit within the community to put Jesus' achievements into effect and thus to advance final kingdom. We can summarize all this in the following manner. The New Testament was understood as New Covenant. The book that forms basis for new telling of the story through which Christians are formed, reformed and transformed to be God's people or God's Word. That is the challenge the early Christian bequeathed to us as we reconsider the authority of Scripture might mean in practice today.

* * *

IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

If we go wrong on the nature of faith, everything in the Christian life will go wrong. If all authentic obedience come from faith in future grace as said in this connection, then all the obedience will be imparted by misunderstanding and thus experiencing what faith is. The essence of faith in future grace is that we have discovered provisionally. It is so crucial and at the same time so important. We must try to know it more thoroughly.

1. THE GREAT GOSPEL OF BELIEF

A good place to test our understanding of faith is the gospel of John. It has been also called the gospel of “Belief”. The verb 'believe' comes in John’s gospel over 90 times, compared to eleven times in Matthew, twelve in Mark and nine times in Luke.

John says about the purpose of his gospel is that you may believe Jesus as Christ and Son of God and by believing in Jesus, you may have everlasting life in his name. So, the theme of believing on Christ for the sake of eternal life runs through the whole gospel. We can see this for example in John 3:10, *“for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believed in Him, should not perish but have eternal life.”*

Christ also said, *“Truly, truly I say unto you he who hears my word, and believeth on him that sent me has eternal life”* (John 5:24). (And John himself said that Jesus brothers who believed in the miracles working power of Jesus and probably in His claim to be the Messiah nevertheless were not believing in Him).

And in John 11:25 He said, *“I am the resurrection and the life; he that believes in me shall live even if he dies.”* So it is quite clear that saving faith is a document concern of the gospel of John. Believing on Christ is more frequently and consistently mentioned in that book than any other book in the New Testament.

2. BELIEVING THAT DOES NOT SAVE

First we see in John's gospel "believing" can be false or deficient act that does not save. For example, John says when Jesus was in Jerusalem at Passover during feast many believed in his name, beholding his signs which he was doing. There is a warning here, that this believing may not be saving faith. It is based on beholding His signs. That is not bad in itself, especially since Jesus said, "*Believe me that I am in the father and the father is in me, or else for the very works sake.*"

True faith can through seeing the miracles of Jesus. But the danger is that some people are being carried away by the power of Jesus Christ and His power for over throwing the Romans. Jesus rejected this kind of enthusiasm. Jesus therefore perceiving that they would come and take him by force to make him a king, he has departed again to the mountains.

So when John says that many believed in Him because they saw signs he was doing. We are alerted to the fact that this believing may be a persecution based on his power that does not go to the heart of who he is. This is in fact what seems to be the case with these believers.

Then the next lines "*But Jesus on his part did not connect himself to them because he knew all men*" (John 2:24). In other words, what was on the inside did not correspond to what was professed outside. We may find the same deficiency of faith. This section begins with the words, "Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed him".

But before the section is concluded Jesus says to those very Jews "*I know that you are Abraham's offsprings, yet you seek to kill me because my word hath no place in you*" (John 8:37). The same people who had believed in him were trying to kill him. This causes one commentator to say "John is writing very carelessly or he means that the faith of these Jews was deficient". John is anything but a careless craftsman. Therefore, it is right to follow the second opinion. John is speaking of men who had made an outward profession, but in this case did not go any deep."

Nevertheless Jesus used the word "believed" to describe the deficient and inadequate response of Jesus. What the important point to us is that believing in John's gospel is not something that lies on the face of terms used, but derived from the contact of the gospel. So we must try to get at the deeper content of believing in John's gospel. What is the essence of it, that makes a saving sort of believing which may be richer than a Sham?

3. LOVE FOR THE PRAISE OF MEN MAKE FAITH IMPOSSIBLE

One of the reasons that the miracles of Jesus might or might not lead to genuine faith was that they could so easily bolster the love of power and prestige that penetrates the sinful heart and makes true faith impossible. Jesus has already addressed this problem.

Jesus said, "I do not receive glory from men, but I know you do not have the love of

God in you, I have come in my fathers name, and you do not receive me. If another shall come in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek glory that is from the one and only one?"

John says that it is impossible to believe in Christ with true saving faith while the heart is carrying on a love affair with the praise of men. In other words, true faith invokes a spiritual renovation of the heart. Faith cannot co-exist with self exaltation. It is inherently humble and God exalting. It looks away from itself to God and feels extremely happy not in the praises of man but in the glory of Almighty God.

We all know Christ has come not on His own name, but in the name of His father. This means He embodies a kind of humble God exalting frame of heart, which is the immediate need of faith and that faith loved it. But they will not receive Him because He threatens their pride and Jesus says, "If He had come in his own name, they would have willingly received Him.

Why, because he would fit with the way they are desiring that their own names have to be praised by men. The bottom line is that they have not even an iota of love towards God. That is to say, they don't feel happy in the exaltation of God but of their own. This disposition cannot be believed. Therefore, faith is impossible for a person who is in love with the praise of men, as love and mammoth cannot go hand in hand.

We may infer that true faith in John's gospel is of such a name; it excludes the bondage, it applauds. It includes a love for God, serving and relishing of God, that makes the praise of men by compassion with the treasure that God is. This is what we saw about saving faith; according to the previous information.

4. LOVING LIGHT IS THE ROOT OF FAITH

The available information so far may help us to some extent the positive essence of saving faith in John's gospel. "And this is the judgment that light is come into this world but men loved the darkness rather than light because of their evil deeds. For everyone, who wished to do evil things naturally hath light and does not come to light as his deeds would be exposed. But he who preaches and practices truth will come to light and his deeds will be magnified of having been wrought in God"

John is of the opinion and suggests that before we come to Christ, we must try to like light rather than hate it. Then coming to Christ is the expression John uses to describe saving faith in Christ.

Jesus said, "you are unwilling to come to me that you may have life". Therefore, John says here, that saving faith or coming to Christ must be preceded by some measure of transformation in the heart to take away the inborn hatred of spiritual light.

This means, saving faith in John's gospel is the act of a quickened or renovated heart

that loves light. Saving faith is not mental assent (acceptance) of an old heart, that loves darkness. Love is implicit in John's view of saving faith. "Love" is what we called previously a spiritual taste for the beauty of Christ. Faith is not the mere affirmation that Christ is infinitely great and precious. But faith is embracing Christ as precious, because the light of Christ is loved and not hated.

5. FAITH IS A GIFT OF GRACE

This implies saving faith in Jesus is not mere a human work, but a free gift of God. John makes this plan in several ways. He says that not believing is ultimately owing to not being born of God. But because *"I tell you the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin! If I speak the truth why do you not believe me? He who is of God, hears the words of God, for this reason. You do not hear them because you are not of God."*

According to this text you cannot even hear the word of God. Faith is not a self wrought work, but a fruit of God's work in the soil. It grows out of a heart that has been begotten from above to Christ. This is what John means "No one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him." The drawing enables the coming which we have seen above is the same. What we have seen above is the same faith which is drawing corresponds to being of God.

6. FAITH IS SO RADICAL

This point love is simply to say about the sovereign work of God's initiative in creation. Faith corresponds with the radical thing that faith is. It is so contrary to proud, self exalting, unspiritual, world loving, hearts that there is no way it could be self generated. If we are to come to Jesus, the way Jesus teaches us to come we will have to be drawn by God. Our hatred for the light must be overcome by God. Our distaste for the bread of heaven and the water of life will have to be shattered by God. And our hope is finally free and sovereign grace.

Saving faith apprehends this grace as our only hope; tastes its beauty with spiritual discernment and embraces it as the greatest treasure in the universe. Faith receives the gift of God's transforming grace as it beholds in Jesus His compelling worth.

The outcome of all that indicate, God is for us in Jesus – past, present and future becomes the satisfaction of the believing soul; And the rest of life is lived not under the control of worldly desires but in the powerful freedom of faith in future grace.

Another word for worldly desire is "Covetousness." This sin stands close to the centre of evil as you can get. Conquering it demands a relentless, but also thrilling effort from us. Freedom from covetousness is one of the most satisfying works of God in the human soul.

PERSONS WHO BECAME MARTYRS

1. MARTYR

Stephen was called the first martyr. With God's spirit he happened to do many miracles which caused some opposition in the synagogues. So, his opponents considered to have him executed by stoning. This made him the first martyr in the church. They threw him outside the city and stoned him. The witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul.

Luke while writing the fact about Stephen, foreshadowed the rise of Saul/Paul by describing his presence at the stoning of Stephen. Luke recorded this incident in the first chapter of Acts. The replacement of Judas Iscariot by casting lots among the names of the disciples close to back part of the 'twelve', God seemed to leave another disciple in mind to round out the select core of the founding church.

Saul was converted himself from the persecutor of the church and ranking 'official' witness to Stephen's martyrdom, became an apostle Paul in the second portion of Acts had great influence regarding the direction of the church would now take away from Jerusalem. Stephen's sermon occupied the whole seventeenth chapter of Acts and showed the same kind of power from the Holy Spirit as Peter's sermon. It might be because Stephen spoke in a less central location, when he testified of the resurrected Christ and where converts were not yet numerous. He was executed while Peter and John were able to escape from that fate.

The Persecution Multiplied

The success of the church in its first generation, could establish its congregation, from Ethiopia in Africa, India in Asia, in Rome, Gaul and Britain in Europe. Some early Christians could escape persecution as mentioned in Acts with the martyrdom of Stephen and the scattering of Jerusalem flock only to find themselves persecuted in the pagan Roman empire.

The people of the Roman empire initially thought that the new Jewish set was anxious

in their coliseums and finding a threat as their growth in numbers and their unflogging loyalty to Christ made Jesus more beloved and worshipped by more people than the current Ceasar.

THE BOOK OF MARTYRS – JOHN FOX 1517-72

John Fox was a popular and brilliant English scholar, master of Biblical language and history of the early church compiled the true study of persecution of Christians under Ceasar between Nero and Constantius (54-313 A.D.). The later chapters of that book were the description of how Christians were mercilessly persecuted.

James Miller said “after the Bible there is no other book so profoundly influenced the early protestant settlement as “the book of Martyrs”. Even in our time it is still a living one. Fox started that book with the crucifixion of Christ followed by the martyrdom of Stephen, then some details were added in Acts. Stephen’s time of death was believed to have been Passover following the crucifixion and about 2000 people suffered persecution, and martyrdom in Judea.

The Second Martyr – The second martyr as described by St Luke in the history of apostles acts was James the son of Zebedee, and the elder brother of John. James martyrdom took place after ten years of the death of Stephen. As soon as Herod Agrippa became the governor of Judea, he raised a sharp persecution against Christians. He started with the striking of the leaders first.

The first apostolic martyr cheerfully and resolutely received the cup while he was told our Saviour was ready to drink then. “Timon” and “Parmanas” happened to suffer martyrdom at the same time, one at Philippe and the other at Macedonia in 44 A.D.

For the sake of records, there were fifteen more apostles and disciples who miserably died as martyrs. They are:

1. **Philip** – He suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis in Phriggia. He was scourged, thrown into prison and afterwards crucified in 54 A.D.
2. **Matthew** – He was martyred in Ethiopia. He was slain with a halbert in the city of Nadabah in 60 A.D. This halberd is an ‘axe’ with a long pointed spike.
3. **James** – He was the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the bishop of the church in Jerusalem. At the age of ninety four he was beaten and stoned.. and finally had his brain dashed out.
4. **Mattheas** – He was elected to succeed Judas Iscariot as the disciple of Jesus. He was stoned in Jerusalem and beheaded.
5. **Andrews** – He was Simon Peter’s brother. On his arrival at Edessa, he was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of the cross were fixed transversely in the ground.

After that came the derivation of the term ‘St. Andrews Cross’.

6. **Mark** – He was a companion of Peter and the author of the gospel on his name. He was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria till he died.
7. **Peter** – He served as the bishop of Rome. He was crucified upside down because he thought he was unworthy to be crucified in the way how Jesus Christ was crucified.
8. **Paul** – He happened to die in the hands of emperor Nero’s soldiers. They came and took him out of the city to the place of execution. There he took some time and prayed to God. After that he gave his neck to the sword.
9. **Jude** – He was the author of the epistle bearing his name and brother of James. He was commonly called Thaddeus. He was crucified at Edessa. He was killed with arrows when he refused to leave his faith in the year 72 A.D.
10. **Bartholomew** – He is also known as Nathaniel. He witnessed for our Lord in present Turkey. It is said he translated the gospel of St. Matthew into Indian language and preached it there. He was cruelly beaten and flayed to death by a whip and then crucified.
11. **Thomas** – He was also called Daddemus and doubting Thomas for his doubt about the resurrection of Jesus. He preached the gospel in Persia and India. The pagan priests in India took revenge against him. He was martyred as he was killed with a spear.
12. **Luke** – He was the author of the gospel bearing his name and also he was the author of the book of Acts. He was supposed to have been hanged to an olive tree by idolatrous priests of Greece.
13. **Simon** – Zealots preached the gospel in Mauritania Africa and also in Britain. He was crucified in the later country in 74 A.D.
14. **John** – He was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. But he was saved miraculously and escaped death and even without injury. He was the only apostle who escaped violent death like other apostles and disciples. In his last days he was filled with the Holy Spirit and wrote the last book of the New Testament called “The Revelation” when Jesus Christ saw him for the last time. He prophesies that John would get visions and write the book of Revelation.
15. **Barnabas** – The death of Barnabas was one of the secondary followers of Christ. He was the companion of Paul. His death might have taken place in about 73 A.D.

John Fox gave a brief and important list of the martyrdom of the church’s first generation of leaders. The continuous persecution and horrible punishments were recorded in the churches.

THE TEN PERSECUTORS OF ROME

1. **Emperor Nero** – 54-68 A.D. – It was he who ordered for the burning of Rome and it was in continuous flames for nine days. In these flames it is recorded that thousands of people died. Nero, after doing that heinous act, blamed Christians for that fire and started persecuting Christians. The emperor refined upon even in the methods of cruelty and introduced all manners of punishment for them which must be the most infernal imagination could design.

In particular, the emperor sewed up in the skins of wild beasts, and then worried by dogs until the Christians died. Some other Christians were dressed in shirts made of stiff wide wax, fixed to the olive trees and then set on fire in his garden. This type of persecution became common throughout Roman empire. But the spirit of Christians and their faith increased in them instead of decreasing. In their routine persecution, St. Paul and St. Peter were martyred. John Fox said that Nero also martyred the members of “Seventy” including Erastis, Aristarchus, Trophemus, Joseph, Barsabbas and Ananias, bishop of Damascus.

2. **Dometian** – 81-96 A.D. – John Fox gave his opinion about the emperor Dometian who was naturally inclined to cruelty and with that temperament he happened to execute his own brother and other members of the Roman Senate. He killed some people due to malice and some others in order to confiscate their estates. Actually in his rule many Romans like Christians became victims of persecution and martyrdom. Paul’s co-worker, Timothy, bishop of Ephesus was among those many martyrs in his regime.
3. **Trajan** – 98-117 A.D. – John Fox said under Trajan ruler Pliny the second a man of letters and a famous one happened to see the lamentable brutal slaughter of Christians and pitied their condition. He wrote a convincing letter to the emperor Trajan that thousands of people were put to death which was against Roman laws and so on. Then Trajan was succeeded by another emperor whose name was Adrean. During that period, Alexandar was the bishop of Rome. He had two deacons and the bishop along with his deacons was martyred. In addition to that Quirinus and Herinus with their families Zenon a Roman nobleman and about ten thousand Christians were martyred.

After Adrian came, “Antoninus Pius”. He was one of the amicable monarch among all the Roman emperors that ruled. He stayed the order of persecution against Christians.

4. **Marcus Aurelius Antenimus** - This emperor instigated fourth wave of persecution. Polycorp was the bishop of Smyrna and father of the church, became one of the most famous martyrs of that period. When the guards came to arrest him, he got it prepared a good feast for them. Then he took an hour permission to pray to God. His prayer was so fervent that the guards repented and said they had been only instruments in taking

him. He was somehow taken to the proconsul who condemned him and he was brutally burnt in the market place. Fox also reported that inhuman prosecutions took place in “Zyon” France during that period.

5. **Severus** – 193-211 A.D. – According to the information given by John Fox, emperor Severus tried to relieve the persecution because he had a soft corner for Christians. But the other leaders were afraid of the Christians because of their growth as church members. Therefore, they persuaded the Roman government to enforce the order laws against Christians so as to reduce their population. Fox further said, that Tertullian, who lived at that time informed us, if the Christians had collectively withdrawn themselves from the Roman territories, the Roman empire would have become depopulated.

Fox prepared a long list of the martyrs in Rome, Africa and Zyon, during that period including the celebrated bishop of Zyon of France and Irenaus a father of the Church and author of a book which was considered a classic in Christian literature.

6. **Mamimenu Trax** – This was called the sixth wave of persecution. In his time some of the martyrs happened to be members of the Roman Senate and they continued its inroads in the society and culture of Rome. Fox wrote, “During the time of persecution raised by Maximenus, uncountable number of Christians were slain even without trial and buried indiscriminately in heaps. Sometimes fifty or sixty numbers were thrown into a pit together without a least decency. When this tyrant Maximenus died in 238 A.D. he was succeeded by “Gordean”. During his reign, “Philip” came as his successor. He was a kind hearted man. So the church was saved from persecution for more than ten years.
7. **Dicius** – 249-251 – Decius disliked Philip because there was a talk among people that he was a Christian. As he stopped the persecution of churches, for more than ten years and they had a great relief. Before he came to power it seems even many pagans must have become Christians and so, the pagan temples were abandoned and the members in the churches increased catastrophically. So he started a campaign against Christians. Fox said, as the number in the churches increased there were factions among themselves.
8. **Valerian** – 253-260 A.D. – The eighth wave of persecution began in 257 A.D. and it continued vigorously for three and half months. The martyrs that became victims for the persecution were innumerable. Their method of torturing that lead to death was of various types and with unbearable pain. During this time, the government ordered for the execution of clergy also in Rome. In Africa the persecution raged with peculiar violence. Thousands of people received the crown of martyrdom. Among such people, there was “Eyponion” bishop of Cathridge.

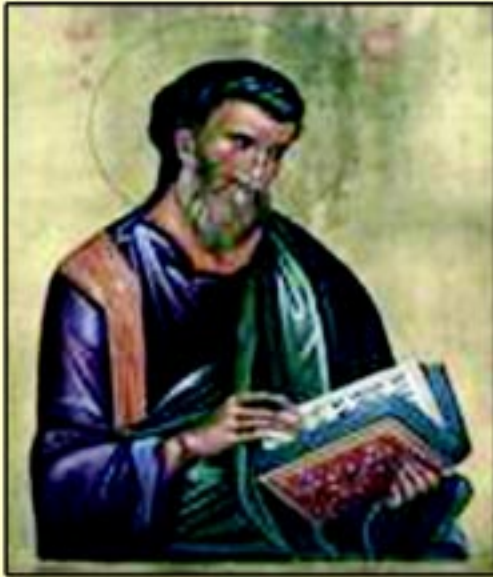
At “Utica” due to the order of the proconsul three hundred Christians were placed around a burning ‘lime kiln’ pan of coals and incense burning prepared. They were commanded either to sacrifice to Jupiter or to be thrown into the kiln. But they were all with one word refused their order and jumped into the pit.

9. **Diocletian** – 284-305 – The ninth wave of persecution began with “Aurelian” during 270-278 and was continued by Diocletian his successor. Under him the most severe campaign was done against churches and with an imperial order to destroy them and the churches including the ‘scriptures’. This persecution became common in all the Roman provinces primarily in the eastern side and it continued for ten years. It is practically impossible to ascertain the numbers that were martyred or to enumerate various modes of martyrdom. Racks, scourges, swords, daggers, crosses, poison and famine were tried or made use of to dispatch Christians.

After the Roman authorities were bored with the above said methods to kill as many Christians as possible, some of the provincial governors petitioned for a change the practices of execution. Then a new method was introduced. It was the method of body mutilation and other means of making the lives of Christians more miserable. The persecution of the emperor Diocletian reached its climax in 304 A.D. At that time a good number of Christians were put to unbearable torture and the most painful and ignominious deaths.

10. **Constantius and Galerius** – Diocletian was succeeded by Constantius (303-306) and Galerius (303-311 A.D.). During their reign the Roman empire was divided into two provinces. The first one was eastern province ruled by Galerius and western province was ruled by Constantius. In the east, Galerius continued the persecution as severely as his predecessors. But in the west, Constantius did not implement that heinous persecution as he was more kindhearted and tolerant of Christians.

PERSONS WHO BECAME MARTYRS



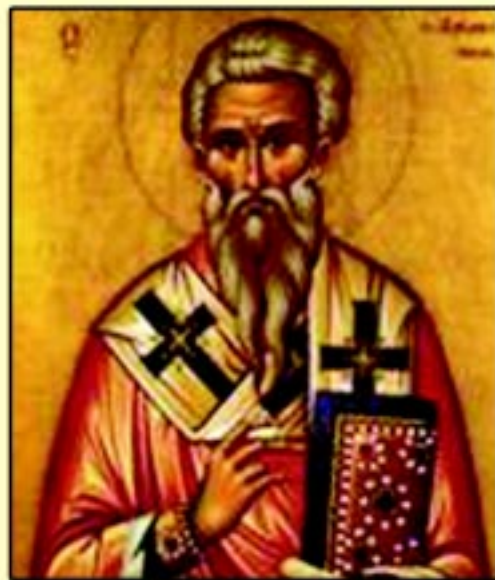
St. Matthew



St. Mark



St. Peter



St. James, brother of Jesus

PERSONS WHO BECAME MARTYRS



St. Luke



St. John



St. James, son of Zebedee



St. Andrew

PERSONS WHO BECAME MARTYRS



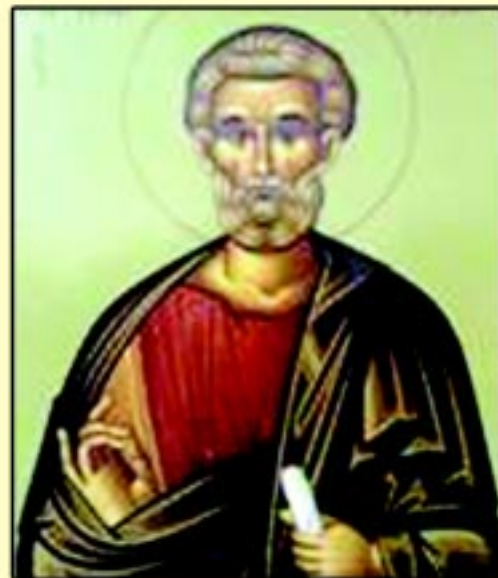
St. Bartholomew



St. Jude



St. Thomas



St. Mathias

THE WORD OF “YEHWEH”

The word "Bible" came from the Greek plural form "Biblia" which means books – the books of western world – a collection of books in Hebrew language which would be put into the library. And after some time they would be taken to the "Canan". About five milleniia ago human hand first carved a written "Word". It consequently created history of messages. This took place in "Sumer" in a ware - house of "Urech". This was perhaps the earliest human habitations which might deserve the name of the city massed along the Euphrates river in ancient Mesopotamia.

In invention of a new "Word" was perhaps necessary and the Sumerians kept the account of everything. Their developments in every walk of life helped the Babylonians who came after them. This Babylon city became famous for hanging gardens which was one of the seven ancient wonders of the world and these Babylonians were called the direct successors to Sumerians.

The first word was incensed on a small clay tablet for many years. Sumer appeared to have been in a collection of five burning city states. We must have to think seriously about the working oracle objects who had dug up many Sumerian cities during present century and many traditions were made of the clay.

There is actually much more importance we have to know from Sumerians because theirs was the world's first civilization. Their teaching of farming and husbandry were really extra-ordinary. It is said the Sumerians had 200 words as their vocabulary. In the beginning of the second millennia BC to Babylon and the Sumer's "Hammurabi" became the world's first emperor. Semitic - is a Hebrew term - Semitic tribe - Abrahamites - it is said Abraham belonged to Sumer tribe.

The ten commandments were also called ten words in Jewish Medianial translations. They were broken into 2 parts, the first is connected to God and the second part for God's people. According to Abrahamic Covenant of Blood, circumcision was the outward sign of

the covenant and the commandments. They were the invisible sign of the circumcision of heart. The Heavenly Father would be their God. The Israelites would be His people. His kingdom of Priests and His Holy Nation would be their's only. They would keep God's commandments any of the innovations that represented mount Sinai were the codification of Abrahamic "Monothiesm" which means one God only is to be worshiped even though many Sumer gods are in existence. Then this standard of "Ten words" would gradually subsequent "Israel's" history.

Augustine of Heppo era divided the ten commandments into two parts, the first three are connected to God and the remaining seven to people. Augustine's division of the ten commandments was followed by Latin church members, the Lutheran church and the Anglican church members also. But the Greeks and the other Eastern church members followed what appeared to be the most reasonable number that is four for God and six for people.

As a matter of fact if the ten commandments are not for any suggestion, they are not even for any challenge but the only thing new about them is their articulations at this movement and testifying "Sins" of Mount Sinai. And they are properly received by billions of people as reasonable necessary and also unalterable. Why because they are imprinted (written) on human hearts. They are always there in the inner core of human being in the deep silence of every one of us carry within ourselves. They need to be spoken by the people in a loud voice. The time in which those ten words were given was a brutal one, it was a time of spiteful and Godless. And the people we heard the converts were unrefined and "Dusty Ones." God also called those people as stiff-necked ones. Some of the Israel tried to follow "Torah" as an important document.

Torah means teaching - some times it is found mistranslated as "Law", the law of Moses. The name Torah was given by Jesus to the first five books of the Bible. It was also called "Pentateuch" which means the five books in original Hebrew language.

In Hebrew

Bereshet

Shemot

Vayyigera

Benidvar

Devearim

In English

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

The stories of "Torah" are largely contained in the first two books only. Genesis starts with the creation of everything upto Abraham and ends with the death of Joseph in Egypt. The second book is discription of slavery and their liberation by Moses. The book is

concluded with a long list of ordinances, Leviticus contained the ordinances of the priests of the tribe of Levi. The next book Numbers is called so because it contained the information about the census of the desert tribe, Israel.

Deuteronomy is only a code of Biblical and religious laws framed as a long discourse by Moses. The books also mentioned the names of prophets because all that great Israel figures start with Moses and Joshua are deemed to be prophets. The Torah is unquestionably is "Scripture" of Jewish traditions since the early days. Then the first twelve prophets were considered one scroll (one book). The Hebrew Bible containing 24 books was pointing to the importance in justice traditions of the Numbers 12 and its multiple significance and fulfillment. Regarding the order of books in Christian Bible it is completely different from that of Hebrew Bible but the material is spiritual, the intellectual and the moral aspects are the same in both.

"Harken O Israel"

YEHWEH our God YEHWEH (is) One"

The great formula is not that there is one God. But that is "God is One." God and the poor man's son being together as it should be God is One.

David

When David became the king he attacked Jerusalem which was in the occupation of Jebusites. Of all the psalms he wrote, the most favourite one of Jews and Christians is the good Shepherd which became world famous.

"The Lord is my Shepherd

I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures"

Amos

In the middle of eight century a Judean shepherd by name "Amos" was living a few miles away from Bethlehem. He was sent by an important message from God. He got an inspiration through this message and decided to preach in the northern part to the adulterous Israel. But he was not a well known professional prophet like Elijah or any other great men. He was first a shepherd from a remote place. He did not have any connection with any prophet brotherhood members. He was only a rugged shepherd and it was quite evident from his appearance as rough preaching, words delivered at the Samaria Schismatic (shines) in "Bethel" and in the streets of Samaria.

Amos addressed Israel as "Cows of Bashan" living on the hills of Samaria by exploiting

the weakness and ill treating the innocent poor. The sophisticated and pleasure seeking ladies of Samaria were not habituated to that kind of address. They were also unhappy over the direct accusation of Amos towards their husbands openly hated Amos for criticizing them and their way of life. But Amos sincerely appealed to them to seek not evil but justice reign at the city gate. Israel's hatred increased more and more when he openly attacked them by saying

*"I hate, I scorn your festivals,
I have no pleasure in your solemn assemblies"*

It was only due to Amos' constant and hateful criticism had been continued and finally he was forced by the circumstances to leave Israel with short notice. But in his brief celebrity he had taken the old part of prophecy and shaped it into a new instrument for a new age. Leaders like Moses, good kings like David, good priest like Samuel and good prophets like Nathan who spoke truth. In such conditions God raised Amos from nobody, and from nowhere to tell about the truth to the stiff-necked Israel.

Therefore in Samaria during 8th century B.C. Amos preached about truth with justice. The cream of his preaching was that one cannot pray to God and offer more sacrifices by ignoring the poor and beggars at the church gate. He insisted that it is more radical if any one (possessed) more than he required or needed.

According to the understanding of Amos a man who possessed more than he needed was no other than a thief because he had stolen the excess from those who did not have it. Added to that he called such people as murderers who had abundance that had been taken from the mouths of those starving people. Amos even addressed such people as idolaters because their worship was not true towards God. They were like whores as they had bedded down over other gods, the gods of their own comforts.

Hosea

When Israel's mind was in such perverted condition, a new priest joined Amos. His name was Hosea who preached in the same style of Amos. Since he had his own experience with his unfaithful wife, he was able to enrich his preaching.

In the meantime the Assyrians descended and seized the properties of Israel and dispersed the nobles through out the empire as nameless slaves and they never heard of them again. But the whereabouts of those nameless slaves was known to Amos only. Those Israelites were taken away permanently leaving their homes forever. They lost even their identity.

The circumstances made them permanent exiles. It is said the Israel were simply evaporated a ten lost tribes who left no trace of themselves. In the historical records it seemed

to be even the remaining stiff-necked Israel did not properly understand the prophesies of both Amos and Hosea. When Israel were in such pathetic condition, a new prophet came to the people of the South. He was no other than prophet Isaiah of Judah. He was an educated man like Moses. Due to his education and other abilities he could have every access even with the kings. So he was called the "first literary prophet". Added to that he became a great writer. When he was 25 years old he had a vision in the temple of king Solomon in Jerusalem. In his vision Isaiah saw God enthroned in His Heavenly Sanctuary. He was surrounded by the Seraphim angels, who were six winged and four headed fiery ones. They were shouting - rather singing,

"Holy, Holy, Holy,

YEHWEH Sabath

All the earth is full of His glory."

* * *

APOSTLE PAUL - A GREAT PREACHER

Saul was a Jew by birth and a Roman by nationality. He was from "Tarsus" and he could speak Greek also. As a Jew he was a hater of Christianity. So the Jewish authorities who were antagonistic to Christianity appointed Saul to persecute as many Christians as possible and even to kill them without any reason. With that, Saul became more notorious and a threat to Christian community.

Saul with such a record one day he was going to Damascus. On the same business, He was asked to bring as many Christians as possible both men and women to Jerusalem to persecute them. While he was going, he was stopped by a light that came down from Heaven and encircled him. Saul was surprised at this unexpected incident that made him fall down to the ground. Then he heard a voice that came from heaven in the following manner. "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*" (Acts 9:4). Then Saul said "Who art thou Lord?" "*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*". He said "God" and then added, "What I should do?"

God made him blind at that time and asked him to go to Damascus and to the house of "Judah". Accordingly his followers took him to Judah's house as God planned. Saul as a blind man stayed three days in that house in that condition.

In Damascus there was a disciple of Jesus and his name was "Ananias". He was chosen by God to heal the eyes of Saul in the house of "Judah". And Saul was praying to God in that blind condition and saw in his vision of a man by name Ananias would come to him and put his hand on his eyes and with his touch, he would get his sight back. Then God asked Ananias to go to the house of Judah and heal Saul from his blindness. He was surprised to hear such words from God, because he heard many horrible stories about Saul. But he sincerely obeyed God and healed the eyes of Saul as he was instructed by God.

Since that time the name of Saul was changed to Paul as God had some purpose with him in future. Then God told Ananias about Paul that he was a "chosen vessel" for Him to

bear His name before the gentiles, the kings and other Christian Israel. After he was healed he took Baptism from Ananias himself. Paul immediately started his responsible work of preaching about Christ. This sudden change in the character of Paul surprised many, particularly Jews, Christians and also Apostles.

The Jewish authorities who actually appointed him to persecute Christians and kill them saw this sudden change in Paul and decided to kill him somehow at the earliest. Then Paul came to Jerusalem one day secretly to meet the "Apostles". They did not know what happened to Paul. So they were afraid of meeting him. In such conditions, it was Barnabas who brought Paul to the disciples. Since then they could understand one another and planned together for the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's sincere effort resulted in starting a good number of churches in Judah, Galilee and Samaria. In Ephesus also he preached to both Jews and Greeks. In addition to that many people accepted Jesus Christ as their saviour. Paul once said when many people were converting to Christianity, "I am pure with the blood of all men". This sudden change of Paul and his regular preaching made 40 numbers of fanatical Jews to take oath not to eat or drink until they kill Paul. At that time one day he was arrested but not punished and later he was released.

While he was preaching in Rome, he said, "man must live by faith, because he is justified by faith". Before Saul became Paul he was originally a murderer, a blasphemer and a persecutor. In spite of all past history, God touched him and changed him so as to use him as a vessel who changed people in many nations. His humble and faithful saying was "Christ came into this world to save the sinners and I am the first sinner." He hopefully advised the people to pray to God for forgiveness. This word "forgiveness" can be found in the New Testament 27 times.

At that time the gentiles were worshipping God of Israel and their own gods equally. That system of pagan idol worship was not acceptable to some Jews. But gradually they tried to leave the idol worship and stick to one God and honour the fundamental principles of the "Scripture". The Jewish Christians are really happy at the change and attitude of the people. They were preached about the coming Messiah and the heavenly kingdom.

Paul joined the Christian movement three years after the death of Jesus and the church elders appointed him to travel into many places and establish congregations in "Syria minor" and Greece. Then he decided to spread the gospel to every nook and corner of the earth before Jesus returns again.

Paul wrote letters to the converts and answered their questions, in order to satisfy them and at the same time explained the fundamentals of faith. He was called the busiest preacher who never thought of himself for a moment. He wrote Scriptures because he was convinced

fully that Christ would return in his own life time. Paul never imagined about future generations as they would follow their own way of living with selfless conditions. He was considered to be the most satisfied and popular teacher and preacher to the gentiles.

He was the embodiment of explosive temperament and it made him unpopular to some extent. Nevertheless, his letters to different churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Philippi and Thessalonica were the masterpieces in the Bible. Some commentators gave a wonderful testimony of apostle Paul that without the letters of Paul there is no New Testament at all.

Paul explained to the people of different nature that his gentiles have totally renounced all their pagan cult and worshipping completely the God of Israel. But he had no belief in that they should convert into Judaism as Christ already made the gentiles love the son of God. Christ openly declared about the gentiles as they need not undergo circumcision and observe the fundamentals in "Torah" (which means the five books of Moses or the Law of Moses).

But they must live as if the kingdom of God is at hand and already arrived. The gentiles were advised hopefully to take care of the poor and behave with charity. Those two, charity and modesty must become part and parcel of their life. Then they must love one another. With all his preachings Paul found a wonderful change among gentile Christians. It was found some of them became spirited and even prophesied and performed miracles also. In a grip of excitement they spoke strange languages. All these experiences gave us a clear picture of an indication of the power in the Spirit of God was hovering in the gentiles. These above said examples would suffice to justify the kingdom of God would arrive in near future.

Apostle Paul in all his letters or speeches suggested why Christ did not like to observe Torah. Perhaps he might have thought it would put Him out of covenant. The Israel received a special gift of revelation from the mount Sinai. The temple cult and the privilege of being called the children of God.

They enjoyed many things among themselves, but Paul too valued and respected all of them. He was not criticizing or commenting either on Jesus or Judaism but only Jewish Christians who were expecting the gentiles must undergo circumcision and observe the entire Torah.

Paul became very great among gentiles because he had the magnetic power to attract and change many gentiles into true believers and also most faithful. He was convinced that he alone was in possession of truth. In the Messianic age with his mixed congregation of Jews and gentiles, he felt they were the true Israel. That means they had become wonderful believers and changed themselves completely in their character and conduct since the coming of Christos (Christ).

Whatever was written long ago in the Scriptures meant to teach us something. The real importance of law and prophets had come to light therefore, those Jews were referred to accept Jesus as the "Messiah" did not understand Him and His importance properly.

The Israel too did not understand Jesus and realize Mosaic covenant was only an interim measure. They could not see what this scripture was about because the veil was over their minds. Then they would be transformed also and their unveiled focuses reflecting the brightness of our Lord. As the Jews were fond of new meaning to a secret message in the scriptures which referred to their community, all used to refer to some Biblical quotations in order to keep his congregation in correct tract.

He would say to the gentiles how Adam and Eve brought sin into the world then, how the humanity was put into correct relationship with God. Then Abraham became the father of the Jews and also the father of all the faithful. His faith was important to remember which was later translated to the meaning of "Trust" rather than "Belief". This spotless faith of Abraham made an indelible impression on Paul and made him remain as a model Christian. He was also astonished how Abraham could have such perfect faith in his time. That was centuries before the coming of Messiah.

The scriptures also praised the faith of Abraham. It means it is referring to us and to our faith too. The scriptures for-saw God was going to use faith to justify pagans and proclaimed this good news long ago. When Abraham was commanded by God to abandon his concubine Hagar and her son Ishmael in the wilderness, it had become an allegorical saying in the Bible.

In this connection, Hagar represented mount Sinai covenant which turned Jews to law, but regarding Sarah, Abraham's free born wife was corresponding to the new covenant "which had liberated gentiles from the "Torah Obligation". The author of the epistle to Hebrews appeared to be more radical in his writings. He seemed to have written that just to console the community of Jewish Christians.

The Jews were beginning to lose heart and at the same time faith with their forceful arguments about Christ because he had not given any importance of "Torah". It was actually more exalted by Jews than Moses himself. In an extra-ordinary passing authority the entire history of Israel which was at present unknown and unseen.

Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Debora, Barak, Gideon, Samson, Samuel, David, and prophets who obediently exhibited their faith in some form or the other basing on their position and condition in which the society they lived it had been indeed their individual achievement. God made all people provisions for us to find or receive something useful from. But unfortunately they could not reach perfection in their day today life.

All the Hebrew writers showed their share of achievements to their future generations how to interpret or explain the Hebrew Bible and make it their own. The "Jesus Movement" had become more controversial for the people than before. The Jews and Christians became desperate and spellbound at the pathetic scene of Jerusalem temple. They might have dreamed of replacing Herod's temple but no one was in a mood to say anything. One thing all unitedly felt is that without the temple their life would be a waste.

The Christians also saw the total destruction of the temple with shedding of their tears. Even Jesus prophesied about the destruction of the temple on the mount of Olive 40 years after He was crucified. The ruins of the temple symbolized its tragic and wore a deserted look. People who looked at it felt the end was approaching. After everything was cleared people believed that God would order for the establishment of a new kingdom.

By the middle of second century A.D., all the twenty seven books of the New Testament had been completed probably by scanning. The commentators doubted whether the letters of Paul were scripture. Paul called Jesus Christ as the "Son of God". But he had used the title in traditional Jews sense and said Jesus was a human being who had special relationship with God like the ancient kings of Israel. Paul wrote his contribution to the Bible when the temple was intact. So, he did not mention the temple in his writings anywhere. But the temple was very important for him because it marked the vision of Jesus.

After the death of Paul in early 60's the Christian writers who recognized his worth as a great writer and a wonderful preacher. They praised him for his extraordinary letters to different churches, especially in Ephesus and Colasians. They whole-heartedly declared that they had lost a powerful write from the Christian believers. Then some other Christian writers wrote a supposed posthumous letters addressed to Paul and his associates "Timothy and Titus."

APOSTLE PAUL - A GREAT PREACHER



St. Paul



The House where St. Paul lived

THE SECOND SIN

The following lines are taken from the "Epic" poem, "Paradise Lost" written by John Milton.

*"Of man's first disobedience
And the fruit of forbidden tree"*

The first sin committed by Adam and Eve was portrait in a symbolic language in the Bible with great wisdom and concern. The main reason for the Sin was nothing but the violation and disobedience towards the commandment of God, that is not to eat the fruit of that forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was in the middle of the garden of Eden. Both Adam and Eve violated the commandment of God by eating that fruit.

We can presume two reasons for this unfortunate incident. The first reason is the cunning words of the serpent that tempted the innocent Eve. The second reason is violation of God's commandment or disobedience of Adam and Eve towards God. There is some importance in the first sin because it was the first sin, whereas the second sin is more important than the first one as long as we have not recovered from the first one. The scriptures and the human experiences provided some clue as a remedy for the first sin. But regarding the second sin there are no fundamental principles to be observed as a remedy and so causing more anxiety.

Let us go back to the garden of Eden for a while. Because of the ill-advise of the serpent the innocent Eve respected the words and ate the fruit and then gave it to Adam. We can see here how Eve was easily trapped by that evil serpent because of her weakness. That is why the popular saying "Frailty thy name is woman". Immediately after eating that fruit, their eyes were opened and they became conscious of themselves. They came to know that they were naked. Then they made garments with fig leaves and covered themselves.

Just at that time God was moving in the garden and understood what had happened. God called Adam "Where are you?" He questioned, "why did you eat that fruit?" They really

The Second Sin

felt uneasy in the presence of God and Adam replied that the woman you gave me as a partner, gave me that fruit and I ate". When God questioned Eve she replied, "the serpent tricked me I ate it". So, that was the first sin and the whole story was beating around the bush.

In addition to this, there are some clues and opinions, regarding the first sin. Some renowned people suggested that it must be the discovery of the Sex because Adam and Eve became conscious of their nakedness and covered themselves with the garments of fig leaves. Another probable opinion was that it must be "human desire to be equal to God". Let us not give much importance to these opinions but according to the "Bible and writer of the Genesis" "eating of the forbidden fruit itself is the result of disobedience and disbelief" in the words of God.

Now, we have the Second Sin. It is more dangerous than the first one (Sin). It is the "Sin of Excuse". It is called so because on one hand we don't admit that we are wrong. On the other hand "we refuse to surrender ourselves for what we are".

Whatever may be the nature of origin of our sin, like adultery, murder, cheating, drunkenness, ill-temper, etc., they can be escaped through repentance or God's forgiveness. But regarding the second sin being the sin of excusing ourselves, and unwilling to correct ourselves, and by possessing this kind of unyielding and unrepenting temperament we are closing our doors against God and hope.

If any country takes a wrong step in its administration or policies it will repent for it and then tries its best to put into the right trait and goes forward. But with self-excuses it goes on justifying its wrong policies, the country might plunge into various problems, mistakes in our day to day called 'sins' might destroy us and our inability to face ourselves that we are wrong.

We came across many personalities in the Bible who can be classified into different categories. Some are desired to learn - to repent and some are not. And those two cadres can be also classified as those who become victorious in their life time, and those who had tragic end. For example Moses and Balaam, Moses had done some mistakes, while bringing the Israel from Egypt to the promised land of milk and honey. He obediently repented for his sins (or mistakes) and reached his greatness in the sight of God, and God even called him, "My servant Moses".

Regarding Balaam God told "Thou shall not go with them (Balak and other heathen kings) thou shall not curse the people for they were blessed ones". But he disobeyed God and went to Balak for the sake of money and finally died like a fool.

Same is the case of Saul and David. Both were sinners. Saul became jealous of David for his wonderful power and strength, when he killed Goliath a Philistine giant with the help of a small stone. Since then, he was afraid of David and tried to kill him with the help of a javelin. Likewise, David also got the chance to kill Saul, but he did not do so, instead of that he spoke noble words. For that Saul said to David "Thou art more righteous than I, you rewarded me good, but I rewarded you evil" (1 Samuel 24:17).

Saul for his wickedness, fell into the hands of Amalekites in the battle, who cut his head and hanged his body to a tree. So, he died miserably for his Sin.

Regarding David he made arrangements for the death of "Uriah" his own military officer, then took his wife as his wife. Her name was "Bethsheba". This act displeased God. For this evil act, God told David "I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house and I will take thine wives before thine eyes and give them unto thy neighbour and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of the sun" (2 Samuel 12:11)

To punish David more for his evil act, of taking Bethsheba, God sent a prophet to remind him his sin. Finally David repented whole heartedly. God was satisfied with his repentance and declared him "the person of Gods own heart". God was happy with him and called him "His is a man after my own heart". God also said only David's family should rule Israel. Even after three thousand years, David had good reputation in Israel. In their national flag there are six blue stars which are called the stars of David. According to the historical evidence, God inscribed the Ten Commandments on blue stones called sapphires and gave them to Moses. That belief made the Jews to keep the blue stars on their national flag.

If we look into history, some of the most significant people became great by acknowledging suffering for their mistakes or sins in their life time. Our character grows out of the soil of our life like a tender plant. So, if we repent for our sins that repentance breaks the soil of our life and allows the plant to grow and get a new beginning. If we 'excuse' or ignore our actions, the soil of our life hardens and the plant of character simply cannot grow and even it may not survive.

So, we can define the 'Second Sin' "as doing something wrong and never think of repentance" and added to that we try to defend ourselves like Adam and Eve. Had they repented for eating the forbidden fruit, at that time, for their sin then God would not have sent them out of the garden of Eden and the story of Adam and Eve would have been written in a different way in the Bible.

We can also call the second sin as unpardonable and inexcusable and that God hates such people. It is called so because it is against the Holy Spirit and whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will be in danger of eternal damnation. So, doing something wrong

and not repenting for his mistake with "self excuses" is nothing but blaspheming of the Holy Spirit.

It is the power that controls us as sinners. We become hard hearted by not accepting our sins with our own 'excuses'. As time goes on we continue only self excusing process in our lives.

"How Adam answered to God?" " 'Yes' I ate" the fruit it was the woman you gave me, brought that fruit for me. But regarding Eve, she did not like to be bearing the entire responsibility, chinned in so, she said the serpent tricked me" Adam was not satisfied by blaming Eve for giving him that fruit. Eve blamed the serpent for tempting her and finally "Adam blamed God, for giving him that kind of woman as his partner".

We are really experts in hearing from the knowledge of what we are. Adam and Eve set the patron for us and we have been refining evil sins. When God asked Adam if he had eaten the fruit from the forbidden tree, it was really a good chance to go forward and confess his Sin. Instead of doing so, Adam answered God 'Yes' but the woman.....". He was undoubtedly very courageous soil ready to shoulder the responsibility. It was the woman.. woman is made for man, but not man is made for woman.

The woman did not do better in this case. It is no doubt regrettable. There might be some social differences between the 'sexes' (between men and women). But sin is considered as one of them. Both men and women have same facilities, for peaceful living. At the careful observation, some people were of the opinion that the woman had committed the first sin and it is also noticed, man is responsible for the second sin. When Eve understood the blame is leading towards her, she immediately said "The serpent tricked me".

Adam's excuse does not stop with shifting of the blame to Eve. He made a complaint to God by saying "It was the woman you gave me". Adam actually wanted to say "It was your fault in giving generously that creature that lead me astray". Adam finally concluded by saying to God, "It was your fault for giving me that woman, as my partner".

The conclusion about the Second Sin is a type of "self excuse" and repentence. This type of temperament prevents us from finding God. The following lines are taken from the book of Psalms of the Bible by king David.

"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit.

A broken and contrite heart, O! God, thou will not despise" (Pslams 51:17).

God is always ready to resist penitant soil, because the penitant soil has an open door. At the same time God will close the life of a person who covers his faults with a hard surface of "excuse". But the people who passes the noble quality of forgiveness are called noble-

men and it is called "noble gift". Though we don't love God he always loves us because we are His children. His love is like sun-beams which penetrate into our bodies. His love is unconditional. Adam and Eve committed sin and "the wages of sin is death".

But a great mercy came into their lives as God is more concerned to their lives. Therefore when God came to know that they ate the forbidden fruit, he made an enquiry by calling "Adam where are you?" Sometimes, we try to escape from God but he will follow us always. Whatever weakness we have that cause us to sin. God is always there to come to our rescue and help us. Whatever sin we have that afflicts us. God offers his remedy. Only one thing in our lives that stops going well that is the second sin". Our innate unwillingness to confess that we are in need of help will stop our intimacy with God. So on the basis of confession we can seek God's remedy. As man is mortal whatever we do in this life, and whatever course we follow, let us be sure that we should not die with excuses as it is against the Holy Spirit and we cannot have eternal life.

* * *

THE SECOND SIN



IMPORTANCE OF THE NAME

Rachael prayed to God long prayers for children with agony and God heard her prayers. She humbly prayed to God for a son. Accordingly, she got a son and she called his name "Joseph", by saying "May the Lord add to me another son". It is said Rachael was a very beautiful woman in those days and also she was the daughter of a rich man. If there were news papers or magazines in those days they would have certainly praised her beauty. Jacob also became a prosperous young man and fabulously rich. He loved Rachael more than her sister Leah and for her sake he worked for another seven years in her father's house and this we all know.

The elder sister 'Leah' was begetting children regularly but Rachel was not. Rachel could not have children for about 10 years. According to the belief of the people in her time, children were not only blessing from God but also important evidence of God's favour. Rachael really experienced mental torture regarding children. The woman in those days who did not have children used to think as they had no God's approval for children in them. They further thought it was God's disapproval but not the fault of their husbands if they did not have children. Leah was quite alright and getting children one after another so natural jealousy increased in the mind of Rachael against her sister.

As Rachael was not conceiving she began to scold Jacob. He got angry and told her "Am I God that I can decide whether or not you, will have child" At last God remembered her and her prayers. How good is the memory of God! "God opened her womb" (Genesis 30.22).

God heard and answered her long and anguish prayers and Rachael got a male child. She actually waited for the child atleast for ten years. The child was a gift of God. Then she began to think seriously to select the name for the child. In the Old Testament times people did not select the names in a casual manner. They went on Baptizing the child for about four decades (40 years) and then decided a name. And also in ancient period people or prophets named their children according to the spiritual connections or something most significant at the time of the birth of the child.

After studying on all angles what name Rachael must have preferred to her blood child because he was the long waited result of her prayers. In her prayers, she went on asking for a child that too for a son, and she was granted. After he was born, she made a request for another of the same in everything. It means Rachael must be requesting for another male child.

The name Joseph must have been a good name if she had selected and God must have added the first name or middle name. "Chanan" which means roughly "God had shown me favour". Any way she thanked God for the favour. He had shown to her and made a request for another. After observing her dialogues with God for sometime, we can understand that Rachel was a better the theologian than anybody else and also she knew the nature of God, how to handle Him and the purpose of God in our lives.

Rachael could convince God through her prayers and conceived for the second time. But it is not mentioned in the Bible regarding the gap between the two sons. When Jacob was with all his family members in his journey, by the time they reached "Ephratha" called Bethlehem the time had come for her to deliver. Regarding its second issue the Mid-wife thought it difficult for Rachael to survive after that risk in her delivery. But still the mid-wife encouraged her, by saying she would survive for another issue" (Genesis 35.17)

She gave birth to her second son also and his name was "Benoni" which means "Son of my sorrow". Then she died. Her husband Jacob later changed his name mercifully into "Benjamin" which means "son of my right hand". One thing we have to remember in this context. If she had not wished for the second child, after Joseph, she would have survived for some time. And also we have to remember another important thing in the case of Benjamin who played a very crucial role.

The descendents of Benjamin became courageous warriors. Whenever they went to wars the cry of the people was "After you O Benjamin". He was the only son, and last son to Rachael born in the land of milk and honey called canaan The land finally became the occupation of Jewish people. Among the twelve tribes, Benjamin was the first one as far as the population was concerned. God blessed Joseph and Benjamin and Rachael abundantly and it was nothing but her faithful and humble prayers. She could win the love and mercy of God through her long prayers.

Prophet Samuel appointed Saul as the first king of Israel on the advise of God, because for 200 years they were under the rule of Judges and they wanted a king like the other kings around them. This Saul was the descendant of Benjamin. But because he was unfaithful and cruel towards others like David, finally God offered him a miserable death. Then after many generations, a man known as Saul of "Tarsus" who later became 'Apostle Paul was also from the family of Benjamin.

King Solomon was abundantly blessed by God. But he forgot all that and became almost a heathen king by marrying so many heathen wives. So God got angry and punished him by dividing the kingdom into two parts. The first one was Southern Kingdom of Judah with the children of Judah and Benjamin with their capital Jerusalem and second one the northern kingdom of Israel with the remaining ten tribes, with their capital Samaria.

Even today, half of Jewish population we find is from the tribe of Benjamin. He was indeed a key person in the history of Jewish people a kind of aristocracy of quality. So, the present Jews of Jewish nation are the true descendants of Judah and Benjamin. We can understand in this context about Rachael as she understood better than any one of us in her days that there was something more significant in putting the name than in blessings. She might have got the idea that the purpose of God is only to give blessings as number one. Then a basis and foundation for blessing is number two and thanking God for His blessings is greater than anything else as the original blessings.

Rachel seemed to have realized one thing in her life that is, God had something more in His mind about her and her two sons. She also vaguely understood the ultimate purposes of God's activities. But she could not understand her second son would create world history in future. She even did not understand her family history would become a tell tale stories among the people even after thousands of years.

Sometimes we feel frustrated in not correctly understanding the purposes of God on our lives and on our characters. We as human beings are too small to understand the purposes of God. It may be due to our humility or lack of confidence. If we go on questioning the purposes and activities of God it means, we are discrediting the generosity of God Himself.

If we ponder over our merciful God, we have to say openly God would think of us better than ourselves. So all of us must honour and appreciate Rachel how being a woman could understand and believe in the goodness of God in her days.

She asked God boldly, what she wanted, in her prayers because she whole heartedly believed in Him. He was good God and it pleased Him to bless Rachel abundantly.

Charles Wesley a hymn writer praised God in the following lines. When he received abundant blessings from God.

*"What shall I render to my God.
For all His mercies store?"
I'll take the gifts, He hath bestowed
And humbly ask for more"*

Wesley must have learnt a lesson from the secret and blessed life of Rachel. As she

said we must pray to God for His favour and blessings and wait for the result, patiently till they come to us. We must learn how to thank God. We must accept the "Divine goodness" and then recognize such goodness as the essence of God's character, then we should say I'll like more of the same.

Regarding her first son Joseph, there is much to be said. We know how his brothers felt jealous of him and threw him, into a deep pit. Then he was sold and taken to Egypt, and there by his intelligence and good behaviour won the confidence of king Pharaoh. He finally reached the pinnacle, next to pharaoh in the position. God was with him and blessed him. Even pharaoh had to depend upon him for everything. Joseph became so popular in Egypt that they all called him "Father of Egyptians". So, the two sons of Rachel became famous in the history and in the Bible. It is all due to the constant prayers of Rachael.

This story speaks about the remarkable character of Rachel in the Bible. We can believe she would have become more popular in this world, if there were to be news papers in those days as we have today. She prayed for a son desperately. When he came into this world, she said, "I'll call him Joseph" and added "May God add me still more". She understood the purpose and goodness of God, and by doing so she opened the doors for God's goodness and the purpose to be fulfilled. After understanding the wonderful story of Rachel, shall we all wish ourselves to be more like Rachael and win God's favour for our families?"

* * *

SERVICE OF ANGELS TO HUMANITY

Generally men will have greater desire to know more about the unseen or spiritual world, about the angels and about their work as God created them for what purpose and so on. Angels are the kind of beings who can move faster than even light, it is said apparently. They also interfere in human affairs or problems whether they are great or small. Greater affairs may be connected to actions and smaller things to position of a child.

Angels are employed to carry out the orders of their master God all the time. Now-a-days we have many stories or incidents about angels, how they are participating in a unique way in the day today life of human beings, and protect us in times of danger. They convey messages and even watch what is happening in the churches when we worship. Above all they take part in the important “cosmia” spiritual battle that we are not aware. It seems many people have bad impression about angels. Some of us must have read some stories of ancient times; myths and experiences of some people with angels.

Some writers and people who were under such wrong impression about the angels have withdrawn their opinion about them after they found some truth in the stories. We can find many stories connected to the Bible and God’s word. If we look into the Bible for understanding we can find many stories about them as doing some performance. Almost all New Testament writers happened to mention angels in their books. The name angels can be found more than 260 times in the Bible.

The most important fact said about them is that they are real and involve in many activities of human beings. Christ also said when he was arrested by the Roman soldiers in the Gethsemane garden, that if he felt it necessary he would have called a legion of angels to come to His rescue.

According to the Bible the angels are two groups – 1. The Holy angels of God who are always ready at His command to attend any type of work. 2. The second type of them are those that followed Satan and rebelled against God. The number of angels that followed

satan, it is said is one third of the total population in heaven. The evil angels always try to attack us wherever we are found with something. In such conditions the word of God is necessary for us to protect from that kind of angels. So our knowledge of God's word is our protection against the evil deeds of satan. Therefore let us read and enjoy some of the stories of the people with angels and how they acquired some experience with them.

1. THE HIGHWAY ANGELS

Mr J.Ken of Georgia State (US) gave his wonderful experience with an angel. He said it was only divine intervention of the Lord who sends His angels to save him from a danger. He was an employee working as an accountant. He was asked by his employer to finish the years accounts in a very short time. He was completely exhausted in his work and planned to go home to take rest. And he was driving the car at the speed of 15 miles per hour so as to escape from any kind of accident on the highways. All of a sudden his car lost power and stopped and the lights of many cars illuminated on his car and there was engine break also. So he found it difficult to move the car and put it in the right track. It was only two line highway and the road was full of vehicle movement. Under such conditions he could not move his dying car to a complete stop to the opposite line.

Many cars passed on that way but nobody tried to stop in order to help him in spite of his appealing shouts. Then after some time came an old vehicle as if to hit the standing car. But he was wrong. The driver of that vehicle came slowly and stopped before him. He said, "we will have to get your car over to the right hand shoulder and out of the way of traffic." Just at that time came another man saw the situation and said that he had heavy chain to pull the car and put it in the right track.

The most unbelievable thing that happened when they were moving the vehicle that there was no movement of the cars till they finished their work. Such kind of experience was most unusual to anybody, unlikely and impossible.

The new friend asked him if he needed any more help. For that Ken replied he wanted lift to the next exit so that he would call his friend by phone to come and take him home. While driving Ken found his friend's coat was completely drenched might be due to sweating. Then as a token of love he offered a small gift of 15 dollars for dry cleaning his coat. But he rejected that and said "don't thank me for being here, thank God for sending me to you".

His new friend at last went away in his old car for some distance and vanished from his sight. Ken became spell bound at that strange experience. Then he tried to start his car as a trial. And to his surprise it started immediately as the dead battery acquired new power. This is really wonderful but real story. He told this story to many people and after 10 years he changed his job also.

His Second Experience: One day he attended a church conference. In that meeting an Afro-American a middle aged man met him. He said God had sent His angels three times and protected him from death by keeping divine hand upon him. After telling his story the Afro-American disappeared from his sight. Ken tried to find him, but in vain because he was also another angel, who was sent to share his story.

God really holds victory in store for those who are upright. He acts like a shield to those who are blameless. He protects the way of life of His people who are faithful. This is no doubt an amazing story and we have a wonderful God, who always tried to help us on all occasions.

Angels in Mens' Clothing: Henrietta W. Roman gave her experience with the angels who were in human form with men' clothing and behaved like human beings. One day Henrietta went with her husband Williams to the student center auditorium in the university campus in Missore. It was the meeting of a connection of a well known evangelist. Though both were not interested in such gathering, they were invited and the seats were reserved for them. The hall was fully packed with the audiences but the two seats were vacant for them. Finally they occupied their seats and began to pray for the people who asked them for that. They opened their eyes after the prayer and found something in the hands of everybody except in the hands of three persons who stood before them.

The first one smiled at them who was extremely tall with blond hair, with deep green eyes and a jacket on his shoulder. He wore a blue shirt and pant. They came closer to the couple and the first one knelt on one knee to be still closer to them. He first greeted her husband with welcome and then held her hand. This was happening in the hustle and bustle of the audience. It was so quiet and peaceful. He laughed at them continuously. It was really strange and unbelievable. She tried to introduce herself and her husband.

But he abruptly exclaimed “we know you, we want you to know that God loves you. He appreciates your prayer and always heard it. We are to tell you that you are doing well, in teaching young people around you to be good apostles. But you both are meeting with spiritual warfare especially healthwise. Please look at the word of God and carry on. Don't be afraid and take heart in your work.”

Then he stood up and they also stood up. She asked his name in a low and surprised voice. He seemed to be searching for his name and said his name was Steven. Finally those young men left the couple with a lovely smile. They followed the strangers for some time and suddenly they disappeared into the air. The couple looked at each other with full beating heart. With that memorable incident their spirits were increased and inspired. They enquired about those three strange visitors but nobody told about them.

She was a good writer also. She began to write immediately what all was spoken by the strangers and messengers of God who were sent for them. At last they bowed their heads with great reverence and prayed to God by saying "Thank you Lord, thank you for trusting us." Angels are being sent to minister to us personally.

Many Biblical references assure us that we are the objects of their personal concern. In the book of Martin Luther "The Table Talk", he made the following statement, "An angel is a spiritual creature created by God without a body for the service of Christendom and the Church." When the angel visits us we cannot hear the rustle of their wings, not feel feathering touch at the breast of a dove. But know their presence by the love they show and speak with our hearts.

An Angel Porter: This story is about Cindy and Herald who had to travel by train in Germany. At that time they had to change their train in midway, with heavy luggage of six suitcases. The station was designed with two tracks and with concrete platform. So as to change the platform from one to another one has to go down then through a tunnel 25 steps down and 25 steps up, and this was designed under the track. They were waiting for the train and suddenly they came to know they were on the wrong side of the platform. They also came to know their train had just arrived.

Now they had to run to the right platform with the luggage of 6 heavy boxes 25 steps down and 25 steps up under the track through the tunnel. In America we don't find porters or coolies as in India to carry our load. First the man took 2 boxes and kept his wife to watch the other four. He carried them with great difficulty. He hurriedly walked the downward steps but struggled a lot for the upward steps. Then he left the two suitcases there and went back to bring two more. He humbly prayed to God to give him more strength to carry the remaining load quickly.

Suddenly at the top of the downward steps, he saw a man carrying four heavy boxes and his wife was simply following him. He kept one box each under his arm and one on each hand. After reaching the destination, the stranger looked at his wife if she had asked his name. She replied she did not. Then she turned to his side to thank him. To their surprise, he was not there. There were only four people in the entire station and there was no room for the people to go.

His wife told him about the stranger that came all of a sudden took the four suitcases and walked at full speed as if he was running with empty boxes. The man then roughly calculated the weight of the four boxes, and found it was not lesser than 280 pounds. Any sensible man can understand that the stranger must be a super being. They finally understood and concluded it was no other than an angel who came to their rescue when they were in need of help.

DO ALL ANGELS HAVE NAMES?

This is the story of Cleare telling about her spiritual experience with some angels in the church. As usual on one Sunday she went to church. While worshipping the Lord with music she casually looked at the windows of the church. There were eight tall windows on each side. They were well designed and looked more beautiful. She observed that the lights became brighter in each window and quickly the angel warriors in white cloths appeared to be standing before each window. They filled the windows with spears and other weapons in their hands. In surprise she looked at her husband and other people in the church but there was none.

She went home and told her husband all the story. She could not understand what it meant or what kind of message they might have for her family. Any how, she got the inspiration through that strange incident. Then she became more curious to know the names of those angels who visited their church and whether God gave names to all angels. It is certainly impossible to give and write the names of all the angels because they are in crores. But let us study about some names that are available through some sources. If we look into the Bible there are Seraphimes, Cherubimes, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, Princes, Powers, Principalities, Virtues etc.,

It is said God created hundred crores of angels and one third of them became the followers of Satan who came to the earth. Following are some of the names of the angels:

1. **Abdeel** – This name was mentioned by John Milton in his epic poem “Paradise Lost”. He was one of the fallen angels and became second to Lucifer called Satan. But this angel left Satan and went back to heaven. As a matter of fact he was the only angel that deserted Satan and went back to his original place.
2. **Af** – According to Jewish legends Af is the angel of death. He would be sent on missions by the Archangel Uriel.
3. **Appolyon** – He is some times called “the destroyer” and his name is found in Revelation 9:11 as the angel of Abyss.
4. **Bardiel** – This name was taken from the “Book of Enoch” and he was considered to be the angel of lightening.
5. **Beelzebub** – He was originally worshipped as Philistine god or as deity. The meaning of the name was ‘god of Flies.’ In the New Testament and in the gospel of Matthew 12:24, he is known as the prince of demons.
6. **Chamuel** – This angel seemed to be one who wrestled with Jacob in the book of Genesis. He is also believed to be the angel who comforted Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.
7. **Gabriel** – He is considered to be the most prominent in the Bible. The meaning of this name is “God is our Strength”. In the Bible, he assisted prophet Daniel when he was in

troubles in Babylon as an exile. The same angel appeared to virgin Mary and told her about the birth of Jesus Christ. It was the same angel who helped Moses for the separation of “the Sea of Reeds” or Red sea to free the Israel. Finally he would also appear for blowing the trumpet of judgment.

8. **Jophiel** – God seemed to have used this angel to drive away Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden. He is symbolized by the flaming sword. He is also called the guard of the tree of knowledge.
9. **Michael** – He is one of the specially named in the Bible. His name is in the form of a question as “who is God” His is one of the first and most powerful beings that God created. He is the only angel considered to be the protector of the righteousness.
10. **Raphael** – The meaning of this name is “God has healed”. He is not originally named in the Bible but some scholars considered him to be the guardian angel of the human race. He is said to be particularly to love young people.
11. **Satan** – he is originally said to be the Archangel in heaven. He rebelled against God and so God necked him out of heaven to earth. So from Lucifer, his name is changed to Satan, prince of darkness, prince of evil etc., He was the embodiment of all evil. He was actually highly honoured angel in heaven until he faced a miserable downfall which was caused by his pride and arrogance before God. We can read more about him in the book of Isaiah (Is. 14:12-20).
12. **Warmwood** – This angel is not mentioned directly but referred as a “star”. As we find in the book of Revelation he will be active in the final wrap up of this world as we know it. This is to happen before the final coming of Jesus and after opening the “seventh seal” he will appear as a “flaming star” that passes the worlds water supply and causes more deaths, more destruction in those final days.

Some scholars are still doubtful about the number of angels in heaven whether all of them have names. But let us not worry about such things as are so important to worry at all. One thing we have to remember, that is not to worship the angels as they are not so great, but we have to worship only the God Almighty.

THE HISTORY OF ST. NICHOLAS

If we travel from “Kag to Fethize” in modern Turkey, we will arrive at the village called “Geremis” at the southern part of the plain “Xanthos Esen”. At that place, we might find among the dunes of sand at the coast are the ruins of the ancient city called “Patara”. The name of that city in Fhuisean language is called “padaura” which means “marshy grounds” or river grounds. This name after some years changed into “patara”.

In that Patara city a temple of ‘Applai’ was built which became very popular in those days. The city itself became famous and then it was called the second largest of “oracle prophesy” of the Mediterranean. The city Patara in course of time due to political conditions, passed into the hands of Persians, then into Alexander the Great, then into Egyptians, then into Selucidos and finally into Rhodans.

After some years, the Appolian was identified with Jesus Christ. With that, the city of Patara was frequented by Christian saints. The harbour which became prosperous with maritime trading was completely silted up with alular deposits and the remains of the harbour were submerged in the sand as a result of erosion.

In the southern part of the city, we can find the ruins of the structure of the Romans in fine bath rooms. In that area it is believed that the Byzantine rulers happened to build basilica on the foundations of the house of St. Nicholas. So, it was presumed by various scholars that the birth place of St. Nicholas was Patara in the modern Turkey.

According to the written record, St. Nicholas was born to a rich family in about 300 A.D. It is also said, about the family as the richest in the entire city. All his family had a strong faith and belief. Nicholas appeared to be more faithful than the other family members.

During the school time also when all the students were found only in the play ground, Nicholas would go to the library and read some religious and sacred books. He had wonderful faith towards God from his younger days.

His deep faith and probably to do God's service must have prompted him to study theology. So he went to a monastery for that purpose in "Xanthos" After the completion of his studies in theology, he left his native place Patara and settled in "Myra" to continue his religious activities. In the meantime, his parents died and he became an orphan at that grown up age.

The death of his parents made him unhappy and helpless for some time. After he recovered from that shock, he completely dedicated his life to do service to the poor, unhappy and helpless people. He spent all his money for this noble work, by honouring the dictum (saying) "service to humanity is service to divinity".

The ruins of the ancient city called Myra were found through excavations and preserved in the district head quarters. In that area another important place was "Deme" which also became popular tourist centre. At the same time a church was established in the name of St. Nicholas what added another spot for tourism. Altogether, there are five important places that improved tourism. They are – the ruins of Myra, Deme, Nicholas Church, the unique Rock Tomb, and the Splendid Coast.

In the Phrygian language the original name of the city was called Maura which means place of a 'great mother goddess'. This ancient city was located in Lydia. This Maura later changed into Myra. After sometime the city Myra was promoted to the status of Metropolitan city or Metropolia during the period of Byzantine rule. Then in the second century A.D., it became a major centre of Christianity and achieved great fame. The progress and recognition of Christianity in those days was the constant effort of St. Nicholas.

He even served as the bishop of Myra city. It was believed by the Christians that St. Nicholas had done some miracles also during his service. He was regarded as the protector of sailor merchants, poor, the wretched and above all, the children. It was also believed by the Christians all over the world, that he would bring Christmas gifts to the Children on Christmas Day every year.

Origin of Christmas Day Celebrations – The important point we have to remember in this connection is how this celebration came into existence and how people all over the world are celebrating on 25th Dec. This incident takes us back to the ancient times of holiday celebrations of "The Rise of the Invisible Sun Anara". As a matter of fact, the Mass referred to "Natalis Invach Soil" in Latin which means, celebrating the start of the winter. This had been continued and practiced until the 3rd century A.D.

Those winter celebrations were accepted by the Christians at that time and St. Nicholas was a humanist in those days. Today St. Nicholas celebrations are taking place in his area on Dec. 6th, but not on 25th because he died on Dec. 6th in about 343 A.D.

In 1955 a postage stamp was released in his name by the government of Turkey and honoured him. As long as he lived, he fully engaged himself to God's service and to the humanity to the best of his ability. Since then he was also called "Santa Claus".

In 1981 an international symposium was conducted by the ministry of tourism in his honour. In addition to that a peace park was built in Deme in 1993.

4After some years the merchants of Italy happened to break the tomb of St. Nicholas and took the bones to Italy. At the same time, some thieves came to steal the bones and while doing so, some bones were left in that place. Those left bones were exhibited in "Analyra" museum in his memory.

In the following year the Russian orthodox people bought the land and the church campus. Then they made necessary repairs to the church. It was completely renovated like the Basilica in the shape of an orthodox cross.

The large main sector of St. Nicholas church was in the centre and covered by the Dome. But after some years, because of the ever changing climate conditions, the church was completely covered with the silt of sand. In such conditions some faithful and God fearing people came to know this and took all necessary steps to remove that silt. They felt happy and made important repairs to the church. Even today, it is in good condition and properly maintained by the concerned authorities.

The Turkish people who happened to settle around that church campus respected St. Nicholas and did not make any damage to it. St. Nicholas became popular probably throughout the world for his humanitarian activities. As Santa Claus, he would attend all the churches on Christmas day, and distribute gifts to the children. People believed today that he was known to the people in different names as St. Nicholas, Christmas Father, Santa Claus and Father Nicholas.

THE HISTORY OF ST. NICHOLAS



St. Nicholas Church



The Statue of St. Nicholas



St. Nicholas

HISTORY OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

1. EPHEBUS

The term “Ephemi” came from the word “Ephesis” which means a discarded one. The Ephesians believed that it was the name of a beautiful Amazonian queen, “Ephesia” who founded the city. The Amazonians were very powerful warrior women. Even the origin of their name, how it came was not known to them. According to some historical information, those people originally came from the north east of “Anatolia” and their capital was “Fatora and Order.”

As per the mythological information Amazons were the children of the god of war “Ares” The amazon women were more powerful than men. They used bows and arrows in times of need. For the purpose of sex and children they used men from other cities for mating and after that they would kill them. It is said, they even cut the private parts and offered them to their mother goddess. The most hateful thing for women was nothing but men and so to say men were treated like slaves by women.

“**Zeus**” the main reason for killing men was because the king “Zeus” was becoming more powerful day by day, and thereby men also became more powerful. The women did not like that, as they wanted to feel superiority over men always. The women even burnt one of their breasts so as to handle bow and arrow freely and forcefully.

According to another mythological story the founder of “Ephesus” was Androkilos, the son of “Kodros”, king of Athens. Whatever it might be the original people that lived in Ephesus were overshadowed by the important discoveries made during modern archeological excavations around Ephesus in 1869. The most ancient settlement brought to lime light was the commercial “Agora”.

Near that place the remains of architecture were found dating in 8th and 7th century B.C. They were found 8 meters below the surface of the earth. Then it was officially considered to be the correct location of “Archaic Ephesus”.

It is also said Androkilos came to that place after Trojan war and settled in Antolia. He then occupied Ephesus and the surrounding places. He expelled the native people and population decreased in course of time.

In spite of many wars and invasions for many years by different dynasties, there was a radical change among people in Ephesus, especially their social life. Just at that time came the Romans and occupied the place. It was Octavious Ceasar who changed his name into Augustus Ceasar. Then the first step he took was to make Ephesus as the capital city to Asia province. Prior to that Pergamas was the capital to Roman empire.

With that change, Ephesus became one of the five big cities in Roman empire. It also became the permanent residence of the governor. It was again treated as the second biggest city after Alexandria. During their rule, the style of social life of the people of Ephesus was completely changed. The Romans introduced their heathen gods, and some Egyptian gods to the people. That was the religious policy in their rule.

In Ephesus there were already Monotheistic Jews who were trying to spread their own religion called Christianity. At that time Jesus was in Jerusalem. He was teaching and preaching to people and mobilizing them in different places. After the crucifixion of Christ, the disciples went to different places to preach the good news. That was the most significant period in the history of Ephesus.

It was St. John, who came first to Ephesus along with holy virgin Mary. John was able to gather good number of people by his preaching in “Aegean” region and changed many people into Christianity. He even became a leader of the churches. Virgin Mary spent rest of her life there and died there only. We can see her tomb even today.

John reached Ephesus in 53 A.D. and continued his preaching. The Christian population increased gradually. Then there was a man who disturbed the spreading of Christianity. His name was “Demetrius”. He used to do silver business. He would make statues of “Artimus” with silver and sold them. As heathens were becoming Christians because of John, he wanted to take revenge for his business. So Demetrious could influence many people, especially from Ephesus within a short time. But the authorities controlled the situation somehow.

Apostle Paul was also there at that time. He studied the situation. He left that place and went to Macedonia. That period was really called “The golden age of Ephesus in architecture”. But an earth quake came in 17 B.C. and disturbed the city. After this calamity, new structures came including the temples, and the city looked more beautiful than before with new constructions.

Though temporary disturbance took place in the city due to the increase of Christian population, after suffering for some time they gained the acceptance of the empire during 4th

century A.D. Again some discouragement took place among Christians themselves because of “Nestorius of Antioch”. He claimed that virgin Mary was not the mother of God but Christ (that is of human being). He could convince many people with that statement and under such circumstances he became a patriarch of Constantinople (Isthambul).

Then he tried for the acceptance of his thesis through out the church. But there was some opposition for him also. The Council meeting took place in Ephesus during 431 A.D. in the church of virgin Mary. The Council members were about 200 bishops. They accepted only the thesis of “Cyril” who was the bishop of Alexandria. In that meeting, they decided that mother Mary was the mother of God. With that result, “Nestorius” was exiled to Egypt as a punishment.

Even after that incident, the argument went on among the bishops for about 18 years. Then another Council meeting took place wherein the thesis of some one was accepted by force and that was called a historical even. It was also mentioned in the minutes of Council that both the churches, the church of St. John and the church of St Mary as permanent meeting places.

Due to political disturbance the Roman empire was divided into parts and Ephesus happened to fall in the eastern side. This part was finally occupied by Arabs who made the people of that city to scatter away. And after Arabs came the Turkish empire which made Ephesus prosper well in their rule. The city was decorated with Turkish “Edifies” such as Mosques, greater or smaller and with different architecture.

The first Christians of Ephesus had suffered more brutal persecution. Therefore, they bore a grudge against the protectors of the city and its temples. The city became always an important place for religious activities especially for Christianity.

CHURCH OF ST. MARY

The remains of this ancient city of Ephesus were found in the valley between the mount “Beerbiel and Panearayor” and it was in the south of “Silquik” valley where the river Minor flows into the Aegean sea. The name of that city in their language was “Aphayee” which means the city of streams. And this name later changed into Ephesus.

It was a very a big city in those days in Turkey. It was in existence in the 1st century. The city was also called Maya Bazzar or Magic Bazzar. Its a big business centre and also became one of the seven wonders of the world with the temple of “Diana”. The height of the temple was about 560 feet, and it was built on 110 pillars. This goddess was famous for fertility.

According to some historical evidences the founder of the place was “Appolo”, the disciple of “St. John the Baptist”. Apostle Paul came to this place and instructed the church people. He worked there for 3 ½ years only. The main person here was Jesus Christ with

seven stars, searched and found a dangerous defect in spite of all positive things. That is love among people. First, this was to tell the truth and develop love. But now it was turned into cold conditions. In the beginning it was rooted in love, then grew in knowledge about the love of Christ and the unity and in Spirit.

Jesus said in all his preaching that love was greater than anything in the world. Love sets the flames of love, which is not artificial. The real love is stronger than even death. The church too must love Jesus. Due to self-righteousness and lack of oneness, love is diminished among people. If they are found in the same position, they must turn to God and confess for salvation. We must have a good heart to love God. We must plead for those who are perishing in darkness. And finally love and service must go hand in hand.

The House of St. Mary – Christians were always wondered about the residence of St. Mary. Ancient travelers say she lived, died and buried in Ephesus. The “Ecumenical Church” Council of 431 A.D. determined that she came to that place with John The Evangelist. Both lived and died in Ephesus only.

A German nun by name Catherina Emmerich happened to get vision and confirmed by the tradition. The site was also found exactly. Regarding her life, the nun never left her cell. In her old age, she was considered to be holy. It is really uncommon to call anyone ‘Holy’ when one was alive.

In 1818 the nun again received the visions of virgin Mary which were sketched by C.Brantino. Catherina Emmerich gave a statement about the house of virgin Mary. When Christians faced increasing persecution, Virgin Mary along with John fled from Jerusalem and came to Ephesus.

In 1891 Eugen Paulen the director of a college and a superior to Lazarests decided to investigate the vision of the nun. He appointed a committee also with a priest and some monks. After a good number of investigations, they found the house on “Bielbeldoge”. As Soon as the news about the house was announced, they spread all over the world and the archbishop “Temori” allowed to commemorate the services to be held in the house of Mary.

Pope John XXIII declared the house site of St. Mary for pilgrimage in 1961 and hundreds of Christians visited the place including Muslims who believed on virgin Mary as the mother of prophet Jesus Christ. During the period of Byzantine rule, the house was converted into “Crucifomi Basilica” from which the relics were found.

The structure was restored according to the plan of legend. A red line was marked on the walls and the deignal shape was given. The statue was installed later. There was a compound wall with three gates. In the garden there are a good number of vessels with water and that water has the power of healing.

ABOUT ST. JOHN

John was one of the disciples of Jesus Christ. When he came to Jesus for the first time, he looked at his face and prophesied that John would see visions in his old age and write the last book of the Bible called “The Revelation”. John means “the grace of God”. The Roman government was in power in his time. On some reason, once he was caught and put in the prison in “Patmos”. Prior to that incident, he was put in the pan of hot oil but God saved him and he was freed. After the crucifixion all the disciples were scattered into different places because of the persecution by the Romans and John with virgin Mary went to Ephesus.

At the time of crucifixion and death, Christ asked John to take care of his mother. So, both fled to Ephesus because of the constant persecution in Jerusalem. In that city John became a leader to the church also. In his old age as Christ prophesied, he wrote the book of Revelation. If we read it carefully, we can find that John used number seven about 36 times. So, some scholars proposed another title for the book called “The Book of Number Seven”. He lived for about 100 years and died in Ephesus only. In his book of Revelation, he gave a wonderful description of Seven churches, where in he saw Christ was moving among the seven churches called Seven Golden Columns, which represent seven churches.

The wonderful and heartfelt messages given to the seven churches would certainly change our way of life, clean our souls and lead us to eternal life. Let us all hope and pray to our God Almighty for our everlasting life in His Kingdom. St. John really gave us a wonderful picture of the seven churches as Christ guided him to write that book.

CHURCH OF ST. JOHN

According to the tradition there, John became the leader to the church after Paul died. When he was alive he had a strong desire that when he died he wished to be buried in Ephesus only on a hill called “Aryasulluk”. Then after hundred years of his death a small Basilica was built on his tomb.

In the sixth century A.D. it was the hay day of Byzantine empire. The emperor Justinian wished to honour St. John the evangelist in a proper way. So he built an imposing Basilica in the area of the old one (Basilica means ‘Church’).

But the Byzantine empire became weak day by day and the neighbouring powerful people began to occupy the land. In addition to that the importance of Ephesus also decreased. Then came the powerful Arabs during the seventh century. They annexed even the church of St. John and converted that into a mosque.

Many people gave their testimonies that the dust came from St. John’s tomb had healing power and they were healed of their diseases. This happy news was spread and pilgrimages continued to his tomb.

After a long time, Greeks became the rulers of Ephesus almost at the end of 1st world war. During their reign, a team of archeologists, started excavations and that continued for some years on the hill of “Ayasulik”.

They located the correct church campus of St. John. Then a wall with three gates was constructed for the protection of the church. In front of the church, on some of the columns, the visitors can see the monogram of emperor “Justinean” and his wife “Theodora”. Their sign indicated. They financed the construction of St. John’s Church. The church had a cruciform plan with six columns and four columns at its end carried a dome on them.

The Grotto of Seven sleepers

In the year 250 A.D. seven young Christian people were forced to leave Ephesus because they refused to pay offerings to the “Imperial Temple”. Then they anticipated some danger from the authorities and the punishment might be persecution. So, the seven members fled from the city Ephesus and hid themselves in a cave. There they slept a long sleep as nobody bothered about them.

Then, after two hundred years, they suddenly woke up from their deep sleep and found themselves in good condition. They came back to the city and lived with others as usual. This strange incident boosted up the image of Christianity in that city. These seven members requested their kith and kin that they should be buried in the same cave only after they died. Hearing all this story, many young men took a decision as they too must be buried in the same cave after they died. So when the excavation took place in 1927-28 to their great surprise, they found hundreds of tombs in that cave.

John wrote the book of Revelation or “The book of Number Seven” when he was in Ephesus (Turkey). In that book he described the impressions of Jesus Christ about the seven churches and indifferent behaviour of the congregation. In the Bible, it is said, the seven churches were in Asia. Asia is a big continent with many countries and Turkey is one of those.

Originally, it was Constantinople of Byzantine empire and later it was changed into Istambul during Ottomon empire and again that is changed into modern Turkey. St. John concluded that the spirits of the seven churches were before God’s them.

2. SMYRNA

Smyrna was called the suffering church. It means “myrrh” which was given to Jesus mixing it with wine. The chief priest used this for the worship of “Tabernacle”. Myrrh represents suffering and sadness. It is believed that the church was in existence in between 120 and 130 A.D.. The city is situated when trade became prominent with many people.

When the city was in prosperous position, it was destroyed by the Indians and remained desolate for about 400 years.

The Greek emperor Alexander the Great tried to rebuild the city but he died without fulfilling that. In that city there were science and medical colleges. Then came the Roman rule. They built some temples for their use and worship. At the same time a Christian church was also built and one third of the total population became Christians. Jesus revealed to John about Smyrna that he preserved and had patience and not become weary.

Jesus told John as in Revelation 1:18, *"I am He who lives and was dead and behold I am alive forever more. I have the keys of Hades and of death"*

Jesus appreciated the members of that church and said I know you suffer. All their wealth was stolen. Yet they stood firm in their suffering. Then Jesus assured them not be afraid of anything or trials.

Satan disturbed the church by destroying the activities of Jesus and the outsiders began to persecute them. But Jesus promised the members of the church.

Do not fear anyone of their things which you are about to suffer. Indeed the devil is about to throw you into the prison and you may be tested and you will have tribulation for 10days. But be faithful until death. I will give you the crown of life. So Jesus promised to give us life.

The city of Smyrna was famous for its history of great martyrs like "Polycorp". He was the first bishop who worshiped Jesus faithfully. He refused to worship Ceasar and even ready to die for Jesus. The Romans even threatened to kill him if he did not stop to love Jesus.

Then the bishop gave a suitable reply, "now I am 86 years old. My Jesus did not leave my hand. How can I deny Him now?" The bishop did not care their words and remained faithful to Jesus.

In 1600 A.D. many earthquakes came and destroyed the city. In 1724 many places were burnt and perished. But still the church built in memory of Polycorp remained undisturbed and firm. Even today many pilgrims visit that place and worship Jesus. Many sick people with long suffering of more than 10 years come to that place and take dip in hot springs for healing themselves. So that place became famous for suffering Christians. This example and faith of bishop Polycorp would certainly encourage us to be stronger in our faith and wait for eternal glory.

3. PERGAMUM

The present name of Pergamum roots back to the ancient Pergamum named after Pergamos the son of mythological hero namely "Neoptoumos and Andramakkhe" But

according to the mythology the foundation of ancient Pergamum and the first settlement had been formed by “Telephos” who was the heroic son of “Herecles and Ange”.

After a long time “Telephos” grew up to be a young man and came to Greece. According to mythology, this Telephos took part in Trojan wars and proved himself the embodiment of all heroic qualities. After the war was over, he returned to his motherland with his army and became the king of Mysia and established his kingdom with the first settlement of Pergamum. So the Attalos the founders of Pergamum kingdom believed that they were the roots of Telephos, Heracles and finally “Zeus” the god of gods.

Recently, the history of Pergamum was established to be 5th century B.C. but the continuation of the research work in that area, showed that the archeological excavation with a strong evidence provided that the history of this Pergamum city began in about 8th century B.C. So at that time, there was no clear cut idea of the existence of Pergamum. But it was called “the Archoic Age”.

The research scholars, further indicated that the first and most concrete findings of Pergamum’s history belonged to the period after Hellenistic Age. So Pergamum was one of the rare cities that preserved, the characteristic structural inheritance of Hellenistic period until today. If we want to visit Pergamum in order to understand its history thoroughly we have to plan our trip in three different stages. The important places we have to see after Aeropolis are “Crimson Basilikah” and the “Museums which are located in the present living area.

The next important place is “Asklupieion” which was one of the main health centres of ancient period. And the third place is the Tumules of Maltipe” which is said to be one of the strongest area around ‘Anatolia”. After seeing all these important touring centres. One can see the importances of “Roman Era” in the protected area around Acropolis. Apart from all these things, some of the residential quarters in that place show the authentic qualities of the typical characteristics of Greeks, Turkish, and Jewish architectures. Finally we can also find the most sacred buildings of these three religions temples or places foundations and they are one after other in that place.

The acropolis of Pergamum is no doubt one of the most important and highest acropolis of ancient period. The kings like Alexander the Great who ruled the populations founded on that hill area as Pergamum’s “Eagles Nest”. The first excavations on this acropolis of Pergamum, were done during 1878 and 1886 with a team guided by a German engineer and a researcher “Carl Uman” and thereby Alexander Conye on behalf of Berlin Musium.

The information people gathered had enlightened and they were also inspired by the historical importance of acropolis of Pergamum. Since then, the excavations continued until today, by different organizations. Their regular effort unearthed important buildings such as

“Zeus”, “Aliah”, “Athena” Temple, gora, adalos dynasties places and Traianuem, had been brought to limelight. But due to the accurances of first and second world wars, there was a disturbance in the excavations.

Again the regular activities started in the year 1972 and they were supported by the German and Turkish governments and the efforts had been continued by the modern technologists. The excavated places of Pergamum found during the last century had been exhibited today in Berlin Pergamum.

As mentioned already the history of Pergamum will go back to the Hellenistic period. In the beginning of 4th century B.C. a small settlement was established and later the acropolis of Pergamum was conquered by Persians and they gave it to the reign of Demaratos the Spartan king. That is to say the age of Pergamum kingdom or Attolos kingdom was ended and Pergamum became one of the Asian province of Roman empire.

The Romans maintained their period by establishing wonderful buildings in Pergamum and made the city looked more beautiful than previous appearances. It is also very strange to hear that the Romans did not limit the independence of the people or collected any taxes from them and above all they assigned a local man as the governor of the city. By this we can understand that Pergamum was one of the popular cities of little Asia of the Roman empire as well.

The artistic and cultural activities were also not at all interpreted by them. Pergamum library became famous for its contents. It is said the concerned authorities of the library happened to send about 2,00,000 manuscripts to the library of Alexandria in Egypt as a gift from Marcus Antonius to Cleopatra.

As far as art and culture were concerned ancient Pergamum proved one of the most celebrated cities of western Anatolia. When we compare this to the contemporary cities, great artists and scientists like Mallos of Crates preferred to settle in Pergamum only than any other city. The city had a very good reputation for its parchment and also of the emperors in addition to trade between east and west.

The people of Pergamum made their living through agriculture and cattle feeding. They used to keep sheep, goats, pigs and horses and olive oil production was also the source of their income.

When Metriolaths king of Pontius kingdom captured the lands of Anatolia in 88 B.C., Ephesus and Pergamum participated in the war. In the meantime, many Romans living in Pergamum were punished with death penalty. When the Roman general “Sulla” retook the city of Pergamum the loyalty of the people increased a lot.

There are many places yet to be excavated around the city, anxiously awaiting the future

explores. Even today if we look towards the west, from Acropolis, we can see at a distance, ruins of two theatres built by Romans which were in good condition during that time, one theatre accommodated about 50,000 people and the other 30,000 people at a time. They remained even today as insignia of Roman rule.

Byzantine Period

When one of the seven churches of the last judgement in near east Asia was discovered in Pergamum, the city became first important place for Christians in west Anatolia. It is said in the 4th century A.D. a small group of Christians was formed in Pergamum. According to the letters of St. John the prophet, the first bishop of Christian society, in Pergamum was Gaius. Then Gaius was succeeded by Antipos who was a dentist and he was burnt and killed later by the pagans. Then the Roman emperor “Desius” punished the Pergamum Christians by death and also the Roman general wished to crucify the bishop Pirmius in Ephesus in 250 A.D. In Byzantine rule the city was affiliated to the Archbishop of Ephesus. During this period the city walls of Acropolis were altared and restored with bricks, rocks, dust and lime mortar. In addition to all that some new churches were built in Acropolis, though we can see only ruins of them today.

But the most important church built during the Byzantine rule was “Crimson Courtyard” of Serapis Temple sacrificed to St. John. As a result of Arabic invasions in 7th and 8th Centuries Pergamum was burnt and ruined. Then it was conquered by Karesiogullean in 1306 and became on of the centres of this principality. Finally in 1320 A.D. Ottomons took the city.

The Asklepieon of Pergamum

While going from Pergamum before reaching the “Izmir Canakkale” road and turn left you will see the road sign Ask lupieon. Then a few kilometers further, you will find yourself in front of the entrance of Ask lupieion of Pergamum. It was renowned as one of the three main centers of ancient period. The other centers were “Epidauros” and “Kos”. Most of the ruins we find today in Ask lupieion of Pergamum belonged to the first half of the second century B.C.

In spite of all that, the continued researches revealed the Ask lupieion of Pergamum had been founded in 9th century B.C. Pausanias the historian wrote that the temple at Asklepias was built in 4th century B.C. Pausanias also wrote according to mythological stories and the cult of Asklepios was brought to that place by a hero who was wounded on his foot while hunting in the mount of Madra in north of Pergamum.

As found in the mythological story “Archeos” who was wounded on foot went to the temple of Ask lupieion in Epidauros Morler to regain his health. In course of time the Romans lost their importance and Christianity began to gain its popularity. The main reason why the

buildings on the holy area of Asklepiuon were preserved particularly because the hallow area was filled with the soil brought by rain water for centuries. The priests incharge of Asklepiou of Pergamum were originated from the noble families of Pergamum.

The job of the priesthood was by inheritance that is if the father were to be a priest, after him his son would automatically become the priest. There was a chief priest also. Among the priests there were some physicians that treated the incoming patients by inspiration and the drugs they used were made from different plants. The patients used healing water and then mud baths too. They took part in sports also. The drugs used by the physicians to the patients and the methods like mud bath to the patients, all these things were inscribed and found in the excavations.

The Columned Street or Holy Road

This holy street lie just in front of this entrance, and it is called “via Tecta”. It was formed with part of 820 meters long holy road. It connected the Asklepion to the lower city during the Roman period. The part that belonged to column street is still seen today. It was about 140 meters long and it was exposed during Pergamum’s excavations. The pieces of some columns which have been replaced by new ones and the ground stones made up of stone blocks gave the true pictures of that ancient period. We can see in the southern part of the street the remains of a cylindrical grave memorial supposed to have been built in the era of emperor Augustus (31 B.C. to 14 A.D.).

Beautiful examples of Hellenistic and Roman statues and sculptures were found when the streets excavated. Some of these art works are exhibited in the Pergamum museum.

Holy Tunnel

As it was constructed as a heath centre the Asklepion contained various wonderful buildings. The city authorities built many attractive structures and one among them was 80 meter long Holy tunnel. It was connected to the temple of Telesphoros and perfectly preserved over the centuries. But it is buried under the soil and it is a great surprise to a visitor. The tunnel ceiling was decorated with holes in full length in order to allow the sunlight and air. It was constructed with vaults intended to protect from cold. The patients would get out of healing water and mud baths and then going to the treatment centre again. The tunnel also healed the patients that entered into it in hot condition.

According to the descriptions that were found in the excavations it was a kind of treatment given to the patients using inspiration and the sound of water that comes from the Holy Spring.

Serapis Temple

We can locate Pergamum at the end of acropolis excavation area and at the entrance of centrum. We can find partially serviced remains, with its red bricks. It remains to the inside of the temple constructed in the name of the god of Serapis. This ruined building today identified as that “red courtyard” or the red Basilica. It was constructed with red bricks in an area of 200 X 100 meters. It had also wide courtyard in front of that Basilica. In ancient terms the town part was surrounded by columns and the other parts covered by marble pieces. And also in the olden days, the pavement of the temple was completely covered with marble.

This temple had changed its name during the era of Byzantine reign into a church. This structure needed some alterations, especially in the axis part. If we look at the remains of the Church, today we can understand the architectural structure reminds us that it is like the Basilica type church.

There are two symmetrical buildings on the eastern side of the temple courtyard which are the reminiscent of a church. During the Roman rule in Pergamum the temples and the chapel shaped cult rooms were constructed inside. The entrance of the temple is known as crimson courtyard in Pergamum. It faces towards the west that symbolizes death. People say it was vowed to Serapis the god of hell or underground. It is also identified with the Greeks Hades. This temple was amended during Byzantine rule and functioned as a church named to St. Johnes that is St. Jean (John).

4. THYATIRA

This was called “immoral church”. Thyatira means ‘traditional activities’ (Rev 2:18-29). This church was bigger than all the other six churches. This place was situated 45 miles away from Ephesus and Smyrna. A message was given to this church where in a few truths were mentioned.

1. God is advising not to entertain baseless and diluted faith.
2. He said one must be holy and clean in his heart.

3. Basing on some Bible truths and vedas some writings were found in the Basilica during 2nd and 6th centuries when it was excavated. It was an old construction actually. And all the synagogues that were built in that area were facing Jerusalem only.

Thyatira became very famous for trade and business in those days. The people became experts in tanning and colouring cloths. They used to sell powders also. A women by name Lydia became very famous for setting purple colour from that city. As the city became popular for all kinds of business, people from different places came and settled there. At present the city is call with a different name “Akissar”.

God's eyes are always on the faithful and righteous people. Regarding the name given to that church is really wonderful. God said, "I am searching the mind and heart. I will reward you according to your work. I will give power over the nations, who can love and follow me."

All of us must have faith and hope to seek the life of eternity, waiting patiently with pure and holy life.

5. SARDIS

The church of Sardis was called "the dead church". The word Sardis came from 'Stalin' which means information. It was situated in the kingdom of Lydia and 50 miles east of Smyrna. It is famous for great trees, cloths, industries and jewelry business. There are gold mines also in that place. In olden days it was considered to be a rich area. It was conquered by Alexandar the Great and then king Koresh.

In 1710 that place was destroyed by an earthquake. But the Romans rebuilt it. During that period many people were converted into Christianity. In 1909, Professor H.C. Butler of Princeton University happened to dig the tunnels with the help of some other people. After excavation many interesting things were found like coins, jewelry, pots, brass lamps, medieval jars, written papers etc., In their digging 270 X 60 ft. synagogue was also found.

But the people of that place became impure due to their sinful activities like adultery. The spirituality was completely dead. The angel of the church of Sardis explained to them with seven spirits of God and the seven stars, *"I know your works and you have a name that you are alive but you are dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die for I have not found your woks perfect before God."*

There was appreciation for this church as a few members were holy who did not defile the garments. They shall walk with Jesus in white for they are worthy. God will keep their names in the book of life. Therefore we must live our short life in this world with faith and action so that we reap the reward in the next world. Jesus will certainly confess the names that are holy before God and the angels.

We must live as practical Christians. In this context Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 5:14, *"Awake you who sleep arise from the dead and Christ will give you light"*. According to him one must recall perfection in continuous prayers and in faith and repentance. We must be active spiritually and wait for a reward God wants to give us.

6. PHILADELPHIA

This was called a "Faithful church". Philadelphia means brotherly love. This city was situated 28 miles away from Sardis and there was also a nearby village called Lydia. In that

place there were many wine gardens, from which they get pure wine. It was a hilly area. The city was built by the king "Antalous" which was called second Philadelphia. At present that place is called Allasker.

This place became popular for Christianity as the doors were opened for preaching the gospel. So the Angel of the church of Philadelphia wrote, "He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens no one shuts and shuts no one can open it."

"I will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world and advised to hold fast what you have and no other man take your crown. The overcomers will have rewards and they will be made pillars in the temple of God. Their names and the name of that city will be also mentioned, as new name shall be written." So the message reminds all of us to be careful about false doctrine. We must have patience and faith and pray more.

God's promises are clear, because He will keep us as pillars and if Christ wants to keep us in high places nothing can stop Him from that as He got the keys for different blessings. We have to claim our promises and try hard to achieve our inheritance that God kept for us. Five good promises were given to the past church and they are still alive for us to receive. So as to receive all the above said promises we must try to live a pure and holy life.

7. LAODICEA

This was called "Lukewarm" church. This was established by Antiochus II through his wife "Layodia" in 250 B.C. The meaning of the church of Laodicea was righteousness and justice of people. It was a rich city with fertile lands and beautiful gardens. The cattle were fed and the fur of sheep was used to prepare beautiful carpets or shawls etc.,

The city was famous for Greek culture, art, industries, medical centers, and other activities. It is 22 miles away to Colossi. And in their regular excavations some remains of prayer cells were found. In 62 A.D., a big earth quake occurred and there was a total destruction of the city.

This church was not with sinners like the sinners of other churches and added to that it was not following false doctrines. Apostle Paul never visited this church, but wrote a letter to them. He said in Colossians 4:16, "...see that it is read in the church of Laodicea and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea".

"I know your work that you are neither cold nor hot. I would with you were cold or hot." According to Paul, faith must be exposed through deeds. We must understand that our deeds have no connection with the fear of God or love for God. He was speaking

to the church for they need to be careful about their behaviour and respect. If a person is hot he can ignite another one and it pleases God. If he is lukewarm God will hate such people because they will be carefree and have no hunger or thirst for spiritual matters. These lukewarm people will oppose the Lord. They will lose to power of God and the result is spiritual decay. The lukewarmness in the heart of people will cause deceitfulness and spiritual decay. Such people appear to be normal inside but there is “sin” in their hearts.

The church members who are lukewarm can see but they are blind to the spiritual vision. They are naked in the sight of God and He gave warning to such people, *“I counsel you to buy gold from me that is refined in the fire that you may be rich that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed...”*

The word of God is like sweet honey as Jeremiah ate the book and felt it was sweet. We must also use the word of God and meditate both day and night, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him and he with me.”*

With all that God’s mercy will be with us and forgive us so that we can open our door of heart to allow Jesus to stay forever and ever, Amen.

THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS



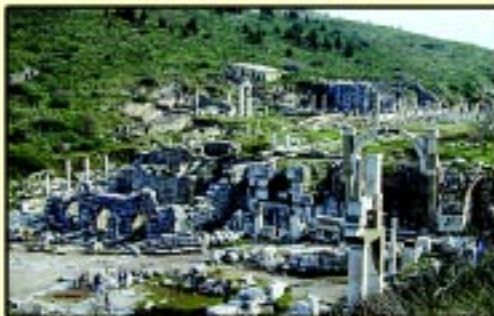
Civic Agora



The Temple of Artemis



St. John's Church



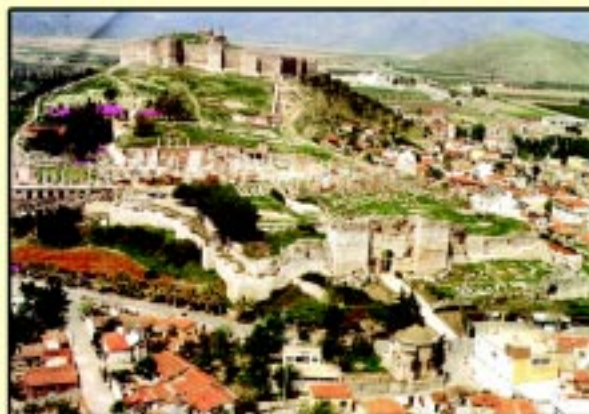
The Temple of Domitian



Commercial Agora



Commercial Agora



St. John's Church & the Castle

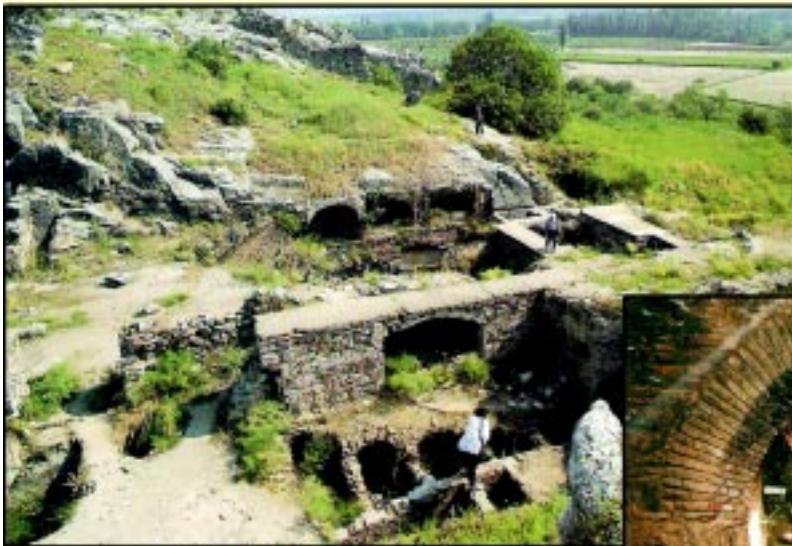
THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS



Statue of the Blessed Virgin



The Church of St. John



Grotto of the Seven Sleepers



House of Virgin Mary

THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA



East side of Smyrna



The Temple of Athena



Acropolis Sistrum



Agora Arches



Agora



Agora

THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM



North side of the Asklepieum
and the Stadium



North side of the Asklepieum



The holy place of Demitor



The Acropolis remains



The town looking westward of
the Acropolis



Way to the Asklepieum

THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM



A church decoraton in Byzantine age



The red bricks of the
St. Ioannes Church



The Crimson Basilica

THE CHURCH AT TYATIRA



St. John's Church



Excavations in the East



Excavations



Roads & building remains

THE CHURCH AT SARDIS



Excavations in the Acropolis



Temple of the goddess Artemis



Pillars at the edge of
the mountain



Temple of the goddess Artemis

THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA



St. Johns Church remains



City view from the Acropolis



South view from Acropolis



The river of Herme near
Philadelphia

THE CHURCH AT LAODICIA



The street near Nephime



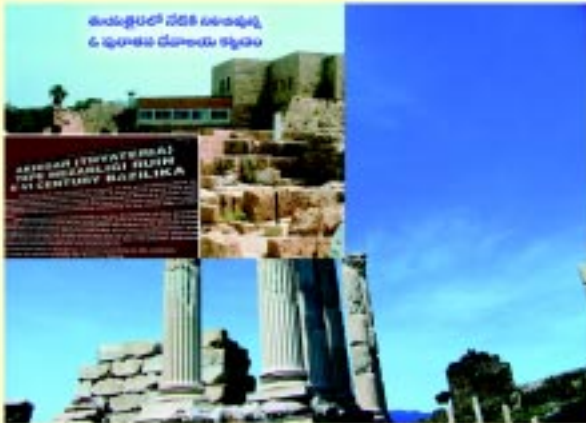
The Stadium on the east side



Bathrooms and the Zymnaseum



Bridge on the river Lycia



An old ruin in Thyatira



An old construction in Pergamum



Polikarp, a famous martyr in Smirna



Jesus with seven lamps



A street in Sardis



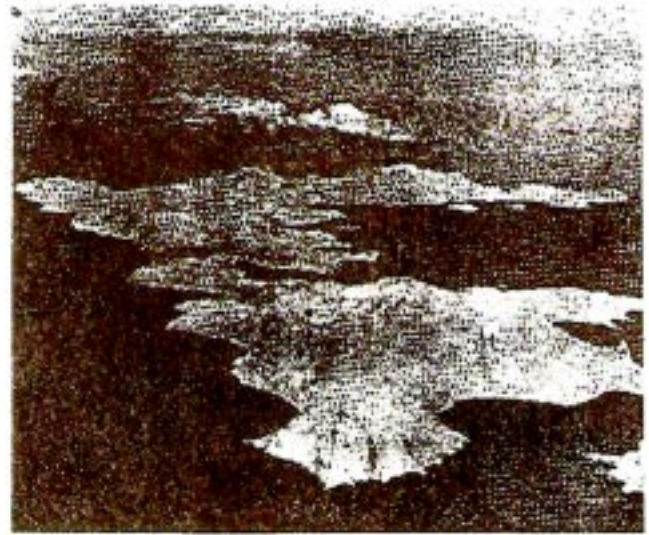
The tomb of St. John

పత్మాన్ ద్వీపాంతరం

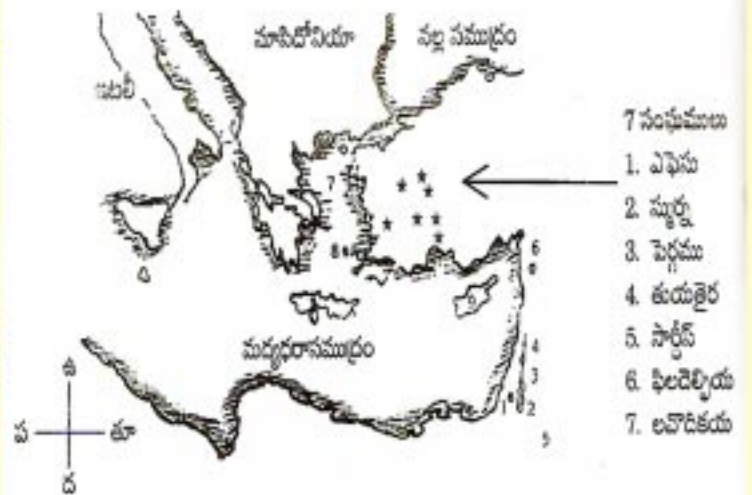
Patmos

ఆకాశమునుండి కనిపించుచున్న దృశ్యం

Air view of the Isle of Patmos



A map of the island Patmos



1. యెరుషలేము
2. పృథ సముద్రము
3. యోర్దాను నది
4. గలెరీయ పర్వ ప్రాంతాలు
5. అరబీ
6. సిరియా, అంకోళ్ళ
7. ఫీజియన్ సముద్రం.

WHAT IS GOSPEL?

The book “What is Jesus Meant?” was at the outset drawing our attention indiscriminately from all four gospels to find out true Jesus. It was objected by some people that differing Gospels are formed from different traditions or different layers of translations. Among such books some are more authentic than others and some are truer or closer to historical reality. The church has every authority to consider such gospels how far they are genuine or true and authentic.

The gospel are no way concerned to history at all. They are not drawn from the first hand testimonies or documents. They were composed in about four to seven decades after the persecution of Jesus Christ. They were culminated from an oral preachings and other process. They used the methods that symbolized the theology of writings and their authors to be “par excellence”. It is like second history of Jewish recorded in their sacred writings. Scraphai is a Greek word which means scripture.

So as to understand this clearly and correctly, we must have to go back to the earliest record of the New Testament and Paul’s seven genuine letters. Some writers were of the opinion that without Paul’s letters, there is no existence of the New Testament. One must have to record the “proto-creed” of the followers of Jesus. Paul said “as my first concern, I pass on to you what had been passed on to me that the Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the “Sacred writings”. Then He was buried and rose on the third day according to the sacred writings”.

The author is of the opinion that this basic announcement seems to be that of orthodoxy. This is the “nucleus” from which the gospels were built up. Paul and his predecessors in the thirties of the first century preached from the Jewish sacred writings that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. The gentiles who believed in Jesus were by birth the seed of Abraham. According to the prophesy, he would be the father of many nations and that was the fulfillment.

The description of preaching in the first gathering was followed by liturgical sequel

“Euchdriect”. First Jesus moves as if pass on beyond the disciples, which is a sign of the divine un-approachability in the sacred writings. When Moses asked the Lord to show His glory, He replied, *“My face you cannot see, for no mortal man may see me and live.”*

*“Here is a place believe me
take your stand on the rock and my glory passes by,
I will put you on a cravel of the rock and cover you with my hand,
and you shall see my back but my face shall not be seen”.*

This passage would take us to the place to the era of Moses of promise. But in the era of Jesus the promise was fulfilled and the Messiah revealed himself. The disciples urged the stranger (Jesus) to linger with them. The same night was coming on the time for celebrating the Passover (and the Lord’s meal). As He stayed with them that night He broke the bread and offered it to the disciples. Immediately their eyes were opened and recognized Him as Jesus. After they ate the bread of union, they rejoiced in merriment. Then they questioned among themselves whether their hearts were in fire as the stranger spoke to them along the road and opened the sacred writings.

In the gathering of these days the gospels were “gestated.” Then the oral memories of what Jesus had said and done were turned over and over two principles of selectivity looking forward towards the Jewish history. The concern was for both where Jesus was and where he comes from (It is the whole Jewish development of the promise).

We must look backward from the passion of gospel. Mark reached back from the Baptism of Jesus. When the last prophet John the Baptist, played the role of a precursor to the Messiah, the link with the time of sacred writings is carried back even further in tow gospels that described the birth of Jesus. Matthew had the child re-enact the “Exodus” from Egypt and Luke had the child who would fulfill the priestly hopes in the temple.

Then John’s gospel travels even further back beyond the birth of Jesus where the “Word” is seen as God’s wisdom according to sacred writings. The gospels are not biographical history books or treatises. They would be determined by the people who read them; by their places in their lives, then their memories and prayers of the early believers. Their biographical memories were present from the onset, but we were put in order only as they confirmed most important fact about Jesus; his resurrection period and also he was the Messiah.

This had been experienced by some of the critics as a surprise at the “Catcombs” and “Mouesileums” art at the early centuries which was first almost completely taken from the Jewish sacred writings, but not from the New Testament.

What is Gospel ?

Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jonah, these men were the first and the Daniel the patriarch, Joseph and Job were more popular figures in the Bible for their special activities. Initially, the Old Testament persons flooded Christian art and documented certain period. The believers of the early centuries did not picture the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But some of them and their friends happened to see the risen Christ (more than five hundred of them saw Him according to the early records).

"But what is that fact mean?

If fulfilled the sign of Jonah

risen after three days from the belly of a whale"

Any way, the importance of the meaning of baptism was carried by Moses striking water from a rock. The sacred writings were not taken as "proof" text to establish biological facts about Jesus. The believers need to know that and believe the facts about Jesus' life history.

Therefore, the importance of the fact was established by the formation of the Canon of authoritative gospels. In fact they are commentators on the continuation of the sacred writings. The canon was not up to distinguish the trustworthy books from "Gnostic" writings which were completely different from Jewish sacred writings.

The main purpose of this canon was not to replace the Jewish sacred writings, but to defend them from those which were attacking them. And the "Gnostics" were as a matter of fact the commentators on the continuation of sacred writings. So this canon was formed only to distinguish good from the bad.

"Canon" means 'the authentic principle'

The Gnostic gospels were also considered to be part of the 'Kerygem' which described real death of Jesus and the need for Him to be resurrected. The four gospels were called "Canonical" which were completely defended against those which would have dismissed them from existence.

WHAT IS A GOSPEL?

It is a meditation on the meaning of Jesus in the light of the sacred history as revealed in the sacred writings. Those four gospels reflect not only the past events of the life of Jesus but also his experiences about community in which he lived. Jesus would be saying "If he were in the community and if it was suffering or persecuted, or if He was in trouble or doubt or of any one in the community, he took the strength in the fact that was the suffering of Jesus. He was known for any kind of suffering as we know about Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and Golgotha. We know also divisions among his followers who had fallen betrayal.

As far as we could understand, each gospel is a sophisticated symbolic contribution of communal experiences and joint questioning of Jewish scripture. The gospels were also about communal self criticism and exhortation of themselves. If we compare the four gospels with one another St Mark's appears to be more simple than the other three gospels. But his gospel was a complete document of Christian suffering and hope. It was a voice of persecuted church staying true to the "Divine Leader".

Its members were revealing out towards Jesus and towards Jews in one another. We have to enter into a gathering which was very different from modern church. It may be necessary at first to stress how strange the gospels appear to be to the modern reader.

* * *

INTRODUCTION TO MARK'S GOSPEL

As a disciple of Jesus, Mark died in Alexandria, Egypt. He was dragged by the horses in the streets till he died a cruel death by the Romans.

Regarding his gospel, among the four gospels, the gospel of Mark is the smallest one with 16 chapters and 678 verses. His gospel was neglected by readers for many years due to defects in the gospel. Added to that he used Greek here and there which are more clumsier and more uglier than that is used by the other evangelists. Therefore, the early Christians looked down upon this gospel for its irregularities.

Then to add insult to this, incoherent writings was one of the most quoted parts of this gospel. A later addition to it (this is called Mark an appendix twelve verses added to it) from the collection of Mark one fourth of the passages were with spurious ending. But a single verse by Luther's "small catechism" "*whoever believes and baptized shall be saved*" (Mark 16:16) is far away from the spurious ending.

In spite of the irregularities in that gospel, in its later days, became the first gospel setting pattern for others. After the truth is discovered more people studied it and finally it became popular.

Then Mark, prepared some oral teaching which was important and necessary for the people of his time and especially to his own community. These became useful as a part of concerted effort, to remind, to strengthen and to control his people in their desperate condition and persecution.

1. MESSIANIC SIGNS

The gospel of Mark was mixed with crude Greek and simple linking of clause to clause. His writings were treated at one time as artless and even naïve. His collections were treated as pre-existing elements and which were added on his own. This was the impression about

Mark, then all gospels were assumed to be pre-Pauline of theological knowledge.

They were more biographical than doctrinal. Paul and John supposed to have added a “High Christology” (attributing divinity to Jesus) to the story of simple inherent preacher from Galilee whose acts were recorded by the simplies.

We know that Paul’s letters were written before the gospels and with that a high Christology was exercised to Christian circle even before Paul. It is not surprising then, that Mark happened to arrange his entire gospel to emphasis Jesus in fact the Messiah with divine powers.

That we have seen already putting himself forwards with God in Genesis. The gospel opens with a Messianic sense of John the Baptist as the herald of Messiah. When John said, “*a stronger one is coming after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not able to untie*”. As soon as Jesus is baptized in the Jordan river he was identified as Messiah. And then while he was coming from the water, he saw the heavens being torn up and the spirit coming down on Him as it were a dove. (1:10).

The dove coming over the water recalled the spirit hovering above the waters at the creation. Why didn’t those not rend the heavenly and come down when the divine voice from heaven says “you are my son, my beloved son in whom I delight”

Unlike Matthew, Mark did not normally make his references to the Jewish scripture explicit. He assumed that his hearers knew what he was referring to.

This is not that sense, Paul the emissary of gentiles preached that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Jewish history or the law and the prophets. The brothers (as the Christians were known during Marks time) began their lives in synagogues and continued there, until gradually from place to place they were expelled. Jesus had frequently preached in the Synagogues and Paul kept up that practice.

There was not a separate religion actually, as Christianity in those days. The so called brothers were Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah. When the gentiles were brought to accept Messiah, Paul preached about the fulfillment of Jewish experiences and prophesies. And Paul preached Jews and gentiles equally.

The brothers while meditating upon the life of Jesus saw it in the context of Jewish destiny. There was only one Bible in their sight when they heard separate verses of the sacred writings. But they could not depend upon them and called them they were not “proof texts” for apologetic purpose.

Then we see in the next episode of Mark after the baptism and straight away the spirit cast him out into the desert. Where he was with the animals (1:12-13). Satan to tempt Jesus as he came to be the first man and the woman telling them as they listed in the premature

world with the first animals. But where the original human being failed the test and the whole course of fallen humankind began its great rewards.

The Messianic meaning of Jesus came out in every aspect of Mark's story. For instance Jesus' selection of twelve disciples, he went up into the mountain and called forward that were found. He made number to be near him, and then made them emissaries for preaching and also they were given authority to cast out even the demons or devils.

The words "he spoke on the mountain" and this is repeatedly used for Moses ascended mount Sinai. In Exodus 24, Moses called the tribes to come up the mountain after him and then he saw the twelve sacred pillars as symbolic of the twelve tribes.

For Jesus the apparent twelve was to Mark as eschatological forecast of recovery of the lost ten tribes – they were to be united with the other two at the end. This will happen, when the Revelation would be preached to the humanity with the presumption all doubts must be cast out. It was no doubt a great task for which Jesus dedicate no doubt.

THE NEW EXODUS

This is a regular item for believers among Jews and gentiles was the meditation of the sense for the calibration of liberation. As Moses had freed the Israel from the bondage of Pharaoh and led them through the wilderness in spite of their temptations and defections along the way. In the same way, Jesus was leading all humanity in the new reign of heaven.

This is also evident how Jesus fed five thousand people who came to hear his preaching in a new wilderness, re-enacting the Messiah of the miraculous bread called Manna. Jesus had withdrawn into a desert space and the crowd followed him.

Jesus was moved by the crowd deeply as so many sheep who liked a shepherd that the community of the Lord might not be the sheep without shepherd.

At that time, Jesus felt it as His responsibility to feed them. So he enquired the multitude if they had anything to eat. Then they found a person had five loaves and two fish. Here the writer is giving a beautiful comparison. The five loaves of bread would recall the five books of Moses, the "Pentateuch".

Since the word of Law, was supposed to be neutralize, the two fish were compared to the two tablets of the Ten Commandments.

This would recall how Moses during his separation of people into upsets of a thousand of a hundred of fifty or of two. These were the units within each of the twelve tribes. As Jesus chose twelve close followers, so the excess food after the feeding remained twelve baskets.

The same kind of excess Jesus showed with his first miracle in Cana where he changed

one hundred gallons of water into pure and perfect wine in the marriage party. It is a sign of references to the eschatological fullness. This is the point of an excessive delight in God's kingdom the New Jerusalem.

Then Jesus went to a mountain to pray, while the disciples started out across the sea of Galilee. Early in the morning there came a severe wind that disturbed them and they were afraid of the situation. They lost their confidence in Jesus as the Israelites lost their confidence in God and turned to golden calf, while Moses was on the mountain in the presence of God. Jesus knew of their ordeal.

In the Exodus pattern in the sequence of Mark's gospel, we should give full force to Jesus' words, "take heart, I AM" This is divine word in Exodus 3:13-14.

There can be higher chronology upon this. Indeed, probably we should give full weight to that "I AM" in Jesus response where He was investigated by the chief priests and when witnesses were given against Him because of inconclusive evidence the high priests reduced the whole procedure to a simple challenge.

At this point the priest asked Jesus "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" But Jesus gave his answer "I AM" and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power and arising with the clouds of heaven." But the high priest ripping his mantle says at this, "what need there of witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy."

One can say that the high priest had a reason to the reaction. He is clear to the truth more than all those who speak of gentile. Jesus was commented as meek, mild and a simple ethical teacher.

According to a popular writer, Cestirton said in his book "The Everlasting Man" that "there is more of the wisdom that is one with surprise in any simple person full of sensitiveness of simplicity, who shall order the grass to wither and the birds to drop out of the air. When a strolling carpenters apprentice and calmly almost carelessly like one looking over his shoulders before Abraham was "I AM."

Anyone raising the claim Jesus is going to be opposed what is the real reason for the persecution that Marks gospel revealed? As the members of the mystical body of Jesus the Markan disciples were themselves provoking others wrath of the blasphemy for their claim.

About Persecution – Mark pointed out some salient points about the practice of persecution in his gospel in his time. We have to think seriously as why those persecutions had taken place. The zealots (rebellious Jews) who drew Jesus followers out of Palestine in the late sixties were violent in their rejection of Messiah, who did not bring worldly ruler as they expected.

The night time hearing of Jesus by the Jewish authorities showed central as the continuing

cause of discard, that was not only from those outside community within the brotherhood. There were disciples who fell away from Jesus' Messianic claims under the pressure of persecution. The disciples disbelieved as being rebuked by Jesus in the gospel had inner counterparts, among Marks people.

The reading of situation may also explain one of the characteristics of Marks gospel that often puzzled the reader. Jesus repeatedly instructed those who were healed by Him, not to reveal the nature of what he had done. He also ordered the devils not to reveal His identity. What must be the reason to keep himself secret? One of the most influential interpretations of Mark was formulated in its first year of the twentieth century and it echoed throughout the succeeding year.

William Wrich's "The Messianic Secret" in 1901, gave his opinion that Jesus was not recognized as the Messiah, as long as he was alive. But Mark argued that made an attempt to explain this point by saying that "Jesus ordered people to keep silent on this subject."

This was accepted as the best explanation. So long as the people were still thinking of the gospel as an attempt to cope with the biographical facts of Jesus' life. However, now it is more probable that the secret reflects difficulties within the Markan community.

Mark people had to face the fact that their opponent Jews or gentiles did not see what they see that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God and divine agent. This is the service of persecution just as Jesus was plotted against by his own Israelites driven them to Syria, because He made claims that were blasphemy. So were his followers in Mark's community persecuted because they honoured those claims. Jesus explained this "mystery" in the parable of Marks gospel that is one mysterious. That mysterious parable riddle is about the sower who went out to sow.

And Jesus was alone with his followers and disciples. They kept worrying at the riddle and he said to them. The mystery of God's reign is entrusted to you, but to ourselves all comes by way of riddles so that looking they look and see not and listening, they listen, and hear not lest they turn back and be realized.

Then Jesus speaks out the meanings of the riddles. He says to them, "do you not understand this riddle? Then how do you understand any other riddle?"

The sower sows the word. Those beside the road where the word is sown and where they hear the word and straight away satan comes and takes away the word that was sown there. In the same way, the word, they straight away take it with joy; but they will have no roots and are shallow. And they are miserably persecuted because of the word, straight away they are trammelled.

Then the others that are sown in the thorn porch are the ones up hear the word and

their temporal worries and the condition of their wealth and some other kind of longings enter into their minds and struggle themselves with the word. Because of the permanent problems, the word will not crop in him. The word that is sown in the soil, in good soil are the ones who hear the word taken it in, and bear the crop.

Different scholars have wondered, why Jesus makes such a faint understandability of riddles. It seems plain on his faces. But the modern readers try to tend to recall the passage in terms of individual persons who receive (or do not receive) the word.

Jesus is speaking here as through out the gospel in eschatological terms or the coming of the reign of heaven, moving to the fulfillment of history.

As the writers say, the riddle is not a story of each soul's reaction to Jesus, but an out line of the entire history of the world. The seeding takes place in stages as we can see. By the time it takes for the fulfillment of each one, the first seeds that are sown on outside of the road, are at once snatched up by birds. The seeds put on the rocky land do have certain development. They first receive the word "with joy" and send down roots, but the roots are not from deep enough to withstand the persecution.

The seeds in the thorn porch will go further and actively send deep crop. But it is choked by the worldly desires. But only the seeds sown in the rich and fertile land, move through all stages it takes to produce an abundant and harvestable crop.

What puzzles Mark's people is the fact that God's reign is supposed to have come with the redemption of death and the triumphant resurrection of Jesus. Then why do people still doubt and fight the reign? Jesus is telling them that the advent of the reign is both diachronic and synchronic. The reign is busy established but in some people even those within the brotherhood the word of reign is till strangled by thorns, just as those outside the brotherhood are proved to be stony ground which is not responsible at all.

The Messianic triumph is still hidden not so much in Jesus, not so much in His life time but in His life as that is being lived out by the members of Marks gathering. That is the secret message entrusted to the insiders no matter what outsiders say or think.

JESUS WAS NOT ACCEPTED AS MESSIAH

The main reason why Jesus was not accepted as Messiah is that he was the wrong kind of Messiah. The true Messiah was supposed to be a triumphant, royal, and earthly ruler. When Jesus said he must be dying and defeated Messiah, the original followers could not take this into their hearts.

Peter denied that this could not be true – and Jesus called him "Satan" the one who throws an obstacle in his leaders path (8:23). There was a further scandal added to the first one. It was bad enough to Jesus to claim to be the Messiah. It is simply insane for Him to

say that He would suffer death for being the Messiah. This is the reason why Paul called the cross of Jesus an affront to “Greeks ignorance”.

The call of Messiah is a call to suffering. Later Christians will be ruling, crusading and triumphant bodies sitting on the papal and imperial thrones sending armies to slay the heathens. It preachers want to say that needs you to be rich and the revolution is a path to success. Mark's gospel could not go further from such distortion, of what Jesus said and did and meant. The Messianic community not only suffered because like Jesus, it suffered because it was Jesus Himself.

Mark's Gospel which sets the pattern for future ones spends a third of its words on passion narrative. It devotes the whole second part of the test to the preparations of the disciples for the “affront” of the cross. It then has the simplest structure of all the gospels. The first half is spent in the Northern part of Palestine namely around Galilee, a moving reign of heaven. He happened to cast away devils and did the healing of the sick.

The mood darkness as Jesus moves in the South to Judah and towards Jerusalem (his only visit in Mark) and predicts three times that he must suffer and die in order to rise. The disciples who had been with Jesus always could not accept the prediction.

Raymond Brown another famous writer gave his impression about the gospel of Mark. He argued that John's gospel was closer to history, when it shows Jesus is going to Jerusalem every year, just at the end of his life. But Marks gospel sees the time of others by aiming everything towards its earliest statement of Jesus. In this context, Paul quotes Revelation that Messiah died for our sins according to the “sacred writings” and Mark hid that climax always in his mind which is quite suitable to a community that is releasing the passion of Jesus.

The writer Christerton captured well the dramatic shape of the synoptics.

It is a story that begins in the paradise of Galilee, a pastoral and with beautiful landscape having some resembles of the garden of Eden. Then that scene gradually climbs the rising country into the mountains that are near to the storm clouds and the stars as to a mountain of purgatory.

It may be as if staying in strong places or stopped on the way for discussion or dispute but his face set towards the mountain city. That is the meaning of that great culmination. He crested the ridge and stood at the road and suddenly cried aloud lamenting over Jerusalem, the final place.

MATTHEW AND HIS GOSPEL

The greatness of Matthew was that he recorded the highest number of prophecies of Jesus Christ than any other apostle. He suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia. He was killed by the wound of a sword. Regarding his writings - both Matthew and Luke wrote their gospels only after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the latest date estimated for the writing of Matthew's gospel was presumed by the letter to Ignatious of Antioch and Didache. The date was around 100-110 A.D. Both spoke about the knowledge of Matthew.

Matthew's gospel showed the community for which he wrote, followed the plan of both Paul and Mark. He collected all the sayings of Jesus at the time of the "Sermon on the Mount", primarily five long discourses. Each discourse had its own theme planned for a separate consideration. The personal behaviour and actions of Jesus Christ were distributed among the people, especially among the disciples to follow individual discourses. The most popular and important discourse was of course "the Sermon on the Mount."

The emphasis on the Biblical references made many people to believe in what was said. Matthew was a Jewish believer in Jesus. Matthew's Jewish faith made the readers to claim whether he wrote the gospel or translated an earlier version of the gospel in Aramaic. He believed for example both pharisees and sadducees were united though they actually divided in certain matters.

John Meir, a popular writer said, "Matthew was an educated gentile who studied Jewish scripture like all early brothers and sisters expected to do so."

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Sermon on the Mount of Jesus contained the three chapters (5,6,7) of Matthew's gospel. This seemed to be the greatest of all sermons. We can also say, it was the cream of all his preachings or teachings. This made even the disciples to open their eyes and examine themselves their past life and the present. It was an occasion for self examination

(introspection).

According to Matthews gospel Jesus after taking Baptism, wandered in the wilderness for symbolic 40 days and then began to collect the disciples around Galilee. The sermon on the mount was in five long discourses contained many instructions in general and ethical primarily applicable to His disciples. They thought of themselves so seriously. They thought how difficult to live a real Christian life from the spiritual point of view. The sermon influenced the disciples and finally decided to live the true Christian life how difficult it might be.

Matthew took some source of information from the gospel of Mark and mixed up with the traditions. Those 3 chapters were considered more important than any other in the entire New Testament. They were often quoted by the preachers because they contained moral instruction and also beatitudes which means beautiful attitude. Then Lord's Prayer, the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the lilies of the field, the tree known by its fruit, and about the house built on the rock instead of on the sand.

According to some scholars, those three chapters contained not only the essence of the greatness of Matthew but also the essence of Christ's greatest sermon. Many people were of the opinion that even if the entire New Testament was destroyed people would be happy with these three chapters. which had the essence of Matthew and the essence of Jesus' sermons.

We can see how John the Baptist heralded in his preaching about the coming of Messiah and Matthew in his gospel pointed out how Messianic era begins. For that purpose he gave us a comparison of Jesus how he ascended the mountain then Moses ascending the mount Sinai. He started his saying with comforted felicitations from the word "happy" which was used in the beatitudes.

BEATITUDES (5:3-10)

The felicitation of Moses came as a series of prohibition like "there shall not" while Jesus began His sermon on the mount with messages of comforting addresses to those who were afflicted, neglected or persecuted for example - Happy are the poor in spirit... He said 8 sentences like that and then explained them. But it is said they were all providential statements. They turn expectation, and normal values, upside down. The same revealing of values are sounded through out the gospel as the last word would be first and the same would be a master piece. People who were throwing away their lives would save them and suffering Messiah would win the glory.

1. Happy are the poor in their own mind...

Literally in Greek it is said.. "poor in spirit." What does it mean? It is clearly not spiritually impoverished or those who were poor in spirit. Those interpretations were not paradoxical

but contradictions. What Jesus said was about simple physical condition of poverty but not a blessed state. But that does more than jealous of the rich or becoming rebellious towards them.

Then Jesus said they have their own reward and also those who were physically poor can have the attribution of poverty, that Jesus was blessing them here. They considered poor in the sight of God, who were neither arrogant nor oppressive like the rich. But Jesus called the poor as those who enter the reign of heaven or those who feed the hungry, clothed the naked and welcome the foreigner. For that kind of people beatitudes promised passport to enter the kingdom of God.

2. Happy are the sad...

In this Jesus said about happy and unhappy; not about physical affliction or loss but He was exploring the spiritual condition of the individual. It was about the suffering of a person on spiritual reason.

Augustine, a popular critic says, grieving over a material thing is a sin. The only lamentable thing is lamenting their loss or rather not to lament those said for right thing or reason were engraved in a victorious act.

3. Happy are those who yield...

Here the yielding people in this statement were often translated as the meek, mild, gentle etc., But it might just refer to those who were unable to be assertive. Actually Jesus praised those people who were aggressive. The full force of paradox came from the reward of 'yielding'. Since acquisition of world was normally the prize of conquest. The only lasting possession was not the one that is seized but the one that is given away.

4. Happy are those who hunger or thirst...

The contrast between physical condition and spiritual intention is again made clear. The optic for right is not the same as body's need for a survival; but it is correctly compared with it. The providence of right is not a luxury but an absolute need.

5. Happy are those taking pity on others...

According to the inference of beatitude the needs of a person should not be directly addressed. But by understanding the condition of a person or others one can find a suitable response that covers one's own position.

6. Happy are those who are pure...

Pure within means pure in heart. This is quite against the "Jewish Holiness Code." That made one unclean according to external things. One dealt with Jesus continuously broke

through to taboos of the “Holiness Code” embracing all kinds of unclean persons. For example, like Samaritan leper, prostitutes, menstruating women, tax collectors etc.,

Matthew later quoted what Jesus was saying. What a man takes into his mouth does not make him unclean. It is the internal purity that the beatitudes facilitates. That purity looks at God strait, but not all the internal ceremonies, set up to have him off from the profane.

7. Happy are those who bring peace to others...

This again tells about the right priority. By looking at the pathetic condition of people and by restoring their good relations, one should act like God’s emissary and earn the right to be called the son of God.

8. Happy are those punished for their virtue...

Persecution of people may be accepted for certain reasons because it might clear them from wrong doings. It may be like baptism with fire. The first and last beatitudes form the book ends “because both promise to some reward like the promises of the kingdom of God.” This statement clearly shows that the eighth beatitude is the final one.

But some people took the statement that followed as the ninth beatitude because it also begins with the same adjective “happy”. If we think seriously about it, we can conclude that it is nothing but an expansion and commentary on eighth blessing. Its different function is shown by the fact that it shifts from third person to second person. So it is said a “happy are you” and continued with an advice on how to conduct themselves.

Happy are you - When they ridicule you to punish and make everything against you because of me, but be of good cheer and joyful, since your recompense is plentiful in heaven. It was in this manner they punished the prophets before God (5:11-12).

ABOUT THE ANTITHESIS

The beatitudes are nothing but a kind of overture to the whole long sermon. The statement of the main theme is introducing the new law which is not to replace the old law but fulfilling it. It goes beyond the old law and lay an obligation which is more internal than ceremonial. The disciples of Jesus must have observed them more seriously than others. But their observation is different. It is according to Paul “the circumcision of the heart” (Romans 2:29).

Jesus Christ new law is pronounced in six commandments and these six commandments are called six antithesis; because they take the form, “you have heard... but I tell you”.

These new obligations are not relayed from God like the ten commandments, He gave to Moses, but only Jesus Himself on His own immediate authority.

The First One:

I tell you, “you have heard the directives to those of the old order. You shall not murder because the murderers will be subject to trial. But any one who calls his brother an idiot, will be subject to “Sunhedrine” (court). Again if any one calls his brother subhuman will be brought to “Gehenna” which means fire. The hyperbole of this passage is the obverse side of the command of love in the gospel. If love plays the supreme obligation then it departs from that swiftly by escalate the direction of that standard.

Jesus expressed this concept by saying that one cannot pray to God if one had offended another and in such case he must leave the altar immediately; then he must make recompense for wrong doing. Love for the fellow human being is the pre-requisite for any profession of love for God.

The old order was handed down from the height of mount Sinai and it first looked to God to submission to Him. The new order works from the bottom up since Jesus is now down among those who love and teaches us to love.

The Second rule:

This second antithesis deals with the “inner purity.” This is already clearly discussed in the sixth beatitude, which is now fleshed out with more details, “you have heard the directive” that you shall not commit adultery. But in the words of Jesus if it is so that if any body looks at a woman with a desire for her it amounts to committing adultery within himself. *“If your right eye makes you feel about some abnormal desire, then you must rip it out and cast away because it is better for you to take one out of your body than from all about to be cast into Gehenna. And if your right hand makes you fall, chap it off and cast it away because it is better for you to lose one part of your body than all of it cast into Gehenna (fire).”* Purity is only a matter of ceremonial usage in the old system. Jesus is not fulfilling that with a conciliation but with a stricter code. It is completely internal. There is no doubt, purity is a matter of intention.

The Third rule:

This third antithesis is also introduced as a stricter rule. It is directed whoever dismisses his wife must give her a separation document. *“But I tell you that anyone dismissing a wife except for unchastity makes for committing adultery and if he marries a dismissed woman he is an adulterer.”*

Matthew reported this directive letter, to the patrician society. This demands chastity among women, as the only guarantee of the legitimacy of children. If the wife is unfaithful to her husband she may give her husband a child who is not his own. In such case, Jesus supports and demands divorce as the complete conception.

The Fourth rule:

This continued the emphasis on the personalism. According to the making, truthfulness is not a judicial concept; but a matter of ones inner integrity.

Once again let us think about the directive and the old order, “Be no oath breaker, but honour oath to the Lord. But I tell you, serve no oath at all, not by heaven (since it is God’s throne) and also not by earth (because it is His footrest) not by the mention of Jerusalem (because it is king David’s city) not by your own head (since you cannot change a single hair of it either to black or to white. Let your word for “yes” and be for yes only and never for no. This is like giving beyond that is towards the evil end.

Why should people consider oath taking is to be treated as supported by the evil one? because oaths were so frequently end in “magic.” To take oath by ‘stars’ is to invoke their power. This is why Jesus says that those are the dwelling places of one God to be disposed of only by Him not to be invoked for the swearers of own purposes.

The Fifth Rule:

Regarding this rule, Jesus quoted the example of “an eye for an eye and tooth for tooth” and He said “but I tell you, oppose no one who is going wrong with you if one hits at your right cheek offer him your left cheek. If anyone looks for your shirt give him your coat also. If any man demands for your services for a mile, walk with him for two miles. Give to whoever asks you whatever he wants and not to turn back with a request for a loan” As a teacher and preacher of non-violence Jesus went beyond in moral principles to Leo Tolstoy, Mahathma Gandhi and Dr Martin Luther King.

The Sixth and last rule:

This takes us into speech deeper level than the preceding one. There it was said, “one should support violence in principle against another. But in the antithesis it is said that restrain must be based on ‘love’ itself. You must have heard the saying you will love those who are not yours and hate those who oppose you.

Jesus said, “*But I tell you, you will love those who are against you and pray for those who wanted to persecute you. Thereby you will become the sons of your Father in heaven. He makes the sun rises over good and bad He sends rain upon those who are in the right and in the wrong.*” Jesus is in this context giving utmost priority to the reign of heaven and God as the supreme authority in all things.

ABOUT THE LORD’S PRAYER

Regarding the Lord’s prayer what Jesus teaches to His disciples is the confirmation of God’s authority on everything on the earth. Jesus is further giving more stress on religion as a fundamental in word actually among people. He warns them with authority not to be in

the public while praying and while giving charity. Others should not see what your hand is doing. He should pray secretly in his house in a lonely room. Then he will have his rewards. In fasting also others need not know about it. Jesus gave these instructions to follow in this day to day life.

Jesus added “one should not pretend himself when he wanted to pray. When one prays in synagogues or in the public places it should be louder because the other people who hear your prayer would say you are praying for others to hear. But Jesus suggests us to go into an inner room, lock it and then pray to your Father and God will hear your prayer and duely reward you. Jesus asks us not to pray like pagans with louder voice because God knows your needs before you ask Him in your prayer.

Jesus then gave His disciples what kind of prayer they should pray. The prayer is not clearly with Christian theme. Some people have commented that it was a Jewish prayer and it was adopted due to some reason by Matthew. But Christian prayer should reflect the acknowledgement of grace and design of God. In assertion to that request “bring us not to the breaking point” reflects in this connection what Jesus also said in the Gethsemane garden “pray that you do not reach to breaking point.” This point both in history and in the individual encounter with His story as the great text of all history.

The clauses show there is an eschatological prayer and final clause in it refer to not to the deliverer from evil but from the evil one. What Jesus is saying in the garden is that his meeting with the power of darkness on that special night shows Jesus final struggle that would be an end of history and the final triumph of the Father.

Therefore, the Lord’s prayer is an eschatological Christian prayer with one sentence of three humble requests directed at the vindication of God in the final showdown of history. There is also another sentence with three requests asking for those who pray may be promoted from this ordeal.

The eschatological setting of the whole prayer shows that there is a reference to the coming meal to heavenly completion when Jesus made a reference to that, it must be to the last supper. As we say, he said in the last supper I tell you again I shall not drink this product of vine, until I drink it with a new vine in my Father’s reign.”

This Lord’s prayer has also some significances for the anticipation of this great feast. The prayer is for the dismissal of debts if at all there are any. There is a reference to great jubilee also, when it is said all debts were cancelled. This is too eschatological.

A BRIEF NOTE ABOUT JOHN

When Jesus looked at his face for the first time, He prophesied that John would see visions in his old age and write the Book of Revelation. It is the last book of the Holy Bible. John was boiled mercilessly in a huge basin of boiling oil during the bad time of persecution in Rome. Then he was miraculously delivered from death. After that, he was sent to the prison island of Patmos. There he happened to write “the Book of Revelation.” Later, he was freed from Roman custody. He was made the bishop of Edessa in Turkey. In his old age, he was the only disciple that died without any persecution.

John was one of the “beloved disciples” referred to in the gospel. He happened to recline to the breast of Jesus at the time of the Last Supper. And also he stood boldly with Jesus’s mother at the time of crucifixion. It was he who entered the iconography of Christian art. He was also called the John of many devotional pictures.

Some scholars were of the opinion that the book of Revelation was not written by one person John, but also another man because of the repetition of ideas. At times a topic ends and begins again at certain point. This repetition looks like insertion by another author.

According to some theory, John’s gospel was the last of all the four gospels. It must have been written in the nineties and presented probably in the beginning of the second century. For some reasons it was guarded by the School of Beloved Disciple. Then it seemed to have been widespread enough to have internal factions; and it was centered in Asia Minor and perhaps around Ephesus.

LIFE OUT OF DEATH

As mentioned in the four gospels Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowd shouted in praise of Him, Hosanna. It was almost a royal reception to Jesus and it was not clear why the crowd shouted Jesus as the king of Jews. He knew in advance, where the donkey would be available for him and two disciples were sent to bring it for Him. Then the disciple spread their garments on the donkey which was saddled in his honour.

Then they spread the same garments on the way as it was a professional red carpet.

In this connection the other three gospel writers showed that particular scene in a different way. According to Luke once the garments were laid down on the road some branches were added to the scene and in Matthew different leaves were added and scattered in the show.

But the story of John was different in this matter. He said, Jesus did not send the two disciples to bring the donkey. The crowd already knew about Jesus' greatness especially with the raising of Lazarus. Some people came from Bethany where they heard that sensational news about Lazarus. By that memorable incident they could estimate what type of person Jesus was. Some people by hearing about the miracles of Jesus came to that occasion. The city people happened to wave the palm leaves as the symbol of victory. The group that attended supper gathering was Pharisees and High Priests.

This third group people were very critical about the situation than the other two. Jesus while responding to the excited crowd found a donkey on His own and mounted it to show His humility. This is the situation that Jesus would tell that His reign was not of the present order. The mounting of the donkey by Jesus was like a prophetic gesture of and it protested the triumphant attitude of the large crowd who were bearing palms.

So, to say the people did not properly understand the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. We see the palms only in John's gospel which were rejected by Him, because he knew what they symbolize. The using of palm on that particular memorable occasion became palm Sunday that we observe today.

THE LAST SUPPER

On this occasion Jesus played the role of a servant before the disciples. Before the supper started, He wished to wash the feet of all His disciples and He did it. This is of the remarkable details of the Last Supper and then John replied about the word where he called from that beloved disciple.

The role of the character played in the Last Supper as John described was really dramatic, when Jesus called "beloved disciples". According to Jesus description the disciples were sitting at the right side of Jesus on the central couch. Judas sat on his left and Peter was at the far end of the table on the right side of Jesus. It so happened that Jesus washed the feet of Peter only as the last man.

The main purpose of washing their feet was only to teach them that they too must do like that to others as servants. In this connection, Jesus said that not only the followers wash their feet one another, but they should be also willing to die for one another. This is the culmination of the theme in the Lazarus death and that death is the way of life.

The two major themes of life and death were locked in struggle, through the whole last part of this gospel and life wins only by losing to death. This is the paradoxical outcome of this gospel.

A direction means, it contained many things, which Jesus gave to his disciples. How far he was loving the followers He was about to say.

“Greater love than this has no one that he gave his life for his dear ones”
(John 15:13).

As said above, they were to love one another as He loved them. They must be willing to die for one another. What Jesus wanted to direct them is to have a new way to them, because the love He was expecting was not simply a natural affection but the manifestation of the Father's love. The example of the vine and the branches shows that their flourishing manifests the Father's grandeur.

So, when Augustine (a writer) said that they lived with a fresh directive. They were “new men”, heirs of new covenant, singers of new song thus dying unto Jesus would re-animate each other.

The reclining position made it easy for the beloved disciple to keep his head on Jesus chest. When Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him, Peter immediately reacted to that and asked who it must be. For that Jesus replied, “This is the one I give the bit of bread, to offer I dip it in the drink”.

Judas took the bread without knowing that it identified him as the betrayer. The beloved disciple was close enough to hear what Jesus was telling in a lowered voice, after he accepted the bit of food, “what you do, do quickly.” The name of the beloved disciple is not yet revealed. But he and Peter were the only male followers who ran to the empty tomb and he over ran the older man.

He was the one whose eye sight was best at that time. When they were in the sea of Tiberius (it is another name for the sea of Galilee) it was he who recognized Jesus on the shore and told Peter that it was Jesus. It was he whom Peter asked as when Jesus would predict the death of Peter himself, he was not the part of the followers when Jesus chose the first disciple, even the other evangelists also did not mention him.

The community, which was formed by the “beloved disciple” on the details that were known to him with the deeper meaning of Jesus in the Last Supper. John's account described the long lasting discourses. The last supper was something like the farewell function for Jesus and he was giving his final piece of advice to his people.

What must be His last advice – He said, you must love one another as I have loved you. Greater love than this has no one that he gives his life for his dear ones.” You were my

dear ones, I never called you my slaves because a slave would understand the masters acts. I called you my dear ones. What I know from my father, I shared with you. You had never left me single I had singled you on certain occasions what you wished from the Father He should give it to you”.

The following lines would show what kind of intimacy Christ had with the heavenly Father and the disciples. They meet the Father in Him and He in them.

Jesus continued His saying –

I am the vine and you the branches

One engrafted in me and I in him,

.....

And as my Father loves me

So I love you”.

The long but very impressive speech given by Jesus at the end of His life and also another long sermon on the mount. Though He was speaking at the last supper, he spoke from heaven and his audience were the disciples. His precious word from His speeches were referred to Christians of all times. This last discourse was the last testament of Jesus. That is meant to be read by the people only after his leaving this earth. The most important point we can remember from the occasion of the Last Supper was the promise of paradise.

“If you love me

You will heed my directive

And I will ask the Father

and He will send another champion

Who will stay with you through all time

The Spirit of Truth” (14:15-17).

Why did Jesus say that Father would send another Champion? It is because Jesus Himself was the Champion of his followers according to the writings of the Beloved Disciple school. He said, then he was returning to his Father. He also said He and the Father both were searching a champion who would stay with them. In this way Jesus comforted His disciples before He was taken away from them.

HIS AGONY OR PASSION

After the mental agony Jesus underwent in the Gethsemane garden John did not say much but he said about Jesus’ praying. While accepting the cup of suffering, He put all his emphasis on the divinity of Jesus as he went through all the ordeals. While accepting the

unbearable suffering, He was not passive, but very active.

Jesus knew already that Judas would be with the Roman soldiers and the temple men to the secret place where He was praying as Judas was bribed for that purpose. Then Jesus asked him whatever he wanted to do, do it immediately; since He already knew what was going to come. When the crowd outside shouted, Jesus of Nazareth was their prey; he told them boldly and with dignity "I AM". The arresting Roman soldiers were probably put at the disposal of the High priest sent by Pilate.

The soldiers took Jesus to the former high priest named Annas the father-in-law of the present priest Caiaphas. As a matter of fact, both father-in-law and son-in-law joined together and plotted against Jesus with vengeance to get rid of Him. During the trial Nicodemus, one of the 70 judges, played an important role to save Jesus from the cruel hands of the high priest. He was also an important figure in the gospel of John.

Nicodemus was originally a gentile, but influenced by the teachings of Jesus, and became one of the admirers of Him and finally became His follower. He tried to defend Him in the trials but in vain. When the priests were plotting to make Jesus guilty, Nicodemus took the initiative and said Jesus must be given time for hearing. When he failed in everything, he at last helped to bury Jesus. Nicodemus was not a confirmed disciple of Christ, but he went into the place where the priest circle when they were following the proceedings of the trial.

Annas at last advised Caiaphas to take Jesus to Pilate and demanded from him the death of Jesus. Pilate also tried his best to save Jesus as he believed that He was an innocent man and in support of his wife who dreamed about Christ on the previous night.

All the attempts became futile before the shouting of the people outside as they were also bribed for that shouting purpose. At last he handed over Jesus to the public by saying that he was killing an innocent man, and then washed his hands. Though Jesus was determined to death, He was in His consciousness and carried the cross.

When He was put on the cross he saw four women and one man called the Beloved Disciple who were standing nearby. One of the women was His mother. He told His mother by showing the beloved disciple what he was her son. To the beloved disciple, He said that she was his mother. Since that time he took care of her. What must be the reason to keep His mother in charge of the beloved disciple was because he was very young with good physique and he had a house in Jerusalem.

He was actually recently joined as a disciple probably from Jerusalem, whereas the others were from Galilee.

Jesus understood that he reached the goal in order to bring sacred writings to thus completion when he sipped the wine on the hyssop, it meant he had completed the drinking

the cup His father gave Him. His mission was to die for the sake of the sinner and with His death that purpose also served. Though He was God, He died as the mortal man for the sake of the world.

In this connection, let us recollect an incident from the book of Exodus, how Moses hit the rock with his rod for water to the Israel in their wilderness. Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman over the well of Jacob. He had applied that to Himself. He said, “rivers of waters that live flow from his depths” here, “his blood joins the water enforcing to the image of waters” the reference here was that the water and blood became symbolical that reviving life from death. Which Jesus bought to humankind. The water and blood from His side were a reference to the vine.

Augustine, a popular writer, thought that there might be a parallel between the opening of the first Adams’s side to create Eve and the opening of second Adams side to create his “bride” the body of His believers. The beloved disciple who was standing near the cross gave the information that he saw the actual piercing of Jesus’ side. The person who saw that gave his testimony as true to the best of his knowledge. What he spoke was true so that everybody should believe. This information was for fulfilling the sacred writings.

HIS RESURRECTION

John mentioned four women who were standing near the cross. But only Mary Magdalene happened to go to the tomb as the first person on the morning of Sunday. She was surprised to see the tomb empty. Then she thought somebody must have taken the body of Jesus. She immediately ran to Peter to tell the news. Then Peter with the beloved disciple went to the tomb, They were almost running to that place and the beloved disciple went faster than the other.

When they entered into the tomb, they found the winding cloth lying over there, nobody could dare enough to enter in. Simon Peter came too late because of his age and entered the tomb. He saw the winding cloth, but the covering veil he saw separately. Then all entered but they did not believe till then, that Jesus could rise from the dead on the third day according to the sacred writings.

Again the beloved disciple was the first to believe in the resurrection which Peter and others were still in doubt. Like Mary Magdalene they were also under the impression that somebody had stolen the body.

The beloved disciple entered the tomb later than Peter, but understood earlier than him about Jesus. In course of time, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and began weeping for Christ. Then she saw a man at a distance and took him to be the gardener. It became difficult to all the disciples to recognize the raised Jesus. As a dim figure Jesus asked Mary Magdalene

why she was weeping. She still took Him to be the gardener and asked him if he had taken away her master Jesus. She further requested Him to tell the place where He put Him so that she would go and take him. Then Jesus called her 'Mary' by turning closer she immediately recognized Him and addressed Him in Armanian language "Rabbuni" (which means master). She want to Him and about to touch his feet. Jesus said not to touch Him, because He had not yet gone to His Father. He further told her to tell all the disciples that He would go to His Father, his God and her God.

Mary Magdalene was certainly an important person for the company of the beloved disciples. She was the second one who believed in the risen Christ. She was the second one only to the beloved disciple. Above all, she was the first woman to see Jesus and immediately reported to all the disciples that she saw Christ in body and Spirit.

Then Jesus appeared to all the disciples who were hiding themselves behind one looking down. He promised them, the Holy Spirit would come to them from the Father fulfilling His promise. But Thomas, who was also called doubting Thomas did not believe all that because he was not there when Christ met them after resurrection. He believed only after putting his fingers into the wounds of Jesus.

Then Christ said, "happy are those who see me not and still have trust"

John's gospel is finally ended at 20:30-31, but he did not mention many other miracle which Jesus did with His disciples. Whatever it may be, we have to trust that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God and that trust would make us live with the power of His rule.

Then the conclusion said about the appearances of Jesus to His disciples after they returned to Galilee. As a stranger he enquired how much fish they caught. They were actually not fishing. They replied to His question they did not find any. Then the stranger told them to cast their net into the right side of their boat. When the net was full of fish, among all disciples it was the beloved disciple that recognized Jesus and first told Peter about him.

Peter, who was always impetuous in his action, jumped into the water to reach Jesus. Finally Jesus ate with them. He asked Peter three times whether he love Him whole heartedly. He replied positively. Jesus then told him to feed the Lord's sheep.

Peter lived for abut 129 years perhaps the longest lived of all the disciples. The legend says that he died on the cross upside down because he did not want to be crucified like Jesus (really by upside down crucifixion, the blood will be forced to the head and would bleed to a swifter and easier death). The earliest and direct information about his death was send in a letter from Clement of Rome to the Christian gathering in Corinth. His death was presumed by Clement that Peter died of rivalry and grudge among the brothers. But there was authentic information abut his execution. Killing Christians through crucifixion was normal in those days.

DEBORA AND Jael - WOMEN OF ZEAL

The word 'zeal' is often associated with fanaticism. This 'zeal' can be used in good sense as well as bad. In bad sense some countries have been encouraging the youth in the name of 'fanatical zeal' to kill the innocent in the form of human bombs. In the good sense, this 'zeal' can also be called 'righteous bond of zeal'. It motivates many missionaries to take up the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the remote and the most dangerous parts of the world to motivate people to enjoy the free gift of salvation with remission of sin, washed in the blood of Christ who died on the cross for the sins of humanity.

This righteous brand of zeal tempts leaders of the world to fight for whatever they believe to be right. And it is this righteousness of zeal that causes millions of Gods' people to live and suffer for the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The "Bible" has a good number of zealous men and women who boldly served God. Abraham and Moses in their zealous love for God were accepted and honoured. His commandment. We have the most noted Pagan Rahab from Jerico city (Joshua 2nd Chapter), whose zeal caused her to risk her life for the sake of two Hebrew spies. King David used his zeal to become a great warrior but his religious zeal for the Lord can be found in the 4th Chapter of "The Book of Judges".

In like manner, we come across in the 'Bible' two women characters of the same zeal for the word of God. They are "Debora and Jael" who lived out their religious zeal with such strength, boldness, conviction and finally action that even after thousands of years their lives and achievement remained as memories to God's righteous zeal and the people who ever study the Bible can understand their achievements and adventurous act. The Christians of twenty first century would certainly learn more from their wonderful action.

Lack of Zeal (Judges 4.1-3)

The children of Israel did evil again in the sight of God when "Ehud" the king had died. That was the usual patron of the life of Israel. Their life was good as long as the king was alive. But after his death they suffered much for want of good and able leader. In addition

to that they also suffered from epidemic of lovelessness towards God.

A Bad case of Gentile affiliation:

God wanted to turn His people towards Himself. So, as to teach them a lesson God sold them to a Canaanite king by name "Jabin" which was like a man sold to slavery. In the same way Israelites were also sold unto Canaanite king.

For humiliating discipline it was Jabin's right hand of cruelty and the main culprit in affliction of pain upon Israel was Sisera, captain of the Canaanite army. Then the Israel had to spend 20 long years so as to receive the cruel and unscrupulous treatment in the hands of Sisera. But it became a task among people as Sisera was Jabin's and God's correct choice to ill-treat Israel till they remember their God then repent and respect Him.

Sisera must have enjoyed a lot in his role as a chief bully and tyrant and according to the Bible the children of Israel were greatly oppressed. Only after they suffered enough in the hands of Sisera they repented and cried unto God.

When Israel were in such depressed condition, Debora came into the picture. She was a prophetess. She led the Israel when they were in difficulties under the servitude of Sisera and Jabin. She was so to say a woman among women and a leader among leaders. She was an extraordinary woman with wisdom and piety. She was so to say in nutshell, the mouth piece of God Himself. Debora devoted all her life and was intimately acquainted with God. As a matter of fact, there was not a man at that time in Israel to defend them from the Canaanites.

So, in such circumstances God gave a call to Debora to take the leadership to defend the Israelites. It was really a wonderful thing, because Debora, being a woman, was going to liberate Israelites from the clutches of Jabin and Sisera. Debora was residing in the hill area of the territory of Ephraim. It is also said "She lived under palm trees".

A worthy leader for the people:

These two words "Free Time" were brought to Debora's vocabulary when she woke up early in the morning. She would be greeted by a group of Israelites who went to help for the judgement as Moses did in the wilderness. Debora judged them always with compassion, sympathy and devotion to God.

Twenty long years passed and Israelites learnt a lesson. The merciful God inclined to come to their rescue. Now we come across a new character entering the scene and that was Barak. Actually God did not know and directly summon Barak, but God wanted to make use of his services through Debora. She had a great God for Israel. So, she wanted to do something to Israel as they were in desperate position. She sent for Barak to go towards mount Tabor with ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and from the children of

Zebulun. Now Barak became an important man in the sight of God to conquer Sisera and his canannites collection of iron chariots.

Barak seemed to have not much experience of war, but God spoke to him through Debora that *"He that Lord will draw unto this to the river of Kish. Sisera the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude and I will deliver him unto thine hand"* God showed him an ideal location for the battle. The mount of "Tabor" so that the Israel would look down up to the far canannites and attack them at the correct time. God again assured Barak that he would win the battle.

Debora was a patriotic Israelite who had zeal for her people and the nation. With heroic spirit and enthusiasm she delivered God's message to Barak. The people's love, affection and respect for her made the perfect person to handle the proclamation of war. Now the time had come for Barak to act according to the proclamation. The only thing he had to do was to perform his duty as per script and the victory would be automatically Israels.

Unfortunately Barak forgot what God had told him. It seemed he became discouraged to march forward by himself. And so came to Debora and told her by grabbing her apron strings if she will go with him, I will go only, if she will not go with him, I will not go". She tried her best by encouraging him, with the words that God was with him and he was a chosen man, but still he had no confidence and spiritually speaking, he needed Debora to hold his hand.

One probable reason might be for Barak's lack of confidence was primarily, he did not know about God, and also the Spirit and promise of God, that he would deliver. Barak was under the impression that Debora would accompany him to the battle field, he was sure and certain of the Lord's presence and hence the fulfillment of His promise.

After hearing the disheartening words of Barak, Debora whole heartedly accepted to follow him to the battle front. And she also put him a condition by saying "I will surely go with thee", much to Barak's relief "Notwithstanding the journey that alone takest shall not be for thine honour, for the Lord shall sell Sisera unto the hand of a woman. Barak did not whole heartedly believe in God and obey Him. Had he honoured the early promises of God made with him and followed accordingly, he would have become the hero of Israel.

As Barak missed the chance, because of his unbelief towards God's promise, God had decided to give that rare honour to a woman and that woman was not even Debora, but a new character "Jael".

Barak's confidence was boosted up to certain extent with the presence of Debora. He plunged into action by collecting 10,000 army and boldly led them to Mount 'Tabor' and ready for war. He was at the top of 1390 feet above the valley of "Jazreel". As per the

plan, the war would be fought on moral grounds. Sisera as a captain came to know, the enemy was at the top of the mountain and he was also ready for war. Debora's and Barak's zeal for the nation of Israel was forged in truth and morality.

Debora finally encouraged Barak by saying "Barak up, for this is the day in which the Lord had delivered Sisera unto thine hands". These words made him more courageous to command the army then with Debora all came down the hill. The presence of the army of Barak created havoc and terror in the minds of canannities. And this havoc made Sisera leaving every thing and fled from the battlefield. The Israel, killed all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the swords of Israel left not even one was alive.

Sisera was the only survivor of the battle, from Canannites. He fled from the battlefield and looked for refuge and found the tent of Jael by mistake. Actually, we know very little about her except, she was the wife of "Heber" the Kenite. On that fateful day Sisera thought he entered the tent of a friend. As his death was destined, he entered the tent of his enemy. Whatever might be the past history of Jael, we see here as the most courageous woman of action.

Jael had a wonderful plan in her mind and that master plan was to get rid of the biggest enemy of Israel, that was Sisera. She saw him completely who was in exhausted condition. She mentally prepared to jump into action, because she was after all a woman and he was the captain of the army. Her action was just timely. She told him "Turn in my Lord, turn in, turn to me, fear not". But Sisera did not know what was in her mind. He believed her fully in what she said. And finally Jael won the confidence of Sisera.

Then she gave him a bottle of milk and covered his face with a blanket, while he was in deep sleep. We can understand her tension and anxiety that woman of those days were supposed to be meek and mild. But we are wrong in our conclusion. When we look at the timely bold action of Jael at the appropriate time, she took the peg of her tent and workman's hammer. She smote the nail into the temple of Sisera and fastened it to the ground. Jael did that wonderful job with courage, confidence and utmost skill. And that act made Israel very happy.

Barak was still in search of Sisera and finally came to the tent of Jael. She showed him the gruesome sight. He looked down and found how the peg was pierced into his head and all the glory went to her only. She brought victory to Israel and glory to God. In her excitement as she brought freedom to the Israel, she composed a song, which was recorded in the 5th chapter of Judges. The song was to commemorate the victory and glowing tributes to Jael. She took the nail to her left hand and hammer to her right hand and smote Sisera. All the name and glory went to Jael only, but not to Barak though he started the war and obeyed God.

Debora and Jael - Women of Zeal

The collective zeal of Debora, Barak and Jael took sometime to liberate Israel from the tyranny of Canannites. The three really did a wonderful job and God subdued on that day Jabin the King of Canannites before the children of Israel. Actually God fought the battle and Israel got freedom.

The lives of Debora, Barak and Jael were the best examples for Christians of today as the proper way to direct our 'zeal' for God's service. Proper zeal does not come from fanatical beliefs or out of control or emotions or false political views, but it will come from the "soul" and it knows the God's will. As far as we could understand, Debora and Barak acted according to the plan and will of God. It is clearly understood as God was behind the scene and guided Jael to make an end of Sisera. Let us all too try to do things of God as done by Debora, Barak and Jael and win God's favour and win abundant blessings.

* * *

DEBORA AND Jael - WOMEN OF ZEAL



Debora



Jael

THE TEMPLE OF ISRAEL

Since the time of king Solomon, the temple of Israel was given a prominent place in the scripture. In this context it is better that we should study the details about the past and future and about the temple. Why should we have such fascination to know about the buildings that were destroyed and some were yet to be built? To acquire the full information, we must go back to the beginning of the creation.

God after He created Adam and Eve, His plan and desire was to dwell with the man in the garden of Eden. But unfortunately sin entered the scene and caused Adam and Eve to go out of the garden of Eden. Still God wanted to give man only a chance to re-establish his relationship with God. That is to say, God wanted to dwell again in the presence of humanity. But man's sinfulness must have been prohibiting this kind of relationship. This situation could not be changed, until Moses brought the Israel out of Egypt from bondage to the mount Sinai.

Then in that mount Sinai, God provided man again to dwell in the presence of His people. He gave them the law called the Ten Commandments. But they did not obey to the law. It was pointed out that no one was able to keep the law except the God man Jesus. Therefore God, in His infinite grace and mercy, gave them another means of experiencing the presence of the living God. He gave it to them by introducing the "Tabernacle", then came the priesthood to take care of everything, and thereafter came sacrificial system. This sacrificial system became necessary for covering of "sins" of the people. And because of this temporary covering, God was again able to dwell in the presence of his people. God did this in the form of the "Shekinah" which means "the presence of God". His glory could dwell above the "ark of the covenant". The introduction of priesthood and sacrificial system became quite necessary because of the nature of people in those days.

MAIN PURPOSE OF THE TABERNACLE

It was a daily physical visible object lesson. It would remind the people that the presence of God was dwelling in their midst and indicated the promise keeping and the covenant keeping.

In Genesis God said that He would promise again and again to send the “Messiah”, His son who would deal with the “Sin problem”. So the coming of Messiah was true and that was the hope of Israel. And in the Tabernacle all the details were kept safely about the coming of the “Saviour”. His life, His ministry and the work of salvation would be fore shadowed and typified.

The tabernacle to the Jewish people would take another role. That is to say, it would be transformed into a temple, which the people built later. The Israel after they came out of Egypt in desperation and humiliation due to slavery, they needed something like individuality as human beings in the society.

So, by giving “Torah” (Law or the Law of Moses, the five books of Moses) and the “Tabernacle” to the people, so that they would find which they were looking for. But the law given by God to the Jews was far beyond the normal law, that was the “Ten commandments”. They could be also called ceremonial laws, dietary laws, sacrifice laws, social laws, dealing with criminal matters and they might be more.

And finally the Israel counted the number of laws they were supposed to follow. The number came to 613 laws and they had to be observed. These unique laws were given to the Jewish people (Romans 3:1-27). They even felt proud of themselves for having that kind of Laws. In addition to that, those laws made them to identify themselves as people who were formerly bonded slaves in Egypt. Such people became an important race in religion and as a nation.

It was no doubt a permanent and important for them and it was all illustrated and represented by the tabernacle (and later the Temple). This information gave us the idea that Jesus can and would one day give warning to the Jewish people that they appeared to be giving more importance to the temple than to the God of the Temple.

The structure symbolized that the Jews held dear, much the same way as the Americans honour their flag, because all that it symbolized for some orthodox Jews, the temple mount of Jerusalem is very sacred and more important than anything else even today.

There are 50 chapters of scripture, in parts completely devoted to the tabernacle. While studying the Bible, we come across a principle known as the "Principle of international selection." The selection of 50 chapters would tell us how much importance was attached

to them and also the pivotal role they played in the minds of Jews.

Some aspects regarding the coming of “Messiah” were illustrated in accomplishing salvation and it is said God did not want to dwell in the presence of the sinful people. Many books were written by the noted authors about the typifying of the tabernacle. The people began to think about time and place. Then details of the structure of them and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

It is a prelude to understand about the future temple of Israel, their importance, their history, their destruction and their reason. As we could understand the whole story to some extent, so far it begins with the Tabernacle. We will see how the Tabernacle, prefigured the coming “Messiah” and the significance of replacing the Tabernacle with magnificent temple.

THE TRIBULATION TEMPLE

The first Temple is commonly referred to the “Tabernacle Temple”. According to some references found in Mathew and Revelation, it is believed that some type of Temple would be built for the “Antichrist” and declare him to be God. That Antichrist period is known as the period of Tribulation.

In this connection there are two serious questions.

1) Where should the Temple be built ?

Any one who is familiar with Jewish history would certainly say Jerusalem as the suitable place for the Jewish temple and that should be on the temple mount of Jerusalem.

The second question needs some clarification. It is

2) How can that happen when the Philistines were controlling the temple mount?

This is during this period, it is quite but natural they would not allow for the construction of the temple under any circumstances and also they don’t allow the Jewish people to pray or to worship their God. This question is really un-understandable. We find today the Muslim’s dome of the Rock just at the centre of the temple mount.

In addition to that, the “E L Aqsa” Mosque is located at the South Western wall of the temple mount. The mosque but not the dome is considered by the Muslims as the most “Sacred place”.

So, when the buildings settled peacefully on the mount, how can the Jewish people think of building their own temple on the temple mount? Several members with various stories discussed this complicated issue. Some elders said that the Muslims Mosque might be destroyed through an earth quake or war. There is some fault geographically that runs under

the mosque, and the damage done to that was caused by tremors occurred many a time in the past. Some people expected an Iraqi sent missile would fall on the mount and destroy both the buildings of Muslims during Gulf war.

There is another probable idea also that is lingering in the minds of some important people that a treaty would be advisable and signed between the Muslims and the Jewish people to divide and share the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish people try to get the temple mount as part of their portion under any circumstances. If this happens peacefully, then the Jewish people can have their Temple built on that mount probably in Northern side, in alignment with the Eastern Gate.

With this adjustment, there would not be any problem for both of them. According to the information available, some Jewish scholars and archeologists believed that its original place was the mount itself. In spite of all these probabilities, time would solve all those problems.

Millennial temple: This might be called the final temple that we have to confirm. This is aptly described in “Ezekiel” and also in the book of Revelation (in chapter 21). This is referred by the most eminent scholars of the Bible. What ever might be the argument of different people, there is a strong argument went on and finally decided. There is only one temple that is mentioned in Ezekiel but there is no temple mentioned in the Revelation.

After Jesus removes the curse from the earth, He would establish the kingdom of righteousness for 1000 years during the period of millennium or thousand years. Christ would also establish the temple as Ezekiel mentioned in his book and it is from this temple Jesus would rule His kingdom. The temple of Jesus would not be like that of the temple of king Herod which had multi court system (court of the gentiles, the women, for Israel and the priests).

The temple of Jesus would be with inner and outer courts. The outer court is 825 square feet. It's wall will be 10 feet high and 10 feet thick. It will have three gates, one on the eastern wall, the second on the western wall and the third will be on the southern wall. In the outer walls, there must be a good number of rooms useful for preparing sacrifices and other rooms for dining purpose etc.

The inner court is about 175 feet, which will be also with three gates corresponding to the three gates of outer gate. The temple itself is in the same size of the temple of king Solomon which was not extremely a large structure.

It is not yet mentioned the ark of “Covenant veil”, the altar of incense “Menorah”. As narrated, these are all symbols for the person and the ministry of the “Messiah”. Jesus Christ will be present finally in the temple. So there is no need of the symbols presence.

However there is “Brazen altar” and sacrifices (Ezekiel 43:13-21, 45:13-40, 24) and here is a clear question why the sacrificial system is re introduced.

In this context, Israel commentators of the Bible provide several possible and probable explanations. All of them have merit and at the same time, all of them may be the answer.

People who were born during that period had to be saved by grace and faith in the blood-shed atoning the death of Christ. But such belief would not be easy. Jesus Christ as a king would rule the kingdom with a “rod of iron”.

In His reign people would not be allowed to do wrong and if they do so the punishment would be very severe; people who lived their lives under the most powerful king, should not behave like the king who once put Jesus to death, and shed his blood by some wicked men. It was really difficult for them to believe. What must have happened to the “Messiah” as it was for the Old Testament people of that period believed what the prophet said. But they had no idea what would happen to the Messiah in future (Psalms 22 chapter; Isaiah 52,53 chapters).

But the Bible does not provide a concrete or clear reason for the sacrifice system is re-introduced during the millennial kingdom. This is, no doubt the millennial temple would be destroyed at the end of thousand years. When eternity begins all the old things will be set aside and new things introduced.

* * *

QUEEN OF SHEBA AND KING SOLOMON

The queen of Sheba heard many things about king Solomon as the wisest and richest man on the earth and the monarch of Israel. Some wonderful stories of Israel's king filled the court of queen of Sheba. The country of queen Sheba is the present "Yemen". The name and fame of the king echoed in her ears and so, she decided to meet him personally at any cost. Her kingdom was about 1000 miles to Jerusalem. Her country was not only wealthy, but also advanced in irrigation techniques and hydraulic power.

The people of Sheba were mentioned in the Bible as "Sabeans" whose routine work was building of dams up to about 60 feet high and also digging the wells and those wells contributed to them to thrive in their life time with agriculture and in raising most wonderful gardens. The country was abundantly blessed, with the goodness and mercy of God. The country was filled with enormous quantity of precious stones, incense and exotic spices. Those riches made the queen a popular trading partner and her country enjoyed lucrative caravan trade.

Therefore in 905 B.C. the camels of the queen of Sheba became frequent travellers up to "Incense Road" that connected Arabia with Egypt and Indians along the "Sea of Reeds" (Red sea) to Israel. Though she had been enjoying life happily with all her riches and other facilities in her country, she did not want to remain idle. As she heard the greatness of king Solomon, she wanted to come and meet him. It was really far away in those days. She wished to see with her own eyes, how far God blessed him as the king of Israel, God's chosen people. So she started the journey of 1000 miles to Jerusalem with so much hope and anxiety. Her visiting of Jerusalem means seeking of God's people and their king.

The queen thought, she was fortunate enough to have associated herself with king Solomon, a famous king on the earth in his time. He became a talk not only in middle eastern world, but also in "Asia and Africa" regarding his immense wealth, wisdom and fame. She wished to take that name and fame to her country by meeting him. She also heard about the

God of Solomon who blessed him abundantly. When the other monarchs attributed their greatness either to armies or to their brilliance, Solomon attributed his greatness and prosperity to God only.

The believers would be seeking a greater work with the Lord Jesus Christ and the queen of Sheba also pointed out to us in the course of direction. Her interests were political and economic considerations. She derived more inspiration and enthusiasm from the decisive connections of Solomon.

In this context the believers are advised to follow whole heartedly the church programmes, Christian books and hymns music: then pray with more attention to the following.

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrew 12:2).

The queen of Sheba finally reached Jerusalem with a big train of camels that carried a variety of spices, a huge quantity of gold and precious stones. She brought all those things because she came to visit the most renowned God’s man on the planet. So, what she brought to the king were the best; as she should not come to such a man with empty hands. The very big train that accompanied her was beyond comprehension as no body would expect such enormous loading of baggage. Many servants also followed her as her security and to take care of the riches she was bringing to the king.

But it is not mentioned in the Bible how king Solomon received her. As soon as she reached Jerusalem, she was ready with a flood of questions in order to clarify all her doubts. She travelled such a long distance only to find out truth. She must have naturally a pretty and beautiful court with magnificent royal palace. But when she saw the premises of king Solomon she thought she did not even dream of it.

She was really shocked to see the splendour and glory of the king. His court was more sophisticated and affluent. As a matter of fact her court was also as pretty and beautiful like the king’s. But as a woman she could not but praise his court and other things. “The main reason for her coming to Jerusalem was to seek what she heard about the king of Israel and his association with Israel God. She came all the way with true heart and with good intention. When she found everything she heard was quite true, she was overwhelmed with joy and at the same time stunned.

In like manner, believers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who are looking for greater relationship with God, must approach Him with true heart and honest intentions: So there would not be any disappointment. The lord God would certainly shower upon the believers His spiritual blessings which they never expect. “Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”

(Ephesians 1:3).

The queen of Sheba obediently told the king she had the first hand information of what she heard in her country was proved true. She came, she saw and she conquered. As the queen found out truth as first hand information, the believers too must seek God by themselves by coming closer to him through prayers and by reading the Bible regularly. She was telling about the kind hearted king, who always tried to do something to the satisfaction of all. She also knew about hard hearted kings, whose kingdoms would produce discontentment and bitterness.

She was happy and excited, how the king was treating his people primarily his servants of the court. In her rapturous excitement she proclaimed that “Happy are thy men happy are thy servants”. She was also a monarch like Solomon and had her own beautiful court and other establishments. Still she could not but praise him and his lucky servants. As she understood the servants were fortunate enough to be under him because no other king would give that kind of treatment to servants. So she said “If I were not be a queen and had to serve some one else, it would be king Solomon”.

She praised the servants again and again for their life and treatment the king was giving to them made them happy. Satisfied with the environments and the treatment given to her by the king, she had a lurking desire to spend a few more days with the king, but she was also a queen. She could not be absent for a long time from her country. She had a great ability to penetrate into the situation and comprehend deeper importance. The affluence of kings court, and affluent ruling of God’s people Israel were the result of character and wisdom of the king according to her estimation.

She continued to exhibit her appreciation about the kingdom and her reception. She was of the opinion that Solomon’s wealth and wisdom were developed from something greater than himself and that must be God’s gift. So, she said “Blessed be thy Lord, thy God which delighted in thee to set on the throne of Israel”.

Some kings would come to the throne by using their army, some others through inheritance. But king Solomon came to the throne through the mercy of God. Like some other kings he became king by inheritance from his father “David”. Solomon had actually elder brothers who would have claimed for the throne. But his occupation of the throne was no other than God’s gift. God must have some specific purpose when he selected Solomon as king from his family: She said.

She was quick and intelligent enough to notice the critical truth. She could not stop recognizing and praising God’s love for His chosen people, Israel. She said, “Because the Lord loved Israel, forever, therefore, made him king to do judgment and justice”. It is really

strange that the queen of Sheba had her appreciation that God loved Israel forever and the sovereign Lord of the universe made everlasting covenant with Israel.

According to the words uttered by the queen she appeared to have read the “Hebrew scroll” of the day that would indicate such truth God must have worked out providentially the proclamation of God’s love for His people. The queen being a heathen monarch seemed to have been recorded for ages a witness of this undeniable fact. Those who are really interested to know God better must acknowledge and understand that all good things would come to people from God only. There might be some men and women of God, who were appointed in our lives to guide and help us to develop ourselves mentally and spiritually.

The queen of Sheba was continuously praising the way of life and his noble qualities. She gave her first priority to God and gave her testimony by saying, “He is the originator of all blessings”. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the father”* (James 1:17).

As a token of appreciation, the queen of Sheba responded to all she experienced in king Solomon’s court by showing and giving extra-ordinary and expensive gifts to king Solomon. They were one hundred and twenty talents of gold, the spices of huge quantity and some precious stones. For the purpose of record 120 talents of gold is equal to more than four tones (4 tones). She came fully prepared and brought best of her nation to the king. There was no decree or declaration that she should bring such huge quantity to the king.

In return, the king also gave what she desired. This was not a new experience to the king, as many kings and other dignitaries visited king Solomon. One important thing we can find in the queen is that her attitude towards God. What she showed should be ours also. God had brought salvation to us through Jesus Christ and we must respond to God for that by offering to Him every best of us since the queen also offered her best to the king. Even God seemed to have felt happy at her behaviour and rewarded her for the actions.

Many people suffer for their faith. Still there is a sweetness, and a richness, that comes from walking with God completely and bringing pleasure to him. We must always look to God only so that He would provide us our day to day needs. *“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him”* (proverbs 16:7).

She was greatly impressed by the king of Israel. She had done everything her best and honoured the king. She herself had been honest and gracious, benevolent, good understanding and thankfulness. After everything was done to her utmost satisfaction the queen left Jerusalem with heart felt contentment and with sweet memories. Her trip to Jerusalem caused a radiant Sheba and fact. A glow of Solomon the splendour of his court, and the goodness of his

God, planted firmly in her mind.

For the believers of today, there is good news to find God with their pure and perfect heart and with unchanged faith. In this context, let us see what God has said in John, *"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall seek what ye will and it shall be done unto yours"* (John 15:7). That does not mean God will give us whatever we desire. It is cleverly said the word "abide" is mentioned two times in these lines. Which means we can humbly request God what ever we need, but granting our needs in his choice.

The visit of the queen of Sheba to Jerusalem, to the court of king Solomon was undoubtedly an extraordinary and most significant one. This appeared that Jesus Christ Himself seemed to have arranged this historic "Episode" in the history of Israel. This meeting gave scope to the queen to understand what king Solomon was. God is speaking here with certain doubt filled and unbelieving character.

Jesus said *"The queen of South (Sheba) shall rise up his judgement with the generations and shall condemn for she came from the utter most part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and behold a greater than Solomon is here"* (Matthew 12:42).

Jesus Christ too commented and praised the queen exceedingly even after one thousand years passed. He referred to the story to prove that the queen of Sheba was a real person and her trip to Jerusalem was a real story. But more than that Jesus was expecting of a heathen, though dignified and gracious woman to shame the Jewish leadership of His day. That is to say, the so called Jewish leaders did not have the knowledge and faith of that heathen woman the queen of Sheba had. She left all her comforts in the royal palace, and travelled 1000 miles in the Arabian desert just in order to look for the wisdom and splendour of God's man king Solomon.

As a king he was the greatest man on the earth. But he was just a man. He was also mortal like us. Jesus Christ's message to His fellow Israel in this connection was quite clear and appropriate. She, being a queen, travelled all the way to meet just a man like herself. When Jesus travelled within Israel among His own people like scribes and pharisees they did not acknowledge him as their "Messiah". The gentle queen of Sheba acknowledged God whole heartedly, where as the so called religious leaders of Israel vehemently denied him as their Saviour. God judged her and rewarded her duly through king Solomon. Jesus Christ was frustrated by the Jewish leadership.

Some of the believers may also frustrate him through their peculiar way of life. We must understand undoubtedly that Jesus is greater than Solomon or any other man on the earth. So all the Christians should acknowledge Him as our Saviour and worship Him in spirit and

in faith. The queen was just a woman who anxiously looked for “Divine” connection and travelled far away in those days; To prove the reports about him, his people and about their monarch.

The story of queen of Sheba reminds us to strive always to reach for deeper things of God, whether they are seeking for His wisdom or for our greater relationship with Him. If the queen could go to such a height to satisfy her curiosity concerning Israel God and their king, then the believers also must understand our God better than itself. The story of queen of Sheba, and her understanding of our God being a heathen woman is worthy to be remembered by all of us.

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QUEEN OF SHEBA & KING SOLOMON



MESSIANIC PROPHECIES AND FULFILMENT

THE LAMB LIKE MESSIAH AND THE SUFFERING MESSIAH.

The word of God warned "study to shew thyself approved unto the God", (2 Tim. 2:15). These words showed to challenge us to investigate the claims of the "Bible". After all, the Old Testament made some Phenomenal predictions and many of them were focused on a Messiah, who would come to redeem mankind. Those who wish to find the truth would examine the Old Testament prophecies very closely.

Millennia ago, God inspired the Old Testament Prophets and New Testament pen-men and promised to the nation of Israel that He would bring "Theocratic Kingdom". He also clearly pointed out that this Kingdom would be possible only when the Messiah or Christ would come to the earth. So far we have seen it is confirmed that "Yeshua" (Christ) can only fulfill the Messianic prophecies which are found in the Scripture. When we have to recognize Jesus is the only one who can inaugurate the promised Kingdom to Israel and finally to the world, Jesus after coming again, clean up all the mess and dirt which Satan and his henchmen had produced and made the world perfect.

The hope of Messiah who would become interactive Bible study was focused on the prophecy of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah. In the study we would also delve into the New Testament, to reveal to the humanity how the prophecies were fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ the valuable and thorough study of all this would certainly the prophecies of the Scripture and how they were pointed out towards the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Christ would banish all the followers of Satan and bind him in the lake of fire in the bottomless pit; then He might remain there perpetual eternal damnation. Jesus Christ then

by sitting on the throne of David, rule the world including Israel. This is the only noteworthy information in history that the entire world would experience abundant blessings that God has in store for His children.

"John Seeth, Jesus coming unto him and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the 'sin' of the world" (John 1:29) why was Jesus being a Jew claiming to be the promised Messiah of Israel referred to as a lamb?". If we go back to Adam and Eve to the Garden of Eden, God's mercy and kindness, His Holiness, Righteousness and Justice became evident when he made provisions for their sins by providing animal blood sacrifices.

At the time of Noah, when God's anger took the toll on earth on every living species expect Noah's family and animal species were kept for future. The first thing Noah did after disembarkment was to build an altar and made some animal scarifices unto the Lord (Genesis 8:20) God's acceptance of animal sacrifices was confirmed and became basis for establishing "Noah Covenant". Then we have the example of the faithful and trustworthy Abraham in obedience offered his only begotten son Isaac, as a sacrifice to God, though he loved him so much.

What truth can we assess from these examples?

- 1) First in keeping with the theme of redemption, which is spelled out for the first time man sinned and God's justice, holiness and righteousness had to be satisfied in order to restore mankind spiritually.
- 2) The second point is - God restored the mankind to accomplish the task through animal sacrifice.
- 3) The third point is that Abraham prophesized the first prophetic glimpse of what God was going to do only through his beloved son 2000 years later on the same mountain ridge of Moriah (Genesis 22:81-3).

If you believe Jesus as "Christ" the son of living God, then you would become qualified to embrace the promised Messiah of the Old Testament.

According to him, whatever laws were written in the Law of Moses called "Torah" must be fulfilled, written in the prophecies and the Psalms concerned Jesus must be fulfilled.

It is necessary that one must try to understand the meaning of certain words like "Messiah" and "Christ". To tell the truth, they are synonyms. They differ in their origin as they are from different languages. The word "Messiah" is taken from the Hebrew language. Messiah means, "The Anointed One". Then the word "Christ" is from Greek language. "Christos" also means "The Anointed One". This is explained in some scriptures like (Psalms 2:2) when David spoke about future when some kings and rulers might refer against Lord, God and the anointed Messiah.

In the Book of Daniel (9:26) Daniel prophesied about the time of the anointed one and His appearance. According to Daniel of three score and two that Messiah be called off....We can find in the New Testament interchange of those two words. When Andrew was bubbling over with excitement after his personal encounter with Jesus said to his brother Simon Peter, "We have found the Messiah which is being interpreted as Jesus".

These two words were merged together once again, in the woman of the well in Samaria engaged in a talk with Jesus, regarding life changing water conversation with Jesus. In the midst of eye opening event the woman made the following statement "I now that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ" (John 4.25). For that statement Christ replied "I that speaketh unto thee am He".

The term "Messiah" was used as a noun in Old Testament as discussed above. Then as a verb indicating an action to be taken, an activity had to be done of anointing God's servants with oil for the office of prophets, priests or kings. The main purpose of the anointed people that were chosen by God himself was for a specific ministry. This is considered to be one of the loftiest prophetic passages providing a glimpse into the duty of the Messiah. It reveals that He as God would be elevated to a position beyond all others.

In 1500 years up to first century A.D. millions of lambs were brought to the altar of sacrifice. Then the Messianic Law was handed down by "Jehovah" (God) to Israel that there should be animal sacrifices to him. Then that system was given a prominent place in mount Sinai and God also instituted the Passover (Ex. 12:1-4). At the center of the redemption process a miraculous thing is the Lamb. It is the God's Passover. According to this process each Israel family was to sacrifice a Lamb and it was to be done throughout all generations. It is quite understandable to any one to function as substituted for a sacrificed "Sin" offering "a Lamb which is brought to the slaughter. As an individual it has to suffer much."

Accordingly, the suffering those who turn to be none other than the Messiah who was predicted from 700 to 1100 years in advance and that was mentioned in the "Hebrew Scriptures". The suffering seems to be much greater than anything and even fathomable when we consider to whom that would happen.

In the early scriptures, God revealed that the Messiah would be an Agent and His purpose was to remove the damage done to earth. The system of the world especially physically and spiritually was bankrupt humanity. In such imperfect conditions, ultimately Messiah would come to the rescue of people. But upon bedrock prophecy of hope, the entire Old Testament flourished with and expanded upon the theme of God's future earthly kingdom, His king and humankind redemption. This stream of details would flow into the ocean, rich in prophecies that became more focused from "Genesis to Malachi".

Many of the interesting Messianic prophecies were directly related to Israel nation and to the Jewish people. And through these people only the Messiah would be humanly introduced. The kingdom that Jesus is going to reign should be established in Jerusalem. Then in Jerusalem as the king of Israel, he would sit upon the throne of David and rule as King of kings and Lord of lords over the entire world. After this happens according to the prophecy, Israel and the rest of the world would experience the everlasting true peace and harmony, righteousness and justice.

As mentioned in scriptures, the age of the kingdom was brought, about by the Messiah. And the same scripture revealed about the suffering of the Messiah for the sake of humankind. The later part of the Messianic prophecy was dealt with redemption process, which was overshadowed by the Old Testament sacrificial system. This restored neutrality enables mankind to be restored then spiritually alive and finally enter into a relationship with God for everlasting life. Since the time of John the Baptist, (for 2000 years) people had been anticipating the arrival of the Messiah and from that time onwards the spirit grew immensely in the hearts of the people.

In the first century AD people came to know that the prophecies would be fulfilled with the appearance of Messiah, that reached a "crescendo" and the Messianic fervour the impression that Messiah's coming was sure and certain and that became a common belief among all Jews. Then popular chronology had become an important "element" to explain the strong hope and the anticipation of Messiah and his kingdom. It is likely to be produced by the realization that the fulfillment was near at hand.

It was quite evident in the New Testament, and in the book of "Zachariaiah" then in the Gospel of "Luke" finally in the statement of Samaritan woman at the well along with many other Samaritans (4:25-42). Many thousands of other Jewish people were very enthusiastic to hear and receive the proclamation of the Messiahship of Jesus. Mathew's main purpose was to produce and present Jesus as the Messiah to the fellow Jews continuously referred back to the prophecies of the Old Testament to show the humanity that Jesus had fulfilled all the prophecies.

When we look for credentials or evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah to the Israel and saviour of the world, this is necessary to compare the prophecies concerning the lamb that the Messiah who suffered bitterly for his people with the person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah of New Testament. Our thanks are due to His willingness to become the sacrificed Lamb of God on our behalf (Isaiah 53:7).

Let us consider the wonderful statements made by John the Baptist, and some important Jews who sent some priests and levites to examine whether Jesus was the real Messiah or not. Some noted scholars were trying to prove the Messiahship of Jesus through mathematical

calculations and demonstrated that Jesus would only fulfill all the Messianic prophecies. It is really very enthusiastic to know that the fulfillment of all the precise prophecies were a mere coincidence.

Out of 300 Messianic prophecies that were written, 48 were confirmed on examination. We find that any one man can fulfill all the "98 prophecies". Those prophecies concerning the Messiah were not only fulfilled in Jesus but also literally scores must have been fulfilled in detail.

There are so many purposes of Messianic prophecies, out of them four are chosen for consideration:

- 1) To prepare the way for the Messiah so that he might appear. Then he would be identified by a comparison of prediction and fulfillment. This will be the same today, as it was for those Jewish people of the first century.
- 2) The Second one is to testify the sovereignty of God over the future fulfilled Messianic prophecy revealed that "Jehovah" the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is indeed the one and true God of the Universe.
- 3) It is a source of confident hope and what all he promised would come as he declared.
- 4) The fourth and final one is that the fulfilled Messianic prophecies would give strong support to the claim that the scriptures are the very "word of God".

* * *

MOSES, THE SERVANT OF GOD

The word "Moshe" is taken from Hebrew language. In English it is Moses which means 'drawn from water'. Until he reached the age of forty years, he was brought up in the royal family. Just at that time, he happened to go out of his palace, and came to know that he belonged to a Hebrew slave family and accidentally killed an Egyptian also, when no one was there. The next day, he went out and saw two Hebrews were quarrelling. He said to the man who was actually wrong "why do you strike your own fellow?" For that he replied in angry tone, "who made you ruler and judge over us?" and also added "do you mean to kill me as you killed an Egyptian?" Moses was afraid of the remarks made by a Hebrew and thought if that news would go to the notice of Pharaoh he might kill him.

Immediately, Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and went to the land of Median. He sat by the well of Median. Just at that time came to that well the seven daughters of Jethro a priest to draw water for their sheep. Those ladies some how liked Moses and took him to their house. He finally married Zipporah the eldest daughter of that Median priest. He got a son also and his name was Gershom. But Moses felt he was an alien in a foreign land.

It is said the middle life of a person would be between forty and sixty five years. Same is the case with Moses also. When people reach that age some cherished dreams become untrue. In a sense middle age is the foreteller of death and death is the ultimate close of doors. It is no wonder so many people at mid-life age begin a kind of fanatic grasping for life and fulfillment. In that middle age, it is really funny if a woman begins to dress like a teenaged girl. It is also the man of that age buying a new car and participate in car racing like a twenty year old man.

Every human being has middle life crisis. So Moses too had such problem in his middle age. He was born to a family of Jewish slaves and it was certain his life would be also the

same because all his people were slaves for four hundred and thirty years. But only with the providence of God, he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, when he was three months old. It was not an ordinary family that adopted him. But it was the family of king Pharaoh. He enjoyed the best of everything in that palace. But the Bible says 'there came a time when he had grown up'.

But the writer of Exodus did not say sufficiently, how much old Moses was, only in the later period, we found in the book of Acts "that Moses was forty years old" (Acts 7.23)

Moses went out of the palace to see what was happening to his ancestral people the Jews. Then he firmly decided to stay with them, as they were working as forced labourers. Moses was restless enough, to be susceptible to an idealism that had been buried for years. Moses in his earlier stage preoccupied with wealth and power, but in his mid life he began to wander and questioned himself, whether wealth and power were worth his life. If any one becomes a victim to his inner crisis and when he comes to the mid life, it is naturally a kind of uncontrollable period.

It is said, "Moses, God's law giver is dead or Moses, God's miracle worker is dead or Moses, God's statesman is dead, or Moses, the God's Judge of the Israel is dead" When God himself wrote the "Epitaph" of Moses he said "Moses my servant is dead" (Joshua 1.2). "And Moses was very faithful in all his house as a servant" (Hebrew 3.5). God's words to Joshua were very valuable to him. At the end of his life he called all the leaders of Israel and gave them all needful information regarding the administration. This was needed because many of them were worshipping heathen gods of the land from which 'Jehovah' had brought them.

God did not look for great Evangelists or preachers, or teachers or businessmen, but he looked for men and women who must be good servants. Whose lives would be like a clay in the potters hands, Moses had all required qualifications, and God fastened him for His own purposes. The first forty years of Moses life were spent at the backside of the desert and yet, they were not wasted years. He learnt discipline, how to obey to the elders. As God was going to select him for a purpose, he could have the necessary qualifications. The lesson he learnt was never diminished, during the wilderness, wanderings in the next 40 years. The spectacle Moses behind was the bush that was burning but not consuming.

The sanctity of the occasion was quite abnormal. Out of that burning bush, the voice of God was heard calling, "Moses! Moses! put off thy shoes, from off thy feet, for the place whomever thou standest is holy ground!! Here, we have a beautiful comparison. On one hand the bush was burning, but the flames were not consumed. On the other, the Hebrew race was enslaved in Egypt. The timing of the revelation was quite perfect. The Hebrews not yet became a nation and in this context Moses must have understood three basic facts.

- 1) The people to whom God was sending Moses, wherein he would face the fiery burning flames of affliction.
- 2) The Hebrews must be miraculously preserved.
- 3) God would speak out of that nation to the people of the world.

Moses was hesitating about his capabilities of great importance. So, he said who am I that I should go unto pharaoh that I should bring forth children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodius 3.11). But God knew about Moses and his worth and so He reprimanded him and said "I will be with thee' I have sent thee - Moses was to be a servant".

He called all the Hebrews and told them The God of your fathers sent me, His name is " I am that I am." The meaning of those words is God is self exist and He can provide everything that His children need. That was a noted departure of Israel from the Egyptian worship of many gods.

Among the Egyptian deities, "hhamam" was the god of "Nile's", "hapi" and "hegt" were the goddesses of frogs related to fertility. "Seb" was the god of earth, "alatchat" was the god of "fly", "serpia" was the god of the protector of the people from locusts. They had gods associated with bulls and cows, gods for healing, moon gods, agricultur gods and even Pharoah was worshipped as a god. So, to that kind of invironment, Moses was sent to bring the children of Israel to worship one true and living God.

The Polytheism of Egypt was defeated and that was the first thing God said to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. "Thou shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). The caravan that took the travel towards east from Egypt would take three roads to canaan. From the three the most direct road was the "via Moris" called "the way of the sea", the second route was called "the way of Sheer", which would cross the Sinai peninsula to Southern Canaan, and connect with the route that would go to north through Beersheba and Hebron to Jerusalem. The third route would cross the peninsula from the Gulf of Sueze to Ezion Geber located at the head of the gulf of Aqaba.

But Moses chose none of these routes because of too many people. He selected the way that led towards the sea of Reeds (Red Sea) crossing of the Sea of Reeds was a salvation to the Israel. We have to sympathise with king Pharoah, because he underestimated the capacity of Moses and the power of God. At the same time, he over estimated his power and followed Israel with 600 chariots and able charioteers, but the sea of Reeds swallowed all of them.

The Israel were quite safe on the other side of the sea, and understood the redeeming power of God. It is really interesting and more fascinating to note here for the first 2000 years of human history there are no references to singing anywhere in its scripture. Instead

of in words, the Israelites expressed their gratitude by singing a song in praise of God. It was only the children of God, can sing such a song. It was the song of the soul "that is set free." The total number of men, women and children that came out of Egypt were estimated about (1.5 million). They were slaves and mixed multitude. They knew only immorality and idolatry of Egypt.

They did not know about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They had to be educated about the God that redeemed them. All these points made God to give them the Ten Commandments (meaning ten words in Hebrew) on the mount of Sinai. Those laws became the foundation of Israelis, moral, spiritual and social conditions. Since their liberation from Slavery God had been faithful to them; He guided them and provided them their needs. He even brought them to the threshold of the land of canaan.

But Moses pained much, when God told him, that he should not enter the promised land. The reason for that was, when God asked him to speak with the rock, so that, water would come out of it, Moses hit the rock hard twice. This incident made God angry with Moses.

Did that warrant God's harsh punishment? God was justified in punishing Moses, because the rock Moses hit hard twice was no other than Christ himself (1 Corinthians 10:4)

Moses through anger, as the Israel had irrelated him at every stage, and violated the divine symbolism.

Moses tried for all human beings in changing the direction of human history. Christ suffered only once for the sins of the world. His death was infinite, which will never be repeated. And Moses must have been due to anger violated the Divine Symbolism. His angry mood must have made him to strike at the rock twice. The result of that was God did not allow him to enter the promised land of his forefathers. Moses knew, that the Lord was a covenant keeping God.

But Moses reached the pinnacle in changing the direction of human history. He was frequently misunderstood and often abused. He died before reaching his dream. He proved his great love for his own people. He penned the first five books of the Old Testament. He was neither a president, a king, nor a military general, but only a humble servant of God. He knew the popular saying from Psalms."

I had rather be a door keeper in the house of my Lord (God) than to dwell in the tent of wilderness (Psalms 84:10).

Now it is quite evident Moses was a man of mountains. Mount Sinai and the mount Nebo were his climbed mountains. So he was a mountain of a man.

"What can we learn from the character of Moses?"

It is our responsibility and privilege to be the servants of our eternal God - who was a creator and sustainer of the universe. Let us have the privilege of doing something for the glory of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

MOSES HAD FIVE EXCUSES

Moses had reached the pinnacle by his extraordinary performance of bringing the Israel from bondage in Egypt and for that wonderful work God called him "Moses is my servant." This achievement made him to remain in History as well as in the Bible as one of the top most characters. In spite of all that he had five excuses in his character.

They are - (1) Identity, (2) Ignorance, (3) Unbelief, (4) Inadequate, (5) Non-availability.

Moses spent first 40 years as a prince in the royal palace of Pharaoh and the next 40 years with a Median priest Jethro. He married his eldest daughter also and spent his time in herding the sheep of Jethro his father-in-law.

One day while he was feeding the sheep in the wilderness, he saw a burning bush which was not common because the bushes sometimes catch fire by lightning strike of spontaneous combustion from extreme heat. But the most uncommon thing in this bush appeared to be burning but not consuming. This unusual sight made Moses curious to go to that place and find out what it might have been. The most significant thing from that bush was God happened to speak with Moses some important matter. But Moses had problem, he had five excuses.

1. His Identity:

To start with, Moses did not know who he was, except a shepherd-man. When he was asked to bring Israelites from Egypt who were in bondage, he said 'who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?' Forty years earlier every one knew who he was. He was a prince. He remained in the palace of Pharaoh first forty years. One day, he came out of the palace, killed an Egyptian by accident and fled from that place and spent his second forty years period with Jethro his father-in-law by feeding his sheep at the backside of the wilderness as a common man. But after killing the Egyptian he thought, he would be the deliverer of Israel from bondage. So when God asked him to go and meet Pharaoh to free Israel, he doubted his value and his ability. This feeling of inability prompted him to ask God, "Who am I to do such things?"

For that question, God answered, He was not bothered, who he was, but he would be with him. That was the main point of the burning bush which was not consuming. There is something special about the bush God wanted to show Moses, that any bush or instrument or person can be the supernatural when God is in it one must have confidence on one's own self regarding his abilities and values. That is the main point and it is no problem as

long as God is with us.

2. His Ignorance:

First Moses had an identity problem "who am I" and next he had an ignorance problem. "Who are you?" If we look into the Biblical history God had been silent for 430 years, and Israel were exposed to many Gods in Egypt under such circumstances Moses was sent to them. He told them he was sent by their God. Immediately the Israel questioned Moses "which God?" So Moses requested God to show Himself to Israel "who He was." Ignorance is not a serious and difficult problem if we have a teachable spirit.

Then God responded to the request of Moses and revealed Himself, His identity to Moses by saying "I am that I am and I am that sent you to them" when God said "I am that I am" the answer to that expression is God, is anything and everything we need. The Lord continued to tell Moses, His saying "I am" means He would provide His people. We are lucky and fortunate enough as the God who spoke with Moses is the same God that He will speak with us also whenever we want. So, if we are in difficulties or problems this "I am" certainly would come to our rescue. The ignorance of Moses, regarding the power of God, can be forced on certain occasions in the Bible.

3. His Unbelief:

Moses said to God that the Israelites would not listen to him at all. This complaint against them showed that Moses did not have belief in the words, power and greatness of God. It is said even unbelief is not a problem to God if we are open and have a desire in our minds to believe. Then, so as to strengthen the faith of Moses, God happened to put a number of questions before him. One of his commands was to throw the "rod" to the ground so that it would become a snake and this incident strengthened the faith of Moses. When God asked him to change water into blood with the help of the rod, his faith was confirmed. Therefore, unbelief is not a problem to God, if we are openly responsive to the truth and God will build our faith.

4) His Inadequacy:

This inadequacy can be found in Moses when he had a speech about impediment. So, he felt inadequate. Who would listen and take seriously a man who suffered then and God responded with immense patience. In this connection we had again the incident of the burning bush with a reference to it God says "any old bush will do as long as I am in it".

But God told Moses, he would be always with him. So, his speech problem is no problem to God.

5. Non-Availability:

This non-availability is sometimes an unexpectable thing that happens without our knowledge. Moses asked God to send some one instead of himself to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites to the promised land. The request of Moses made God angry. In the first four excuses God was patient enough. But when Moses said "I am not available" it made God angry.

God advised Moses to use his brother Aaron, but still Moses was given all responsibilities and he was the sole agent. God wanted to receive glory in Egypt through Moses. The only requirement God wants from us is our availability that means, we must be always ready to attend the command of God.

* * *

MOSES THE SERVANT OF GOD



Moses at the Burning Bush



Moses with the Ten Commandments

PROPHET NEHEMIAH A LEADER FOR AGES

Nehemiah was called a leader, the right man at the right place and at the right time, who might be useful either to a group of people or to a nation. His services were badly needed in Judah, so he was called for that to help and guide people. The main help was construction of the wall around the city Jerusalem. He was also requested to mend the social and economic conditions of the nation.

Before going to the story, we must know the historical background of Judah. When Solomon was the king of Israel, the curse of God came upon him for his sins and the kingdom was divided into Northern Kingdom with 10 tribes and Southern Kingdom with two tribes. This division took place in 922 BC.

Then in 722 B.C. a vast area of the northern kingdom was captured by the Assyrians and many Israelites were taken from those places never to return.

The southern kingdom of Judah was also attacked by the king of Babylon and the people from Jerusalem and other places, were taken as exiles in three groups. In 606, the first group was taken. In 597, the second group and in 586 the third group. After about 50 years later a good number of exiled people returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel. He took the initiative for the reconstruction of the temple on the same foundation. But, there was some opposition for that among the Jews and only after 23 years, the contradiction was started. At that time Nehemiah was sent by the king of Medo-Persian empire. Again in 456 BC the second group of exiles returned to Jerusalem. This second group took the initiative for constructing to wall around the city of Jerusalem. But politically and spiritually there was none to take the responsibility. Added to that the returned exiles were facing some failures in their routine life and at every stage.

In such circumstances in 444 BC the Medo-Persian king Artaxerxes who was residing in his winter palace in Shushan happened to depute Nehemiah to Jerusalem to look after

the affairs. At that time Nehemiah was working under the Persian King. He was visited in the city by a group of people from Judah led by his brother Hanani. He immediately enquired about the returned exiles and the condition of Jerusalem. The remaining Israelites were also not happy. In addition to that the city wall was also broken into pieces and the gates were set on fire.

Nehemiah patiently heard the story of Jerusalem and wept for sometime. He continued mourning for some days, then fasted and finally prayed to God of Heaven. Nehemiah's zeal, his broken heartedness and enthusiasm, set for national repentance. Then he petitioned to the Lord with his humble prayer which was filled with depth, greatness and humility. His compassionate prayer was a master piece with intercession and confession. With intercession and confession, submission and solicitation he finished his prayer by asking God to grant him mercy in the presence of the King.

It was not recorded any where what had actually happened. But Nehemiah knows why a group of people came to him from Judah to see him. He was summoned by God for certain purpose, that is to be fulfilled by him only. He was a man of honour. He was the king's cup bearer. In the ancient days the position of a cup bearer was a lofty one. He would taste the food of the king also. Added to that the cup bearer must be a man of honesty and up-rightness. He was hundred percent honest and sincere in his work and character.

The pathetic news of the Holy City Jerusalem made him unhappy. In such helpless condition Nehemiah was deputed by God Himself to look into the affairs of Jerusalem. But he was an employee under the king of Persia as cup bearer. One day Nehemiah was found unhappy by the king with down east face and looked sorrow. Immediately the king asked him the reason for his sorrow. He became bold and explained to the king the miserable condition of Jerusalem in full details.

Nehemiah prayed to God briefly before he answered to the king. He requested the permission of the king to go to Jerusalem in order to help the people there. After acquiring a few more details the king gave permission to his most faithful servant Nehemiah with the designation of Governor to Judah. So, he set off to Judah with some army and horse-men.

Now we are introduced to some new faces who caused troubles to Nehemiah in every stage. They were Sanballat the 'Haronite' and Tobiah, the 'Ammonite'. They would later be joined by 'Yeshem' the 'Arabian', who heard that some one had come to rebuild Jerusalem, who made them extremely upset. Those three people seemed to be constant threat to Nehemiah's work.

Finally with the guidance of God Nehemiah arrived at Jerusalem and spent three days for thorough examination of the loss and damages done to the city. He took maximum care to supervising and assessing the condition. At the same time, he knew he was an outsider to

Jerusalem and to the people. So, he could not boldly say "I am God's man, listen to me". Instead of that he used his examination time also for prayer and formulated a specific plan to the people.

Nehemiah was ready after three days. First he wished to introduce himself to the people, and then encouraged them to build the wall. He assured Israel that the hand of God was upon him. He also said even the blessings of the heathen King of Persia and his moral support for rebuilding was there for Jerusalem. When the programme of rebuilding started the so called opposition members entered the fray. Samballat, Tobiah and Yesham laughed at them, stoned them even despised them. Such hostility and discouragement was great concern. He realized about scoffers and rebuffs and told them "The God of Heaven, He will prosper us". With the blessing of God and with faith the first crisis was somehow averted.

It was certainly God's hand that prompted to take part in the construction of the wall and a good number of Israelites took part in it. Nehemiah was really commissioned for rebuilding of the wall. The Jews also participated in the work as they felt it their moral binding. It seemed the Jewish people who participated got inspiration from God.

The opposition parties came again followed by the army of Samaria and Sanballat associated with that. Unfortunately, it was not a small gathering. This time the "Modus Operandi" was reduced. They said "What do these feeble Jews". The operation began ridiculing them, and it seemed ridiculing became fashion of the day and every servant of God must have to face that one day or other.

But Nehemiah did not like that kind of aggression or insult to go unchecked. Nehemiah looked at their looks, then at their faces and finally at the wall and prayed at God. He thought for a while, how to handle that kind of opposition and he came to a conclusion that such things could be "handled with prayer only". His opinion was that any problem could be solved through prayer and one could get the answer from Him. So, Nehemiah, leaders encouraged the builders of the wall, not to be afraid of the enemies, because God was with them and they should remember God. He reminded them time and again that God would fight on their behalf.

In such conditions, Israel suffered from plague and shortage of food. They borrowed money from Jewish brethren for high rate of interest. Nehemiah scolded the church members because they were not walking with God, because of the heathens that were with them, who were their enemies. His opinion was that if God was with Israel (Judah) and with their minds, then all the selfish people with their motives would flee. He told the people that they had enough headache from the unbelievers, why because of our own grief.

Nehemiah's logic and influence was quite different. The people at last wholeheartedly rejected their injustice towards his noble task. Then he began to advise all the spiritual leaders as what they had to do and follow. He came to know that the people were harshly treated

by the previous Governors and troubled them also. But Nehemiah as the Governor of Judah did not want to tax like that because he feared God. Why he became so generous and gracious towards the people was due to his reference to God Almighty.

Now Nehemiah did something remarkable to the Jewish community. But with this his problems were not lessened. The construction of the wall completed. But the three enemies Sanballat, Tobiah and Yeshem started troubling him. The fiendish three were trying to use new kind of tactics on the Jewish Governor (Nehemiah). They had some crooked plan against him. They insulted him also and called him to meet them. But he replied, he was doing some useful work and so it was not possible to come. They threatened a good number of times. He did not surrender to their threats. He went on doing his work without caring them because God was with him and guiding him in his noble work.

Along with these enemies another person by name "Shemaiah" who did not open his mouth all those days came out suddenly. He called for Nehemiah to meet him in the Temple. We don't have any information about him also, who he was. But it seemed he possessed some power even over the Governors. It is quite but natural the spiritual leaders had been put to suffering in all ages sometimes even by his own trusted people.

Nehemiah was doing his best to the Jewish community. He could complete the construction of the wall in 52 days. It appeared some business people were also supporting the opposition members like Tobiah. Nehemiah even received threatening letters. But he made sacrifices, cried and even prayed for the people. They in return instead of thanking Nehemiah and extending their hands they put him in troubles. So, he had to completely depend upon God for the solution.

The wall and gates were also completed and now the issue of security problem again they had. So Nehemiah appointed two persons for the security purpose. They were one was his brother Hananes and the second one was the ruler of the place "Hananiah". He was also faithful and God fearing man.

About his brother, we need not doubt, because he was his brother (Nehemiah) for honesty and sincerity. Then he picked up some more men to watch the city and to keep it always in guard. The church leaders were also going in wrong track because of the bad company they moved with.

In his routine work, the next step he wanted to take was to fill Jerusalem city with people because it had no population. And Nehemiah was very particular about the purity of the people. So he wished only Jewish race to be invited to the city, the descendants of Jewish ancestors. Some new buildings were constructed for spiritual activities among people. The leaders of the nation called the people to hear the law of Moses from Ezra who was a scribe and priest.

It is really surprising to note that the leaders were able to gather 50 thousand people at

a time and then Ezra the priest would stand on a high platform. First he thanked God for His blessings and then read out the law of Moses. The Israel could understand the solemnity of the moment and "bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground".

At the time of reading the law, Nehemiah graciously stepped aside and allowed Ezra to continue his work. As soon as it was done Nehemiah as the Governor would go to the platform and address the people. While addressing the Israel, he found some of them weeping. He thought they must have realized and repented for their long absence from God's kindness. But according to Nehemiah that day was a day to rejoice but not to weep. He also said "This day is Holy unto the Lord your God, mourn not, nor weep". He encouraged and asked the people to go and eat and enjoy. After encouraging and uplifting of Israel, Nehemiah became a "leader for the ages". Then gave them and to the world a verse for the ages "For the joy of the Lord is your strength." What a magnificent message for eternity?

The believers strength, hope, encouragement and consolidation were all derived from our joy of the Lord. We need nothing else. This inspiring proclamation of Nehemiah had resounded brilliantly through the corridors of time, encouraging and fortifying believers for centuries.

People gathered everyday and heard the Law of Moses. Further reading of the law books revealed "The Feast of Tabernacle" (or booths) was drawing nearer and Israel wanted to enjoy that holiday wholeheartedly and make the necessary preparations. To speak the truth, that celebration was a landmark in Israel's history, because since the days of Joshua, the son of a Nun, unto that day the children of Israel had not enjoyed such a function.

The gap was about 950 years. It was due to strong leadership of both Nehemiah and Ezra, who completely filled themselves to do according to the will of God. With that, they brought about an amazing accomplishment on His behalf.

Nehemiah had done wonderful things to his people as he was a master to do things according to the circumstances and he changed Israel a lot. Spiritually, one can say undoubtedly under the able leadership of Nehemiah, Israel were no doubt in extreme happiness. On 24th day of the month, being the day of festival - Israel gathered together this time with fasting - and with sack clothes and earth upon them. Then the people started mourning with action. Those who married foreigners have separated themselves. They believed that inter-marriages were a huge and destructive issue.

According to the book of law, the day would be divided into four parts, and each part allotted to certain work. The fourth part was allotted to confession and worship of the Lord their God. At the time of confession there were about eight Levitical priests, who performed their duty like controlling the gathering at the time of prayers. For them the prayers were 'fitting' chronicles of God's creation of the world selecting Israel as His people, then preserving

them in Egypt, giving of the law and sustaining them in the wilderness.

The Levites after the confession and prayer, recounted God's building of the people into a nation, only to have been into disobedience. After the wall was built, Jerusalem city looked more beautiful and ready for inhabitation. Nehemiah gave some more details about the settlement of the people. Then he gave a long list of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And the name of Jerusalem was heard far and near Nehemiah really led his people from the depth of despair into the heights of exaltation and that was a rare and wonderful moment.

It seemed Nehemiah lived in Jerusalem only for 12 years and did wonderful things to the city and left it for some time. But within a short time of his departure the old enemies took the control of the Temple. The Levites were not given their share, and everything was crumbled. Then Nehemiah came to know all this somehow. He returned to Jerusalem again and took charge of it and the Temple matters. First of all he removed Tabiah from his position. As a second step he made the rooms of the temple clean and purified. The third step, he started worship in the Temple. And the fourth step he reinstated the Levite priests. Nehemiah did not work for his name and fame, but to save Israel from falling into sin. He did everything to the best of his ability for betterment of Israel. and proved himself as the worthy leader for the second time.

During the absence of Nehemiah the Israel violated two things at some places. They did not observe the Sabbath day. They began to marry heathen women and given their daughters to them. Then Nehemiah told them that violation of Sabbath was nothing but destruction of Sabbath that would cause Israel for the judgement. He reminded Israel how their fathers were punished for their insincerity and violation of Laws.

He took oath from them that they would not give their daughters in marriage to heathens and marry their daughters for their sons. He finally advised them not to follow king Solomon regarding marriage to have many wives like him, which is called 'Polygamy'. To keep Israel in right track Nehemiah appointed extra priests and Levites to take care of them. So, Nehemiah stood not only as the supreme leader of Israel, at the right time and at the right place, but also he was "a leader for Ages."

THE STORY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

In the days of king Herod, there was a priest in “Ein Karem” as small town four miles away from Jerusalem. His name was Zacharias of the course of Abias and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron and her name was Elisabeth. They were close relatives to Mary’s family. They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord and they were blameless. They had no children because Elizabeth was barren and they both were stricken now in years (Luke 1:5-7).

1. AN ASSIGNMENT FOR AGES

*“They are two humble people;
they are two righteous people.”*

Their hopes of ever getting children seemed to be an impossibility because of their age. They could never imagine that they had to play an important and most crucial role among the stories in the Bible as one of the unbelievable in the life of both of them.

At that time Herod became king of Judah appointed by the Roman authorities. It is said he was a very cruel king. But the faithfulness of both of them could be seen in their rich priestly heritage. At that time Israel was in a crossroads because the Greeks and Romans influence distributed the nations cultural existence. The Jewish nation was totally disturbed. There was the unimaginable growth of pagan population and increase in their influence. The Holy land had been occupied by the pagans. They might have spread their ethics and their gods. At the same time the Jewish religion was trying to maintain its unique character in the middle of heathen influence had splintered into conflicting and warning factors.

The Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes, all these were waging wars to win the hearts and souls of the Jewish people and each group was claiming to be the keeper of God’s truth. But the common Israel in the mean time were looking for nothing more than a genuine path to God, a way to worship Him in spirit and in truth. It was no doubt a crucial time that

the nation badly needed a spiritual deliverer.

According to prophecies, someone was coming and before His coming God would send a messenger and before the Lord would do that he must select the parents of that messenger and they were Zacharias and Elizabeth. They were going to receive Divine Assignment that would change the course of history.

2. DIVINE APPOINTMENT

When we are introduced to Zacharias we can immediately understand that he was the priest of the course of Abia (Abijah) in a small town of Ein Karem. During the reign of king David the priest were divided by him into 24 courses or divisions. And each division had to serve in the Temple for a week at a time and twice a year. The priests of Abijah were the eighth one (division: 1 Chronicles 24:10).

Next we are introduced to Zacharias wife who was of the daughters of Aaron and Aaron was the brother of Moses who was the first Priest. So, the couple was treated as the highest priesthood and the scripture tells us they were the most righteous before God, walking in all commandments and ordinances of the Lord and above all they were blameless and it was called the outstanding couple. But they had a problem, the Bible says they had no child; because Elizabeth was a barren and both were now stricken in years.

Barrenness in Israel was a social scourge; people in those days were under the impression that barrenness was a sign of God's judgment. But God had reason to withholding children from the couple. According to the Biblical story the time had come for Zacharias to perform priestly duties as he was chosen by many leaders to burn the incense (symbolic of the people's prayers raising to heaven) which is the highest act a priest that can perform. That act would put him directly in front of the altar right side in the holy place of the temple. Then it must be noticed that God Himself would determine the lot, and it is He who appointed Zacharias to be at that place at the exact time.

3.. DIVINE VISIT

It seemed the burning of incense was the high light of Zacharias ministry. But he could never imagine, what was going to happen to him. Just at that time, "And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord". When we come across an angel our immediate reaction is as usual. There might not be much disturbance in our minds. But when Zacharias looked at the angel fear fell upon him. But the angel came with happy news that was really encouraging and glorious news.

Then the angel finally told Zacharias "thy prayer is heard and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear a son and they shall call his name John." What is the importance in this connection was the mention of the couple's humble prayers. They were praying for a son and it is justified in the case of the ageing couple for their humble and constant prayers..

The angel also told Zacharias that the child would bring joy and happiness not only to his parents but to many people in his birth. Thus he could have a special place among the children of Israel and he would become great in the sight of God. He would be filled with the Holy ghost from his birth. While growing he would turn many children of Israel towards God and make them ready for Gods kingdom.

4. DIVINE REPRIMAND

The Power of the message was s astonishing , so lofty, and so joyful that it appeared to be beyond belief for aged people like Zacharias. He was stumbled at the wonderful news He forgot that the message came from God through the angel called Gabriel. First he wrongly looked at his face then he particularly looked at the ageing body of his wife.

He questioned himself, “how can this be? We were old”. Actually it was the wrong question at the wrong time to the wrong being. And the angel while answering him, “I am Gabriel that stood in the presence of God and am sent to speak unto thee these glad tidings. Gabriel like Michael was the most prominent Angel who used to go with messages. The same angel was sent by God to Daniel the prophetic visions (Daniel 8:16: 9:21). The same Gabriel angel delivered (announced the message to Mary about the birth of Jesus Christ).

For his momentary lapse of faith in the message of God, Zacharias received a divine reprimand from Gabriel “and behold, thou shall be dumb and not able to speak until the day, that these things shall be performed because thou believeth not my words”. As far as wecan understand faithfulness has its own rewards and faithless ness has its own penalties. Even for the righteous men like Zacharias. As a result of his faithlessness Zacharias would remain not only mute but also deaf. For him this kind of dumbness is a punishment.

5. DIVINE SIGN.

Though Zacharias was doubtful earlier, he proved himself faithful for nine more months what all he was asked to do he observed that carefully. When the time has come for the action he did it wonderfully and improved the initial preparations so as to name his son John, but not Zacharias. Just at that moment he obeyed God and immediately his mouth opened and also his tongue loosed.

Now the story is well known to all the Bible readers. Zacharias had been questioned by the angel who made a great and wonderful praise and promise became true. Zacharias had to be freed from his infirmities and it was nothing but the work of God only. He and his wife understood that they were filled with joy. It was really a miracle done by God to his family.

Generally news of this importance would be spread easily towards the hill country of Judah and those who heard abut the family of Zacharias kept themselves in their hearts, by

saying what kind of child he must have been. After understanding all the events that occurred in the family all the attention of the people turned towards the child (John). He was the one the Lord wanted the people to focus on.

6. DIVINE CONCEPTION

Elisabeth's conception should not be compared with Mary's because Mary's was the miracle of the highest order and therefore unique in all human history. But Elisabeth was the natural by product of a physical union with her blessed husband. However, the reality of her conception was the Lord's work and it was miraculous. The child that was going to be born was God's chosen messenger and the parents who would raise him up were God's chosen special and blessed vessels.

Before we return to the narrative let us have a glance at the house of Zacharias and breaking the news to his wife. It was no doubt she experience a Gamut of enthusiasm from shock to joy, the doubt to worry, then back to joy again fun. Elisabeth conceived and hid herself five months. She whole heartedly prayed to God and thanked Him for that blessing.

7. DIVINE BIRTH

In Luke chapter 1 the story turns to Gabriels proclamation to Mary and then her visit to her cousin Elezabeth was important. When her neighbours heard abut her pregnancy, they talked among themselves how God showed mercy upon her and all rejoiced at this happy news. The couple's age and no doubt their popularity made the birth a cause of great celebration and rejoicing. Even the Lord must have laughed at both Zacharias and Elizabeth for their happiness.

As Zacharias could not speak Elizabeth needed to take the initiative regarding the name and she made it clear the boy should be called John. But the leadership objected and looked for the confirmation from Zacharias. But the priest was deaf and dumb. Then they made some signs to him how his son should be called. For nine months he lived in a silent world. But still that was with the joy of God's promises, love graciousness and abundant blessing. Immediately he requested for a tablet and wrote the name of his son as John.

8. DIVINE FEAR

Though he was doubtful and questioned himself first he was faithful for nine months. Whatever he was asked to do he did it with dignity and resolve. He did things so perfectly and told the priests that his sons' name would be John but not Zacharias. At that very moment he obeyed God's command, his mouth was opened immediately and his tongue loosed. God delivered him and kept His promise.

9. DIVINE DELIVERER

Now Zacharias was a changed man. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. He started glorious discourses and even prophesied. His speech of adoration was marked by the common Jewish Messianic terms of redemption and salvation. As a priest he used to sing “blessed be the God of Israel, for He had visited and redeemed His people”.

When the Lord the God visited Israel we don't have any authentic record or reference but according to Zacharias he must be referring to John's birth as the actual beginning process of the magnificent work God was about to do; and also in John's birth. But Zacharias had already seen the starting point of redemption work to occur in his mind soon.

The priest Zacharias had taken a Messianic turn, when he spoke of an horn of Salvation in the house of His servant David. It had been long ago prophesied that Messiah hood came from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10 and also 2nd Samuel 12:13). Zacharias now confirmed that the time of the final fulfillment was at hand. He confidently said his child (John) would not be the Messiah but the Messiah's forerunner and his son would signify the fact that the Messiahs' appearance was getting close.

It is very interesting to say Zacharias as prophesy was focused on Israel's physical salvation as opposed to spiritual salvation. He said through prophesy that Israel would be saved from the enemies and from all people that hate them. He also said, as they were delivered from the enemies, they might serve God without fear.

10. DIVINE MESSENGER

Zacharias now turned his attention towards his new born son and his words were wonderful. He said, “And thou child shall be called prophet of the highest, for thou shall go before the face of Lord to prepare His ways” This prophesy confirmed that John would be the fulfillment of the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness prepares ye the way of the Lord make strait in the desert a high way for our God.” This Messiah will come soon and John would be His messenger providing the way for His ministry (Malachi 3:1). And the same sentiment echoed “Behold, I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way for me.”

Zacharias now presented the significance of Jesus first coming to this world. Then the Messiah would give the knowledge of salvation unto His people for the remission of their sins. But it is not like that. The Messiah of His first coming would not overthrow the heathen government that was ruling Israel. Instead of that he would cleanse His people of their sin that infected their inner souls. Before dealing with the nation as a whole Jesus would deal with sin and purify His people from the inside out.

For the people see bountiful blessings would come. ”Through the tender mercy of our

God whereby the day spring from an high path visit us.” Again the Messiah’s first visit would be marked not by physical strength or brutal force. But by tenderness, mercy love and compassion. John would not be preparing the way for physical conqueror but for a spiritual one, who would battle with the powers of sin and death.

John was really the first one who proclaimed the coming of one who would give light to them that set in darkness, and in the shadow at death to guide us into the way of peace. The coming kingdom of God would be one of lights where the darkness of sin lifted. It would be lifted from all those who accepted His free gift of salvation, which was brought by Christ by shedding His blood.

11. DIVINE FULFILLMENT

In Luke we are told that the hand of the Lord was with Jesus. That was necessary for Him in order to prepare Him for the unique purpose for which He was born. The wonderful, at the same time the responsible assignment he was given was never given to any other person. It was only John alone who would be granted the task of preparing the way for the soon coming Messiah. The end of Luke chapter 1 puts an exclamation point on the early life of John.

The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit. He was wandering in the desert till the day of his showing himself to Israel. John’s childhood and early life were unusual close walk with God. It was a walk that saw the Lord till, John with the power of Holy Spirit.

John was just six month older than Jesus Christ, who was his cousin and we know Christ began His ministry at the age of thirty years. And he did His ministry only for three and half years. John left his parents and lived in the desert. His food was wild honey and locusts. His ministry was near the dead sea where the scrolls were found at the Qumran caves. God was in the heart of John and came to him in the wilderness. Then he moved into the country side near the river Jordan. There he preached about baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

The preaching of John was so powerful that the people who heard his speech took it for granted that he himself was the Messiah. With emotion he used to say “I indeed baptize you with water but one mightier than I cometh the lachet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.” (Luke 3:16). John never thought of his glory but only his aim was to prepare the way of the One who would come after him deserved all the glory. In John the divine fulfillment of the great promise made thirty years earlier to Zacharias had been accomplished. The messenger (John) was assigned to prepare the way to the coming Messiah (Jesus Christ).

JESUS AS PROPHET, PRIEST AND KING

If we come across any Christian and ask him who the founder of Christianity was, he would certainly say “Jesus Christ”. And people who had the knowledge of the Bible would say “Jesus” was His first name and Christ was His last name. It can also be said Christ is not the name but only a title.

When His earthly parents at the time of (registration at the local town hall might not have written their names as Joseph Christ and Mary Christ. So, the word Christ is only a title but not His last name. And the meaning of that title is “Messiah” in Hebrew language ie., “an anointed one”. Then either in the Bible or some writers must have used casually the phrase Jesus Christ which means they both are really saying Jesus the Messiah.

Below the title of Christ/Messiah it appears to us that there is a deep layer of rich meaning. Then let us try to understand the special roles played by this so called “Messiah the anointed one” in the old Testament and how Jesus embodied these roles in His life’s ministry.

MESSIAH AS PROPHET

Elijah was commanded by God to be the prophet. Elisha was anointed to be the prophet in his room (1Kings 19:16). So the prophets were often referred to as “anointed”.

The Messiah came to this world not only to rule and redeem, but also to proclaim the truths about “Divine Revelation”. This was His major role to play as prophet – one who declares God’s messages – Moses was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, predicted *“behold, Lord they God will raise up unto the prophet from the midst of thee of they brethren like unto me unto him ye shall hearken”* (Deuteronomy 18:15).

It is important to note in this connection, that this one must be from the brethren of

Israel, emphasizing His Jewish ethnic origin. Some people had seen this prophesy as having the fulfillment only in the order of prophets during Israel's subsequent history. The information that is available later indicated that the Jews in the New Testament were expecting this "eschatological prophets". The Dead Sea scrolls dating from the time between the Testaments period indicate that a group of deeply religious Jews at Qumran were still waiting for this great "prophet". Some of the Jewish leaders also questioned John the Baptist, if he was Elias. He replied He was not. They again questioned him if he was that prophet. For that question his answer was 'no'.

The apostles really understood the true identity of that prophet. Apostle Peter boldly applied the prophesy in Deuteronomy 18th chapter to Jesus as the prophet – Messiah in Acts 3:22 and Stephen also did the same in Acts 7:37. Basing on the comments of all these people we can conclude that Jesus was the ultimate prophet the one who would perfectly fulfill all of the prophetic ideals. No one spoke like that as He did, for He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. He stood before His home town synagogue and proclaimed.

The spirit of the Lord was upon Him because He was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor. The priestly work of the Messiah was His sacrificial suffering. This was also equated to the Messianic figure with that of anointed prophet, who would fulfill and declare God's word "*I will declare (proclaim) thy name unto my brethren in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee.*" So Jesus certified Himself as the promised Messianic prophet by faithfully predict things that later took place.

Jesus predicted only one example, that is needed to be given. Jesus most correctly predicted about the total destruction of Jerusalem temple.

He predicted that in 40 years the temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24:2). Accordingly His prophetic prediction was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when Roman authorities attacked Jerusalem and took away precious things like gold and silver from the temple and Jesus died in 30 A.D. Actually no one in the Bible history was qualified to be the prophet predicted by Moses. Jesus was that Messianic prophet just as he predicted.

MESSIAH AS PRIEST

Aaron and his sons were selected as priests in the second cadre of ancient Israel. They were anointed as priests with oil, the most essential performance of the Old Testament. Priest was only to offer sacrifices. Then the Messianic priestly function was seen both in this work as sacrificer who would officiate at the altar and also in His own person atone for "sin."

The role of Messianic priest appeared in three ways in the Old Testament scripture and

Psalms 110, quoted in the New Testament more than any other passage. It is stated that David's Lord (ie., Messiah) was declared by divine oath to be priest. "*The Lord hath sworn and will not repent. Thou art priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*" (Psalms 110:4).

If we study the book of Hebrews it is nothing but a sermon explaining this great Psalm and its promises at Messianic priesthood. Then Jesus at the Father's right hand being in the Melchizedek's priesthood is shown to be better than the temporary mortal Levitical priesthood. The sacrificial act of the Messiah was also given with details in Psalms.

Christ after He had offered one sacrifice for our sins, forever sat at the right hand of God. From that incident onwards Christ was expecting His enemies to be made His footstools. For by one offering He had perfected them for ever that are sanctified.

Regarding the second Old Testament passage which described the priestly sacrifice of the Messiah was found in the "servant song". It was seen by many people as the best example of the gospel in the Old Testament. After describing the suffering of the Lord's servant verse 10 declared "*thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin.*"

In Hebrew language the word for offering was 'aslam'. It is used in the Old Testament for trespass offerings. The Marfellons acknowledgement of the Messiah's priestly sacrifices was then followed by the statement regarding the previous sacrifices of the Messiah we can find the next passage. Actually, we can give full account of this amazing chronological aspects of this passage. But the topic might become too big. Probably it would suffice to say that its prophecies among other things that at the right time "shall Messiah be cut off?" (Daniel 9:26). The words sacrifice offerings and enthusiasm are connected to Israel's anointed priests of the Old Testament period and also applied to the work of Jesus in the New Testament. By considering all the above said points we can come to a conclusion that Jesus Himself was the Messianic Priest.

MESSIAH AS KING

Saul was made the Israelites first king. He was anointed by Samuel on the advice of God and played his role in theocratic kingdom (1 Samuel 10:1). But Saul became selfish and disobedient to God. Still he was the Lord's anointed and literally he was called "Messiah". Saul for his weaknesses and sins God punished him and he faced miserable death. After him David became the king and he was also anointed by Samuel. And this king David joined prophets, priest in Israel as the Lord's anointed one.

In spite of all that long before Saul and David, prophetic scripture anticipated an anointed king – and the most surprising thing the person was that His characteristics went beyond any earthly monarch – Jacob who supposed to have lived in 1800 B.C. and then Balaam

who must have lived in 1400 B.C. Both of them had prophesied about king-messiah who was wielding the scepter. The concluding verse of Hannah's first passage in which the coming deliverer was particularly called Messiah! And at the same time he was specially called king. He could give strength to the king and then exalt the horn of His anointed. The future king would not be either Saul or David because these kings regime takes place in that future age only when the Lord gives His judgment and that is the end of the earth.

The book of Psalms contained a good number of references about this king and His characteristics showed that he was as forceful as king David referred to king Messiah as the Son of God. He also predicted Messiah's ascension to the right hand of Yahveh as David "adon" which means, ruling in the midst of His enemies after they had been defeated. King Solomon also looked beyond his own time and foretold the coming of the most perfect king whose kingdom would take up when his own hand terminated. That anointed king "*shall have His dominion from sea to sea, and to the river to the end of the earth.*" And in the same way as said in the psalms, it was addressed to the "Divine Messianic King" saying "thy throne O God, is forever and ever the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter."

Prophet Isaiah also predicted about the Messianic child that He would bear governmental authority upon the throne of David (Isaiah 9:7). Micah also predicted about Messiah's birth in the humble village of David's royal family in Bethlehem instead of in the royal city of Jerusalem. Then prophet Jeremiah in his prediction united deity and humanity when he described the reign of king Messiah.

*"Behold the days came saith the Lord,
that I will raise unto David a righteous
branch and a king shall reign and prosper
and shall execute judgment and
justice in the earth in his days hath
shall be saved and Israel shall dwell
safely and this is His name whereby
he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness."* (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

Though Jesus defended his kingship with the Roman authorities, it was not accepted first by the Roman procurator. Finally the Pilate questioned Him, "art thou the king of the Jews" For that question Jesus replied,

*"My kingdom is not of this world, if my
kingdom were of this world, then would
my servants fight that I should not be*

delivered to the Jews, but now is my kingdom not from hence”.

In spite of His time and again sayings regarding the purpose for which He was sent; He was really misunderstood by His own people (Jews) and finally he was crucified by His own people. Just at that time the Pilate wrote a title and put in on the cross and the writing was “Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews” (John 19:19). Even though, He was mocked at, wounded severely with spears, and finally brutally killed by His own people, He was the Messianic king.

If we look into the Qumran authors of the ‘dead sea scrolls’, people who lived and wrote for two centuries period to Jesus, understood the Hebrew scripture and also about the Messianic king but they thought there must be three kinds of Messiah. They were Messianic prophet, Messianic Priest and Messianic King. They appeared to be in the right track in their understanding and according to authentic information there would be three different Messiahs but all are one. If we consider some of the passages from the New Testament and the role of Jesus as prophet, priest and king it is really understanding to study.

Jesus appeared on the earth in His role of prophet. He appeared now in heaven in His role as priest. Then He would appear at His second coming in His role as king. In this context let us consider the description of John about the Messiah in his book of Revelation (1:5).

“And from Jesus Christ, who is the Faithful witness (prophet) and the First forgotten of the dead (priest) and the prince of the kings of the earth (king) unto him that loved us and washed us from our "sins" in his own blood”. (John 1:5)

If we look into the scripture, there were some individual Israelites example of a person who was at the same time a priest and a prophet (Ezekiel and Jeremiah) and also a person who was at the same time both a king and a prophet. It was David. But there was not a man from Israel who was both priest and king and it was Jesus Christ.

There was such restriction because only Messiah should consider those two functions in His own person. It was not exemplified because it was to be a dual role only to be fulfilled by a man from Israelite priest-king the Lord Jesus Christ. So, the final Messiah would be the ideal person of perfect priest-king combining the role of the prophet, who declared God’s rule, to mean the priest who offered a sacrifice to God for man and the king who alone had the right to rule over men as God.

The anointed one of Jesus was, is, and always will be the prophet, the priest and the king. Each of the roles was however, played at different times in His ministry during His earthly ministry of teaching and preaching His role as prophet was in the forefront. His sacrificial death, resurrection and ascension and current session at His Father's right hand brings his role as a priest unto our views. His return to earth during His Millennial reign and His role as king would be stressed more. The point is that He is always the anointed king and He enters into the public office as king during the millennium.

The example of the Old Testament was the period of time between David's anointing as the king, and his eventual enthronement successor to Saul. In hope of all that it has been seen and studied about the prophet, priest and the king bring through various passages in the Old Testament period and in light of the amazing way in which Jesus would fulfill all the three roles. We can conclude that with the words of Andrews "We have found the Messiah, which is being interpreted as the Christ."

* * *

JOB'S WIFE (2:4-10)

One day some angels came to present themselves before the Almighty God and along with them came Satan also. Then God looked at Satan and questioned him "where comest thou?" For that Satan replied he was going to and fro on the earth and walking down to and fro on it (Job 1:7).

God again questioned Satan "How you considered my servant Job? and above there was no more like him on the earth. He was a blameless, spotless and upright man. He would fear God only and turn away from evil. He always gave more importance to his integrity though the Satan tried to destroy him for nothing wrong in him" God gave very good compliments about Job.

Then Satan replied "skin for skin". He requested the Lord to give him permission to touch the bones and flesh of Job with some diseases so that he would certainly curse God. But God had complete faith in the integrity of Job's character.

As per the request, God handed over Job to Satan for testing his faith towards God. At the same time God warned Satan not to do anything to his life. And with all the necessary instructions God gave permission to Satan to do whatever he wanted in order to test his integrity and faith. Then the Satan took immediate action by inflicting loathsome sores on Job's body from top to bottom. Those sores forced Job to take a broken piece of pot and scrape himself by sitting in the ashes.

Then Job's wife came into the picture and said to him, do you still persist in your integrity, "curse God and die". But Job answered to his wife "You speak as any foolish woman would speak, still we received good at the hand of God, but not the bad". In all his bitter and painful experiences Job did not utter any "sinful" word with his lips.

For the ill-advise of Job's wife anybody would have suggested some positive idea to her remarks against God. With that she would not have become as infamous as Job's friends.

The friends of Job spent thousands of words in the Bible in order to make Job miserable, whereas Job's wife uttered only eleven words in two brief sentences - a rhetorical question and the answer - In most of the English translations, the two sentences of Job's wife were added up to fewer than a dozen words.

If we hear about her story for a while, not to demean her, the Biblical writers did not mention her name, perhaps they had forgotten about it. Even after the fortunes were restored to Job with her seven sons, three daughters and the property was doubled, she remained anonymous. Job was originally a man with enormous wealth and the Biblical writers too mentioned that Job was the greatest of all men of the East (Job 1:3). He and his wife had every advantage that wealth could offer in those days but not the advantages and other sophisticated equipment. Job had many servants at home to look after everything. The family must have enjoyed luxurious life with good food because of their riches.

Regarding the way of life in their families, it is really peculiar. In their routine life the sons used to hold feasts in one another's houses in turn and they invited their sisters also to their parties. As Job was a good man, his children were good. But Job was very sensitive man to the possibility of evil. So whenever one of his sons to have his feast, Job would get up early in the morning and offer burnt offerings to God on their behalf in case they had done anything wrong in their day to day life and to be far away from evil.

I must say all this because Job's wife with her riches enjoyed comfortable life and at the same time Job loved her so much that even the righteous must have felt jealous of their happy life. If we look into the Bible and into the large families, they would have "Divine Blessings" and God blessed Job's family also in the same manner. They had good and peaceful life.

In such circumstances the Satan happened to inflict such disease to test his faith towards God; as if Job was the devils favourite. All the wealth was wiped out, in a series of dramatic misfortune. After that calamity seven sons and three daughters were killed when a desert storm blew the house in which they were celebrating in one of their traditional banquettes. This time Job could not have the chance to plead their case with God in his morning sacrifice.

After this calamity took place, Job himself suffered devastating illness. In the Bible we can find all this story, how the Satan took permission from God to penalize Job with the pretext of testing his faith towards God. Modern medical science would say that no such additional authorisation was needed. Any person who had gone through such series of personal diseases was a natural candidate for illness particularly this kind of disease that Job got.

We were never given clearly the medical description of his affliction. But we are simply told he had some loathsome sores - from the sole of foot to the crown of his head (Job 2.7)

Evidently, he must have been pathetic and repulsive to look at. In such condition he wanted to go out into the garbage heap and sit there to scrap away at the discharge of his body using a broken piece of pottary. One must have a feeling after looking at the suffering of Job, he had all virtually. When Job was in such critical condition his wife entered the scene.

Until the story came to that stage she was not mentioned in it. That too for a brief moment, she came to the stage for the delivery of her soul. Then she said to Job "Do you still persist in your integrity?", for that she did not get any answer. She answered herself to that question and said again "curse God and die". Her speech appeared to be very short but more powerful and to the point she did not blame any one, but it appeared there was a hint of importance in Jobs piety, the importance that one would feel while dealing with the quality of life. Job's answer was very brief for his wife's reference. It might appear at the worst. It might sound bitter, anger and at the best the righteous indignation. Therefore Job answered to her question. "You speak as any foolish woman would speak, we still receive good at the hands of God and not received the bad" (Job 2:10).

We can understand Job's wife without doubt, that she did not appear to be good in the convention. She appeared to have lost faith and hope in God. We can understand she might think and respond the way many a sympathetic compassionate spouse might respond or would she like to say "Dear Job you suffered long enough, nobody should have that kind of experience, not even God would appreciate. You have a right to die" If this is what she meant we can whole heartedly say that she was making a lower response to faith.

If we go further in our story everybody would certainly think about how much Job endured in his loss of wealth and also in the death of his children. But we must also remember Job himself physically suffered the same losses. As a matter of fact, it can be well argued her sense of loss in the death of children was even greater than Job himself.

Let us study about a preacher-cum-scholar in this context who recalled the pains. He and his wife who suffered a lot in the death of their first born child immediately. He remarked "She suffered more than I". She suffered boldly and emotionally. The man also suffered emotionally, because the child died immediately after the birth. There is probably no correct way to compare a mother's and a father's sense of loss because they are different in gender and personality.

Job's wife must have been depressed by the death of her children and at the same time she was unconvinced by the financial reverses. In that condition Job needed nothing but a garbage heap, that is all she needed as well. All the pain that descended on Job, descended with equal force on his wife also. But Job had an additional suffering of bodily affliction than his wife. In such circumstances we as readers can suggest something to Job's wife and that

is nothing but heartfull sympathy including those people who watch their patients at the bedside of their tormentedly ill particularly those people who suffer and remain on beds for years together than the women how they would remain at the bed-side of their adults or children for a long time and how long their mental agony would continue for the sake of their people, perhaps Job's wife would not understand that pain.

Before coming to the main story, we have to consider one more incident. There was a man whose wife was more powerful and dramatic personality. She was an effective and wonderful preacher. She was also a leader for many years, before the woman took the initiative to preaching and ministry in large numbers. But regarding her husband, he was just a standby, a sort of man with a self-deprecating sense of humour. Whenever he got the chance to introduce himself to anybody he would say "I am a jacket in the kings deck". But he was extremely proud fellow.

Nobody can say satisfactorily how much sacrifice the wives do towards their husbands and to the families. We must say women have immeasurable patience to any kind of suffering than men in the society.

I wish to quote one more touching example regarding tolerance of women. In a ceremony held at Artington some years back the president honoured a young army sergeant who was a father of three children with a posthumous medal of honour. In a rice paddy in Vietnam, he had thrown himself on a live mine, taking the full blast into his body in order to save the lives of his fellow soldiers. While the President was giving the medal to the young widow, he observed that she was controlling her tears. Then he said "You are a brave young woman". For that she replied "Mr. President, I have to be brave because he was brave"

Let us call that brave lady Job's wife, and honour the faith that her husband had monumented bravery, who represented a spirit of dedication and terror. Her's call for a hundred loving nights with sick children, attending dozens of meetings alone and trying to be both father and mother at all of those football games, and different parties. It is not easy to any woman to be Job's wife and to stand along the hero.

There is also most appropriate message by John Milton an epic poet in English literature in 16th century. He was a great poet, who wrote the poem "Paradise Lost" which became world famous. He became blind and he thought he became useless and his God's gift of great eloquence of writing poetry now became useless. But God seemed to have answered Milton with the following lines.

*"God does not need
Either mans work or his own gifts who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best, His state
Is kingly thousands at his bidding speed.*

*And Posto'er land and ocean without rest
They also serve who only stand and wait"*

Some of the people by nature in their life and in their assignment are called at times to "stand and wait". They have the responsible and complex role of Job's wife to act. But as we think it is not so easy. Let us hope and believe that God would certainly see and understand. Then in the final judgement all issues of life shall be made clear; God will set everything and credit will be paid to the people according to their merits and demerits.

THE DOCTRINE OF MARTIN LUTHER

PROJECT WITTENBERG

Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences
by Dr. Martin Luther, 1517

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Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary on the same at that place. Wherefore he requests that those who are unable to be present and debate orally with us, may do so by letter.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said Poenitentiam agite, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.
3. Yet it means inward repentance only; nay, there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work divers mortifications of the flesh.
4. The penalty [of sin], therefore, continues so long as hatred of self continues; for this is the true inward repentance, and continues until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The Pope does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties other than those which he has imposed either by his own authority or by that of the Canons.

6. The Pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God's remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgement. If his right to grant remission in such cases were despised, the guilt would remain entirely unforgiven.
7. God remits guilt to no one whom He does not, at the same time, humble in all things and bring subjection to His Vicar, the priest.
8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to them, nothing should be imposed on the dying.
9. Therefore the Holy Spirit in the Pope is kind to us, because in his degrees he always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.
10. Ignorant and wicked are the doings of those priests who, in case of the dying, reserve canonical penances for purgatory.
11. This changing of the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory is quite evidently one of the tares that were sown while the bishops slept.
12. In former times, the canonical penalties were imposed not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties; they are already dead to canonical rules, and have a right to be released from them.
14. The imperfect health [of soul] , that is to say, the imperfect love, of the dying brings with it, of necessity, great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater is the fear.
15. This fear and horror is sufficient of itself alone (to say nothing of other things) to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ as do despair, almost-despair, and the assurance of safety.
17. With souls in purgatory, it seems necessary that horror should grow less and love increase.
18. It seems unproved, either by reason or Scripture that they are outside the state of merit, that is to say, of increasing love.
19. Again, it seems unproved that they, or at least that all of them, are certain or assured of their own blessedness, though we may quite certain of it.
20. Therefore by "full remission of all penalties" the Pope means actually "of all", but only of those imposed by himself.
21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in errors, who say that by the Pope's indulgencies a man is freed from every penalty, and saved.
22. Whereas he remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to the canons they

would have had to pay in this life.

23. If it is at all possible to grant to any one the remission of all penalties whatsoever, it is certain that this remission can be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to the very fewest.
24. It must needs be, therefore, that the greater part of the people are deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.
25. The power which the Pope has, in a general way, over purgatory, is just like the power which any bishop or curate has, in a special way, within his own diocese or parish.
26. The Pope does well when he grants remission to souls [in purgatory], not by the power of the keys (which he does not possess), but by the way of intercession.
27. They preach men who say that so soon as the penny jingles into the money-box, the soul flies out [of purgatory].
28. It is certain that when the penny jingles into the money-box, gain and avarice can be increased, but the result of the intercession of the Church is in the power of God alone.
29. Who knows whether all the souls in purgatory wish to be bought out of it, as in the legend of Sts. Severinus and Paschal.
30. No one is sure that his own contrition is sincere; much less that he has attained full remission.
31. Rare as is the man that is truly penitent, so rare is also the man who truly buys indulgences, i.e., such men are most rare.
32. They will be condemned eternally, together with their teachers, who believe themselves sure of their salvation because they have letters of pardon.
33. Men must be on their guard against those who say that the Pope's pardon are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to Him;
34. For these "graces of pardon" concern only the penalties of sacramental satisfaction and these are appointed by man.
35. They preach no Christian doctrine who teach that contrition is not necessary in those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessionals.
36. Every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without letters of pardon.
37. Every true Christian, whether living or dead, has part in all the blessings of Christ and the Church; and this is granted him by God, even without letters of pardon.
38. Nevertheless, the remission and participation [in the blessings of the Church] which are granted by the Pope are in no way to be despised, for they are, as I have said, the declaration of divine remission.

39. It is most difficult, even for the very keenest theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the abundance of pardons and [the need of] true contrition.
 40. True contrition seeks and loves penalties, but liberal pardons only relax penalties and cause them to be hatred, or at least, furnish an occasion [for hating them].
 41. Apostolic pardons are to be preached with caution, lest the people may falsely think them preferable to other good works of love.
 42. Christians are to be taught that the Pope does not intend the buying of pardons to be compared in any way to works of mercy.
 43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better work than buying pardons.
 44. Because love grows by works of love and man becomes better; but by pardons man does not grow better, only more free from penalty.
 45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a man in need, and passes him by, and gives [his money] for pardons, purchases not the indulgences of the Pope, but the indignation of God.
 46. Christians are to be taught that unless they have more than they need, they are bound to keep back what is necessary for their own families, and by no means to squander it on pardons.
 47. Christians are to be taught that the buying of pardons is a matter of free will, and not of commandment.
 48. Christians are to be taught that the Pope, in granting pardons, needs, and therefore desires, their devout prayer for him more than the money they bring.
 49. Christians are to be taught that the Pope's pardons are useful, if they do not put their trust in them; but altogether harmful, if through them they lose their fear of God.
 50. Christians are to be taught that if the Pope knew the exactions of the pardon; preachers, he would rather that St. Peter's church should go to ashes, than that it should be built up with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.
 51. Christians are to be taught that it would be the Pope's wish, as it is his duty, to give of his own money to very many of those from whom certain hawkers of pardons cajole money, even though the church of St. Peter might have to be sold.
 52. The assurance of salvation by letters of pardon is vain, even though the commissary, nay, even though the Pope himself, were to stake his soul upon it.
 53. They are enemies of Christ and of the Pope, who bid the Word of God be altogether silent in some Churches, in order that pardons may be preached in others.
 54. Injury is done the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or a longer time ~~is spent on pardons than on this Word.~~
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55. It must be the intention of the Pope that if pardons, which are a very small thing, are celebrated with one bell, with single processions and ceremonies, then the Gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, a hundred ceremonies.
 56. The “treasures of the Church” out of which the Pope, grants indulgencies, are not sufficiently named or known among the people of Christ.
 57. That they are not temporal treasures is certainly evident, for many of the vendors do not pour out such treasures so easily, but only gather them.
 58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the Saints, for even without the Pope, these always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outward man.
 59. St.Lawrence said that the treasures of the Church were the Church’s poor, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.
 60. Without rashness, we say that the keys of the Church, given by Christ’s merit, are that treasure;
 61. For it is clear that for the remission of penalties and of reserved cases, the power of the Pope is of itself sufficient.
 62. The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.
 63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last.
 64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.
 65. Therefore the treasures of the Gospel are nets with which they formerly were wont to fish for men of riches.
 66. The treasures of the indulgences are nets with which they now fish for the riches of men.
 67. The indulgencies which the preachers cry as the “greatest graces” are known to be truly such, in so far as they promote gain.
 68. Yet they are in truth the very smallest graces compared with the grace of God and the piety of the Cross.
 69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of apostolic pardons, with all reverence.
 70. But still more are bound to strain all their eyes and attend with all their ears, lest these men preach their own dreams instead of the commission of the Pope.
 71. He who speaks against the truth of apostolic pardons, let him be anathema and accursed!
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72. But he who guards against the lust and license of the pardon-preachers, let him be blessed!
 73. The Pope justly thunders against those who, by any art, contrive the injury of the traffic in pardons.
 74. But much more does he intend to thunder against those who use the pretext of pardons to contrive the injury of holy love and truth.
 75. To think the papal pardons so great that they could absolve a man even if he had committed an impossible sin and violated the Mother of God – this is madness.
 76. We say, on the contrary, that the papal pardons are not able to remove the very least of venial sins, so far as its guilt is concerned.
 77. It is said that even St.Peter, if he were now Pope, could not bestow greater graces; this is blasphemy against St.Peter and against the Pope.
 78. We say, on the contrary, that even the present Pope, and any Pope at all, has greater graces at his disposal; to wit; the Gospel, powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written in I Corinthians xii.
 79. To say that the cross, emblazoned with the papal arms, which is set up [by the preachers of indulgences], is of equal worth with the Cross of Christ, is blasphemy.
 80. The bishops, curates and theologians who allow such talk to be spread among the people, will have an account to render.
 81. This unbridled preaching of pardons makes it no easy matter, even for learned men, to rescue the reverence due to the Pope from slander, or even from the shrewd questionings of the laity.
 82. To wit:- "Why does not the Pope empty purgatory, for the sake of holy love and of the dire need of the souls that are there, if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a Church? The former reasons would be most just; the latter is most trivial."
 83. Again:- "Why are mortuary and anniversary masses for the dead continued, and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded on their behalf, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?"
 84. Again:- "What is this new piety of God and the Pope, that for money they allow a man who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God, and do not rather, because of that pious and beloved soul's need, free it for pure love's sake?"
 85. Again:- "Why are the penitential canons long since in actual fact and through disuse abrogated and dead, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences, as though they were still alive and in force?"
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