



An organization upholding the understanding of the Scripture  
as taught by the Apostles and by the Pioneer Christadelphians  
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## **THE CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE STUDY CIRCLE**

### **JUST A WORD**

Where did it come from? How did that Bible come into your hands? Perhaps you found it on the book shelf at home or bought it in a shop: but that is not the answer to the question. Perhaps we think of the days when sailing ships from Europe discovered the continent of the Americas and brought Bibles with them. Is that where the Bible came from? Indeed, no. Despite all the great universities of seats of learning in Europe centuries ago the Bible did not originate with them.

Then where did it come from? We can go back through the centuries -- 19th, 18th, 17th . . . 10th, 9th, 8th, 7th and the Bible was at work even then: we can go back deeper still into the 5th, 4th, 3rd, 2nd centuries and the Bible is still at work. Men read it, quote it, defend it, live by it. The Bible has its roots deep down in history.

Have a look at it; just very generally. It is divided into two parts called the Old and the New Testaments. Both these testaments have one thing in common; they were written almost entirely by Jews. Palestine, the land of Israel is the natural center of what the Bible talks about. Although parts of the book were written outside that little land we can say with confidence that Palestine, the land of promise, is its natural home.

About those two parts: the Old and New Testament -- why call them "Old" and "New"? Is there any essential difference between them? And how does it come about that they are both in one book, the Bible? Those are good questions and the answer is interesting.

The Old Testament was written by many writers from about 1400 B.C. to about 400 B.C. After that there was a long silence and nothing was written until about 45 A.D. and then the New Testament began and was finished about 100 A.D.

Don't be scared by dates and times. They are useful reminders of long periods of history and of dramatic

events. That long period from 1400 B.C. to 400 B.C. marks a great history of the Jews. The other covers the history of the first believers in Jesus Christ. The difference between the Old and New Testaments is simply Jesus. The Old Testament or the old covenant as the words mean is a record of God's work before Jesus came, and, particularly his wonderful dealings with the Jews. The New Testament or the new covenant is the record of the life and works of Jesus and their consequences.

Now for something very wonderful. When you pick up your Bible and flick its pages you are flashing through a library of books. Sixty-six books all in one binding! The last one 1500 years after the first! Can you find any other book in all the world with the same range of writers and times? How did these books get into one cover? Who collected them and what is there that keeps them together? Here are a host of questions and the answers are not difficult to find.

Anyone who takes the trouble to read the Bible discovers that it is unique. It has a style all its own. It talks with authority. It describes characters in a most discerning manner -- whether they are kings or slaves, priests or peasants, learned men or simple folk. The Bible weighs them and tells their worth.

But there is more than that. This word comes straight from God. Without hesitation the writers of this wonderful book repeatedly declare: Hear ye the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord; the word of the Lord came saying, and a score of other oft repeated introductions to the messages which follow.

This is the golden chain which holds the Bible together. And that chain cannot be broken. Men have despised the Bible, burnt its pages, persecuted its followers, forbidden its circulation, attacked its truth, poured scorn on its writers and characters ... but the Book is unperturbed by all this. It does not require men to fight for it. It will stand because God is inside it. Let us never mistake the tremendous durability of the Bible. Inside the book we read: "The word of the Lord endureth for ever." Whether we want to believe it or not the Bible itself living on and on is a challenge to our thinking and a witness to its own truth.

But there is more to come. The Bible is exciting. It is the most thrilling book on earth. No young man or woman need ever feel that time spent in reading the book is time wasted. Every minute spent in reading it is time invested. Listen. Could you find anything better than this? The Bible presents two unique persons -- utterly beautiful and worthy of every admiration -- God and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You can search the world's literature and the autobiography of all who have lived or do live -- and you will never, absolutely never find anything to compare with the surpassingly exquisite characters of the God of heaven and Jesus Christ his Son. Little wonder that the Bible is unique when it reveals such excellence of character.

And still there is more. From the heart of the Bible flow great promises. The greatest of these is the promise of everlasting life. Just imagine: the Bible promises everlasting life to its readers. There is no other book in the world which makes promises like this. A unique book, the unique God, the unique Lord Jesus Christ, and the unique promise of everlasting life. Could anyone want more? There is more but we will not talk about it now.

What has gone before is sufficient to make anyone say: If this Book can do what it says then it is the Book for me. Good enough. Let's get on with it and discover for ourselves that this Book is pulsating

with vibrant happy life. It is the master key to the world's unsolved problems. It is food to the hungry; ointment to the wounded; eyes to the blind; it is a voice of utter certainty in an age of confusion and doubt. It is the very hand of God held out to us. Take it and you will never be lonely; be led by it and you will never go astray. Spurn it and you will meet death without hope.

The Bible is here to help. It is no joyless, severe, grey companion casting a blight over the garden of youth. It is the breath of God bringing life to all who breathe it. The weary come to it and are refreshed; the broken-hearted are comforted; all men of every race and colour are welcome and no one is turned away because he is too poor, too old, too simple, too troubled, too distressed. There is no problem one cannot bring to the Bible in daily life and not find comfort and help.

You are ready to begin? Of course you are. Imagine for a moment that some one said to you: But you will never be allowed to read a single page of the Bible. Never see this priceless treasure, or that some one said: You can read it only if you pay dearly for it. How you would yearn to possess one for yourself and to look upon those words that have stirred the hearts of the greatest men who have ever lived.

Now take the Book. Offer a prayer before you open it: Lord God of heaven and earth I want to read thy word. Bless me. Amen.

Now you are ready. Open your Bible and find the book of Psalms there is an index at the front of the Bible and you will find it useful as we continue this pleasant voyage together.

Read Psalm 19 and learn what the Bible says the word of God can do. This is no idle boast: it is the promise from God himself and he has this power to fulfill it. He made the stars and framed our earth. He is the power behind the tides. He is the life which bursts forth at springtime. He is the life of everything that lives. He is the source of everything that lives. He is the source of everything that can be seen whether living or dead. God is Almighty. It is He who makes the promises of Psalm 19. Read them. Believe them because they are true.

Write down those promises for yourself and think about them each day until you receive your next letter. Goodbye, then Goodbye? -- yes, that means God be with you.

## **NO LIMIT**

The sun is one great hydrogen bomb some ninety odd million miles away from the earth. Light from the sun and all the stars travels to the earth at 186,000 miles a second and some of the light reaching the earth today began its journey to earth when Adam was in the garden of Eden. We can hardly begin to understand these staggering facts; but we can be sure of one thing:

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.” Psalm 19:1.

You will perhaps recall those words from your reading at the end of the first letter. Just think about that. The immensity, the unfailing power, the precision of times and tides, the grandeur of the jewelled sky

teach us something about God.

“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.”  
Isaiah 40:28.

God is Almighty. His power is inexhaustible. He holds all things in his mighty hand and nothing escapes his control.

“To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?” Isaiah 40:18.

Obviously there is no one with whom we can compare him. He is the Creator. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Before everything God was. He is “from everlasting to everlasting.” This is the God of the Bible. A supreme and unwearied person.

Our earth and all creation did not come into being by some gigantic accident uncontrolled by anything other than blind and purposeless chance. There is no comfort in that. Rather let us gather up the strength of the great, simple assuring declarations of the Bible the word which the Creator himself has given to us:

“For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited.” Isaiah 45:18.

There is purpose behind these things and the purpose is the will of God. That is what the Bible wants to tell us. We have no need to worry about our earth; it is in God’s safe hands. It will not collide with any of its neighbours. God has planned it as a gracious home for men. But, when you come to think of it, there is comfort in this. We can lean upon this knowledge and trust the Hand behind all things. We have moved a step nearer to God in thinking like that. We are going in the right direction. Only fools move away from the unconquerable power of God. Wise men draw near:

“O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.”  
Psalm 95:1-6.

Whenever you are lonely in this wide world and who is not lonely at some time or other? then take heart; God is as near you as your own breath. If ever you become afraid wondering whether or not all the world is moving to a complete destruction; then remember the world and all that is in it belong to God.

“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing he is Lord of heaven and earth . . . giveth to all life and breath and all things . . . that they should seek the Lord, if happily they might feel after  
him and find him, though he is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, move and have our

being.” Acts 17:24-28.

We may not be able to trust men; but we can trust God. Indeed we depend upon Him for life and everything. The sooner we acknowledge that, the better it will be for our character. The spirit of dependence upon God is a most rewarding experience.

Perhaps we have some difficulty in understanding how God can be everywhere at once. Let us not pretend that anyone really understands this. How can a fish comprehend geometry? or a mouse the mysteries of nuclear physics? How then can men who are made of dust understand the ways of the infinite God of heaven? There is no way unless God speaks to us in language we can understand. This He has done in the Bible. That is what the Bible is for; for our instruction and learning. When God tells us something about himself therefore it is well that we take heed. Make a note of this:

“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” Psalm 33:6.

Did you notice that? Heaven and earth were made by a word. God can speak and it is done. God said: “Let there be light; and there was light.” Genesis 1:3. This is something we can never prove in the absolute sense but it forms part of the simple and beautiful pattern of the knowledge God gives us of himself. He can speak and his will is done. Is it possible to see this a little more clearly? Yes, if we are willing. Look at this --

“And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.”

God’s Spirit moved: God said: it was done. The means whereby God performs his work is his Spirit, his eternal power. This Spirit, which is God’s energy, God’s overflowing, creative, sustaining force, is present everywhere. That is what Paul meant when he wrote: “in him we live and move and have our being.” It is what Jesus understood when he said: “Are not two sparrows sold for one farthing? and not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Everything happens within the field of God’s knowledge and power. Nothing escapes or can escape his notice. Wherever we are, God is. This filled one of the writers of the Old Testament with surpassing wonder:

“O Lord thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and my uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off . . . such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?”  
Psalm 139:1-7.

God’s spirit is in all places and by it he knows, he keeps us alive and works his will. It is therefore no surprise to us to learn that the very same Spirit, God’s direct energy, was the means whereby Bible writers received their messages from God, spoke them to the people and set them down in writing. Let one of these writers tell us about it:

“The sweet psalmist of Israel said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my

tongue.” 2 Samuel 23:2.

That is the secret behind the Bible. The word is from God. God who made the stars has spoken to us. Every true prophet, every true writer of Scripture, was driven along, like a ship with the wind in her sails, by this same impelling Holy Spirit of God:

“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:21.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” 2 Timothy 3:16.

Do you see the mystery revealed? God’s limitless power, reaching through all space yet centered in God himself, is the motive force of Creation and the influence by which the Bible has come to us. No wonder the Bible is such a marvel!

Now we must stop and have a little private meditation. Read over this letter once more. You will find it worthwhile. Lay special emphasis on the quotations from the Bible. And, by the way, what about opening the book for yourself: Of course you will. It is putting a key in the lock of the universe and opening the door to the mind of God. Be careful though. Approach with humility and with prayer:

“Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool ... for all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” Isaiah 66:1-2.

Lord God, grant me a humble heart sufficient to believe thee and to know that thou are everywhere present by thy Spirit.

Now read for yourself the following Scriptures: Psalm 139 and Luke 12:73-40. You will find them helpful. Take it seriously and think about God some part of every day. You will be happy the nearer you are to him.

## **WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?**

Yes, where did you come from? There is one obvious answer: I came from my parents. I owe my life to the fact that a living seed from my father joined with a living seed from my mother. That was my beginning. It took time for me to grow. The first nine months of that time took place within my mother. Then I was born. You can tell I belong to my parents, just look at my hair -- auburn like my mother’s, and my eyes -- grey-green like my father’s. The odd thing is that people say I look very much like my grandfather. Yet in some things I am not like anyone we can remember in the family whether on my mother’s side or my father’s.

Is that where you came from? Why, yes -- I cannot think of anything else to say, can you? Yes, I can and I am sure you will be interested. There is much more to this matter of living and being born than

one can see only by looking at a baby. Not that babies are not wonderful: everyone is a marvel -- eyes, ears, heart, lungs, arteries and veins, all working together as though working as a team under a captain. And that idea should set us thinking. Is it simply a happy coincidence that our minds and bodies work as harmoniously as they do? Or is there some directing force behind it all? What do you think?

When you come to think of it all the marvellous development of the human frame and the incredible ability of the human mind must lie in these two cells from which we started. What is the power by which those two cells first join together and then develop until they have formed the whole of the creature known as the human baby? The cell is wonderful but the power which in some way guides the work that goes on is more wonderful still.

The Bible talks about these things in a way which is both instructive and beautiful. Speaking of those first nine months during which a baby is formed and cared for within the mother, the Bible says:

“Thou knowest not . . . how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child.”  
Ecclesiastes 11:5.

We confess our ignorance. We do not know the secret behind the living factory in which a baby grows. But king David gives us a help in our understanding of some of these secrets. He asks us to look at this great process as part of the work of God which He carries out every day. Listen to David while he thinks aloud about his own beginning:

“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My frame was not hidden from thee when I was made in secret.”

“For thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb.” Psalm 139:15 and 13.

Did you notice how David speaks of this living miracle as the work of God? In our language, the power, the mind behind the cells from which the baby is formed is God himself. He is the designer of the method. The blueprint is His. More than that it is God’s power which keeps the whole process going.

Let us think again for a moment. We have come to the threshold of one of the rooms in the house of wisdom. Shall we cross the threshold and go inside? Here we are. Sit down and exchange a few thoughts with wisdom.

I suppose most of us have met our grandfathers and grandmothers. Not many have met their great-grandparents: and as for great-great and great-great-great grandparents they seem to be lost in history. All the same it is quite clear that we could keep on going back tracing where we came from. That of course is why so many Americans travel to Europe on vacation. There are roots in Ireland, Scotland, England, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and other lands from which the great tree of the American people has grown. But could you keep on going back for ever? Or was there a time when the human race began?

The Bible is very plain about this and, without going into great detail of how the intricate parts of man were first formed, tells us clearly that God started the process:

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

“in the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him, male and female created he them.” Gen. 1:27, 2:7 and 5:1-2.

There is a lot to learn here. God is the beginning and all life came from him. He was the purpose behind the first man and woman. They were his creation. Did you notice the strange mixture of which man was formed? Dust of the ground and the the breath of life: that is, from the earth on which he lives and by a living force from God.

Did you notice something else? Right at the beginning when we spoke of someone being like grandfather or having mother’s hair and father’s eyes we all knew just how true that is. But what does the Bible mean when it says that the first man and woman were made in God’s likeness? I’ll tell you what I think and we can perhaps hear more about it in later letters. I do not think the likeness lies in hair and eyes or anything to look at with the human eye though angels have a form very much like ours: it lies in the great possibilities of the human mind -- love, joy, worship, righteousness, sincerity, faithfulness, and a host of other qualities.

But to go back for a moment. If God made man, then man belongs to God. If man depends upon God for everything, even life itself, then man should be thankful and show his love for God. That is common sense but it does not happen all that often. Do you think about it? Do you live thankfully? Do you acknowledge God’s power, God’s blessings and his eversustaining arm? You should do so -- in fact, and this is a deep thought which you can carry about with you for a day or two and work out its meaning, a man who does not think about God cannot possibly be using his mind as God meant him to do. He is neglecting something. He is missing something. He is losing an opportunity. It reminds me of the day when a famous scholar went into a monastery on Mount Sinai. He found the leaves from an old book. The monks said they had used some to make a fire. The scholar had a look at them and discovered they were pages written by hand. They were priceless. One of the oldest copies of the New Testament in the world today! And they were using them for keeping warm. Some people do that with their minds. They use them for all sorts of little things -- sailing boats, driving cars, watching television -- and forget to think of the God of the mind and to worship him. Make good use of your mind. Use it as God intended. You will never regret it.

This is the kind of advice the Bible gives on this subject:

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” Ecclesiastes 12:1.

Feel after God and find him “though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live and move and have our being” Acts 17:27, 28.



“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.”

Psalm 139:17, 18.

This is the beginning of the way to understanding life and to getting the most out of it. How can we go wrong if we think about the Mastermind, the One who is the mainspring of everything? Spend a minute or two before you go to sleep each night in thinking about the majesty and wisdom of God. Call the stars to mind, the migration of birds, the movements of the seas, the seasons of the year, the little seeds from which great things grow.

Now read for yourself Job 38. Make sure you read it carefully. God is speaking to Job and letting him into some of the wonders of the world.

## **WHAT WENT WRONG?**

Something must have gone wrong. Think about it. If God made man in His own image -- and we know that He did because the Bible plainly tells us -- what happened to make man the kind of creature he now is?

Take a look at man for a moment. You will remember that in my last letter we considered the wonderful mind and body of a baby. It is no less marvellous when the infant has become a man. Our bodies are surpassingly amazing, finer than most up-to-date scientific achievement. The heart is a built-in pump which keeps its rhythm, day and night, week by week, year by year, throughout a lifetime. Our eyes are cine-cameras of top quality with twin lenses for stereo-pictures, automatic adjustment for brilliant light or pictures by moonlight and everything in colour! And so with all the parts of the body, each fitted for a particular task and carrying it out with fascinating ease.

The mind too is more complicated than all the world's computers put together. Messages from thousands of nerves are received every second and responses sent to every part of the body. From outside our bodies the brain takes up the sounds we hear, the sights we see, the things we feel, the smells we breathe and the food we taste -- and quick as lightning the electronics of the brain use the information for our good. Besides all this the mind can receive and file its information ready for use later on.

All these breathtaking marvels are God's planning. But ... yes, but what has gone wrong? You see man is a very strong mixture; he can be kind, loving, sincere, self-sacrificing and he can be mean, violent, unclean, unscrupulous. I am not talking about savages in remote islands -- I am talking about men and women in our big cities who can read, write and make intelligent conversation. These men and women, people you know, can be either good or bad. If we want to be really personal -- you and I can be either honest or dishonest, considerate or heartless, clean minded or evilly minded. Why? If we were made in the image of God how can we be both kinds of person? God is not like that. He is altogether and always merciful, faithful, holy, true, forgiving, righteous, and never at any time unmerciful, unfaithful, untrue, unforgiving, unrighteous. Why is man such a strange mixture?

When you come to think of it even our bodies are affected by some kind of trouble or pest or blight or whatever we like to call it. For example, we catch cold, we have measles, bronchitis, and smallpox, jaundice and a host of other diseases. And we grow old and our senses begin to fail. Then we die. Why does this sort of thing happen to us? The average man and woman does not want it to happen and they

take great care to protect themselves. Millions of pills, powders, doses, injections, ointments, plasters, drugs and medicines are used every year to keep people well or to bring them back to health. And yet, sooner or later, to all of us without exception, death comes to stay. Why does this happen? It does not happen to God; He cannot die.

All this needs an explanation. Man is a mixture of good and bad, and there must be a reason. Would you like to know what that reason is? It is not a pleasant thing to know; but it can be helpful in the long run. In fact, if we do not know the truth about ourselves we have no hope of putting things right.

The first step is to remember that God who knows everything, certainly knows what is wrong with us. The second step is to listen to what God has to say. And, the third step is to have the good sense to take heed.

Let us begin our hunt for truth. Are you ready?

We'll go together. We shall feel safer that way. And, before I forget, let me say we are all in the same boat. Everyone has the same strange mixture inside. Listen to one of the greatest men who has ever walked on earth:

“What I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.” Romans 7:15.

The brother of the Lord Jesus Christ wrote very powerfully about the use of the tongue. In one section of his writing he says this:

“But the tongue . . . therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made in the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.” James 3:8-10.

We know just how these two writers felt. We feel exactly the same. Every one of us has experienced the same double nature of which we are made. You will perhaps remember the famous story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the one a fiend and madman, the other a respectable citizen. In the end of the story we discover that they are the same man. Sometimes we behave so differently from our usual selves -- either for better or worse -- that we wonder where all the differences spring from.

The Bible describes people just like this. Think of David who wrote the exquisitely beautiful Psalms and was brave enough to slay Goliath: yet even he committed crimes of a terribly serious kind. Look at Peter standing bravely by the side of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, ready to fight to the death in his Master's defence; and then see him but a few hours later swearing that he had never been with or even seen Jesus of Nazareth. These are well-known examples of different kinds of behaviour in the same person.

Can you explain this strange fact? If not, would you like to know the reason? You would? Then let us proceed with our investigation. The Bible tells us in the simplest possible terms how the trouble started and why it is continuing today.

Think, then, of the first man Adam and his wife Eve. God blessed them and gave them ideal surroundings in which to live -- a paradise a park or garden on earth. They were reflections of God -- they reflected His wisdom as parts of His creation, and in their minds so long as they worshipped and obeyed him. There came a day when their faithfulness was put to the test. It was a severe test but not one which they could not understand. The serpent in the garden informed Eve that there was no danger in disobeying

God. God had said that the tree in the midst of the garden was prohibited ground; to eat it would bring death. The serpent said death would not come but instead a great freedom, Adam and Eve would be gods in their own right.

Eve should have rejected the temptation outright. She had the answer ready to hand. God had given her everything and she knew His commands and would keep them. But no, Eve hesitated and then fell. She took the fruit of the forbidden tree and persuaded Adam to do the same. They discovered all too late that the serpent was wrong. All their happiness and innocence had melted like snow in a furnace. They were rebels against God because they had preferred their own way to His way. Would God keep His word? Would death come upon them?

Let us remember one thing. God always keeps His word. God's word is His bond and we can always rely on its truth. What is more there is no one who can prevent the fulfilment of God's will when God sets it in motion. You might as well try to hold back the sea or prevent the sun from rising.

The rebels learned the seriousness of their choice. They were sinners before God. They had said God did not mean what He had said. Thanklessness and selfishness had brought disobedience to God. Two results overtook them sin always has consequences and the first sin had great ones. They learned by experience what had happened and they knew inside themselves that they were sinners. Sin had become a part of themselves; they were stained creatures. The image and likeness of God was marred and they would never be the same again. For this reason they would henceforth be a strange mixture of the good they might have been and the evil they had done. This had become part of their bodies and later on when they had children they too would have the same nature.

But something even more serious was yet to come. They began to die. It was not a quick process but it came at last. Every child of Adam and Eve inherits the same dying mortal nature. Every babe born into the world sets out on the journey, whether long or short, from the cradle to the coffin. And no one on earth can stop it.

This then is the explanation of the riddle with which we started. This is a fundamental truth and you should get to know the facts for yourself. Make a resolution right away that you will read the following -- Genesis chapters 1, 2 and 3.

Don't forget to do it. Offer a little prayer before you read and God will bless you in your reading. By the way, I know the story we have followed is rather gloomy and disappointing: but do not despair because there is something as beautiful, nay more so, as this is ugly: something more hopeful than this is hopeless. But that's for another time. God bless you.

## **IS THAT THE END?**

In our last letter we learned about the great tragedy which took place when the first man and woman rebelled against God. They defied God's authority and turned their backs on His love. Adam and Eve decided to set out on their own: but they discovered all too late that sin has grievous consequences. They felt its effects in their bodies. How? By two means. First of all they had lost their innocence and sin had taken root in their minds. Never again would they be free from its power. It would tempt them from within and constantly urge them to please themselves and not to obey God. Secondly, they began to die. The process began and never stopped until they were dead. The last thing we read about Adam is:

“and he died.”

What is death? Is it the beginning of another life? Is it the time when we leave the earth and commence a new life in another place? Do we come back in another form and begin all over again? What are the answers to these questions?

Let us imagine we are going back in time through the years of our own lives. We can remember yesterday and last week well enough: last month is less clear and last year is a strange mixture of things we remember very well and things we feel to have forgotten altogether. But go back still further. Five years, ten years, back, back into the days when you were a small child. Hardly anything can be remembered and, if we go right back to the day of our birth we confess that we know nothing about it. And before that day? None of us knows anything by personal experience of the things which happened before we were born. We simply did not exist. It was just the same for Adam and Eve. God made them and they had no memory of what happened before they began to exist.

You will remember that the Bible describes man's beginning in the simplest of language:

“The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground --”

Man is a creature of dust. The components of his body are the same as the earth upon which he walks. But he has something more than mere dust. There is something which makes him different from the lifeless soil upon which he walks or which he turns over with his plough. What is that difference? ‘Why, it is life. Life is the difference. Where did life come from? It came from God:

“The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

God gave the first man and woman their life. I know you like to read carefully and I would draw your attention to something of importance in the Bible quotation we have just read. It is this. Man became a living soul. He was not given a soul. He himself was a soul. Moreover he become a living soul -- not an ever-living soul, something to live forever. He was alive so long as he obeyed God. God had given him life and he would have it only if he was obedient. We have discovered that man became disobedient. He used the life given to him by God in direct opposition to God's will. That was the fateful day. His life began to slip from his grasp until one day he breathed for the last time and lay still and lifeless. What had happened to Adam? Was he still alive? If so, where? Or had his existence come to an end? Who shall say? God alone can tell us and He has done that in the clearest possible words. Listen to them:

“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” Genesis 3:19

Death was to be the undoing of creation. God would withdraw his breath and Adam would die. Finally, when the process of decay was complete he would have become part of the dust from which he came. If you are tempted to think that the real Adam was something which could not die, then have another look at the above pronouncement by God. Five times the word “thou” is used. God was speaking to that “thou” and telling it precisely what would happen in death. In any case if death was not really the end of Adam then God did not tell him the whole story. Indeed he would have told him a lie which is altogether impossible for God to do. More than that -- the whole conflict in Eden had been expressed in two opposing declarations: the serpent had said to Eve, “Ye shall not surely die;” God had said, “Ye shall surely die.” The serpent had lied and the truthfulness of God's word was proved beyond doubt when both Adam and Eve breathed their last breath, lay still and ceased to have a personal existence.

This is a gloomy subject but let us face it without flinching. It is better to know the truth than to fool ourselves with lies. It is better to understand that “the wages of sin is death,” than to imagine we can get behind death’s back and escape its clutches.

The Bible tells us the truth about this final event in the life of man. It is a truth we can understand even though we must find it very distasteful to accept. Take a look at the following descriptions of death and I am sure you will agree that nothing could be clearer:

“For in death there is no remembrance of thee God: in the grave who shall give thee thanks.”  
Psalm 6:5.

“Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? shall thy wonders be known in the dark? or thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?”  
Psalm 88:11 and 12.

“What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?” Psalm 89:48.

“The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence.” Psalm 115:17.

“Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” Psalm 146:3-4.

“All go to one place; all are of the dust, all turn to dust again.” Ecclesiastes 3:20.

Jesus said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth ... then said Jesus to them plainly, Lazarus is dead.”  
John 11:11-14.

These are but some of the many words of the Bible which confirm something many of us know -- at least in part -- by experience. When we visit the dentist and he uses gas to put us to sleep, or when we undergo an operation at the hospital under an anaesthetic, we learn that it is possible for us to be unconscious even when living. Many people who are involved in road accidents remember nothing about it when they return to consciousness. These and similar experiences help us to understand what happens when we cease to breathe and we die. As a Bible writer puts it, quite simply, our existence as a living person has ceased.

You may well be wondering, therefore, whether death is absolutely the end. If God does not do something for us, the answer is, yes. We do not survive death, we do not have any conscious existence at all when we meet our end.

But there is hope. Think of it for a moment.

Before Adam existed there was only dust. When we die we return to dust. Could not the Lord God, if he wished it, create again from the dust the living creature which has died? Truly, he could. Will he do that? That is a question with a most interesting answer and we must reserve it for another time. But we can remember this: Jesus, when he was here, was able to awaken the dead. He could even go to a grave where a man lay buried and speak to the dead person and rouse him from the sleep of death. This is God’s power and it was given to Jesus as a witness that he was the Son of God. This is known as resurrection from the dead: that means “a standing again,” coming to life again.

Next time I write to you we are going to see how God began to find a way out of the terrible plight into which man fell. In all that darkness God shed a light. Now read for yourself, Psalms 49 and 89, and John chapter 11.

## THE LIFE LINE

In the days of the great sailing ships when long voyages were much more hazardous than they now are, the crews had to work on deck in the worst weather imaginable. Indeed it was often when the gale was at its height and the seas were washing over the deck that some adjustment of sails or gear was necessary. At such times even the most agile and experienced sailor could be taken off balance by a sudden lurch of the vessel, and washed overboard by the running sea. There was little hope for him then unless a fellow-member of the crew could cast him a line right away. If that could be done -- accurately and speedily -- the drowning man had hope of being recovered.

There is a very strong parallel between the drowning man and the whole world of men in God's eyes. Adam and Eve were swept overboard by their own folly and all their offspring, including you and me, are like men in a wild sea without hope of being recovered. There is no fellow-member of the crew to throw us a line for all of us are in the sea. We can never hope to swim to land or to stay afloat: sooner or later we plunge into the depths never to surface again.

Such is the picture as God saw it. It is described by the prophet Isaiah like this:

“And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor.” Isaiah 59:16.

And the Psalmist describes the hopelessness of our plight in these words:

“They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.” Psalm 49:6-7.

There was no one who could help us. No one, that is, except the Lord God. But would he be willing to do it? Had not he been disbelieved? Was it not God who had been spurned?

Had not He the right to be offended at the behaviour of His creatures? Could He not justly leave them to suffer the consequences of their sins? Truly He could: but He did not.

We need to marvel at the God of heaven. He is altogether wonderful. In Him all the power of the universe is centered, yet He condescends to man. Listen:

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?”  
Psalm 8:3-4.

When there was no one to help us God was merciful. He who had been offended showed kindness and grace. God shined when everything had gone dark. How he did this is the story of the Bible and it leads to the unbelievable love shown to us in Jesus Christ. God said: “I'll help you and the condition I make is that you will believe me.” You must have faith. The lifeline was thrown out and we need to grasp it with trust and thankfulness.

The manner in which God showed his mercy is something for us to follow. It is the story of redemption and hope. It is God in his perfection working his will despite the weakness of human nature. This is one of the marvels of God's wisdom; anyone can do a perfect job with perfect tools and perfect knowledge. But God has wrought His work with such poor vessels as you and I. Indeed he has made our helplessness the basis of His plan.

Let us take a look at the principles upon which God has worked and apply them to ourselves. Remember, we are not simply spectators watching other people in distress; you and I are in the same desperate need, we are dying and only God can help us.

Faith was the basis of God's work. Because Adam and Eve had been unfaithful, the only way back was to be by believing God. God would give His Word and ask man to believe it. That seems simple enough, doesn't it? Of course. But most men still prefer to go their own way as though God had never spoken, as though He did not exist. You and I are not to be like that. We are ready to listen to God and we are able to believe Him. Let us see what He has to say and discover whether or not it is reasonable.

The first thing God has to say is that we and the earth belong to Him. That should be obvious. God is asking us to behave as though we believed it to be true. Listen to God as He speaks about the earth:

"I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded." Isaiah 45:12.

"The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein." Psalm 24:1.

What could be more reasonable to believe? Surely, if God made the earth, then it does belong to Him and he can do with it as he wishes.

Think of it in another way. God is King in the universe. The stars and planets obey His will and follow the courses chosen for them by God. Light moves according to the law established by the King. The earth, so small a planet among the millions of heavenly bodies, moves around the sun on her annual circuit in response to the guiding control of the laws of God.

On the earth, nature, as we call it, follows the instincts and rules of life established by the wisdom of God. Man has discovered some of these wonders. Some of them cause him to marvel -- the migration of the birds on their yearly journeys across oceans and continents, the voyages of the salmon as they return from the seas to the river of their birth in order to lay their eggs, the untold beauty of flower and field, forest and sea -- all these move according to the pattern of God. God is King and all these things obey him without knowing that they do so.

"Fire and hail; snow, and vapors; stormy wind fulfilling his word: mountains and all hills; fruitful trees and all cedars: beasts and cattle; creeping things and flying fowl . . ." Psalm 148:8-10.

This is part of God's kingdom. The Lord is king and all creation gives him glory. All except man: man who was given the free choice, chose to forget the king and the kingdom, and to rebel. What will the King do? He has decreed that His will shall be done throughout the earth by every living thing.

He will accomplish his ordained purpose even though in the beginning man was disobedient. Hear now the words of the King as He speaks about this plan He has made:

"But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." Numbers 14:21.

“I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” Isaiah 45:23.

“And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.” Zechariah 14:9.

This is the lifeline. Out of the chaos of man’s rebellion God is working. He has a plan. He has determined that the earth is to be filled with His glory; everything doing God’s will. We can be sure that nothing will prevent the fulfillment of the great purpose of God. The kingdom of God will be complete -- God will be King and all creation will be obedient to Him. But how will this be? Supposing men do not believe this word of God? Supposing men and women -- and most of them are like this -- simply go on living for themselves and utterly disregard God or remember him only occasionally? What then? How can God’s purpose be fulfilled if men will not cooperate? Will He force them to it? If so, why did he give Adam and Eve the choice in the first place? These are important questions and need answers.

Very briefly -- we shall learn more about it as we go on -- God has given himself time. Out of the millions who live upon the earth at any one time there are some who will believe God. These are men for the kingdom. God is making a selection from among men -- or rather men are choosing for themselves depending on how you look at it. Anyone who hears about the kingdom of God can have part in it when God establishes it finally upon earth. The condition is: Believe me and live like men for the kingdom. More about that next time. If you would like to read about the kingdom, read Psalm 72.

## **A MAN IN A MILLION**

How foolish can you get? Some people never seem to learn the lessons of life and run through the years making and meeting trouble. There is the meddler in other people’s affairs, prying around unwanted and causing endless unhappiness by his gossip and interference. There is the lazy, good-for-nothing who has no intention of doing a hard day’s work but becomes a burden to others and complains when things do not come his way. And, you will have read about the drunkard, the housebreaker, and others like them who are constantly appearing in court and prison for their repeated offences. Why are they like this?

Why indeed! But let not any of us imagine that we belong to a different race of people. The trouble with all the human race is that it will not or cannot learn the lessons which God is trying to teach it. Think about it for a moment. Adam’s children would certainly learn from Adam and Eve how wonderful life had been in the garden of Eden before they sinned and lost the pleasures of that paradise. But that did not deter men from sinning and sinning and sinning again in the years which followed.

You would scarcely believe it possible but within seventeen hundred years of the day of Adam there was only one righteous family in all the people who lived on earth. Only one! Not that God had ceased trying to teach and purify men. God was working all the time. He instructed the one righteous family, Noah’s family, what to do and told Noah to preach repentance and righteousness to everybody he met. Not only that: God gave Noah a message of warning - repent or be destroyed. But Noah became a laughing-stock. Men and women and children ignored him, refused to believe God’s word through him, scorned his righteousness and went their own way. Not that it was a better way they had invented: they did all the usual things such as marrying, having parties, building homes and so on. Not that there is anything wrong in that. But they did it in an utterly godless way. They lived just as though God did not exist. Living like that is atheism without God. Make a note of that. Atheism in the Bible is not simply



saying, there is no God. Not may people say that. It is living as though there is no God. Never thinking about Him, never asking what God wants us to do. That is atheism. And there are a lot of people like that.

Now, I want you to notice something very important, what is known as a principle. When men live without God something happens to them in this life. It happened in the days of Noah too. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Genesis 6:5. And what was the result of that? "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence." verse 11. Make a very careful note of that. Men became violent towards one another. All their lusts were roused and there was strife. Men killed one another or threatened to do so. Men were terrorizing women, young men were lawless and there was death in the streets at night. That was four thousand five hundred years ago thereabouts. Are things very much different today? Perhaps they have not yet gone quite that far but we can see all the signs of it. Not merely among wild head-hunters in Borneo where savages know nothing better: no, in our own cities where robberies with violence, attacks on women, cruel hooliganism among young men take place. And in the great wars which have taken place and the small ones which are smouldering or flaring up all over the world.

Men cannot have tranquility without God. God puts it this way: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Isaiah 57:21. You will find that true in your own life. Peace, inner serenity, quietness and assurance come through believing and obeying God. Strife, restlessness, anger and violence come through neglect and disobedience.

But to go back to Noah for a moment. Noah was right and God loved him. God's love is a practical thing as well as a state of mind. God told Noah that He was going to destroy all mankind because of its persistent and unrepenting wickedness. And God did just that. He opened the clouds of heaven and the great underground lakes and fountains. For forty days the rains and released waters surged upon the land called Earth. Noah and his little family and the gathered animals brought to him there were secure from tempest and destruction in the ark which Noah had built at the command of God and to God's specifications. "And all that was upon the dry land died." Genesis 7:22. Thus God exterminated the violence and godlessness of man. Godlessness leads to nothingness, like the candle flame snuffed out between the finger and thumb.

Noah and his family emerged from the ark into a new world. There was a new beginning. Do you think Noah's children could ever forget the flood? They forgot it quickly. Like the drunkard and the housebreaker, like the smoker who knows that cigarettes can bring cancer, they turned their backs on the knowledge of the flood and went their own way. It would be unbelievable if we did not see the same thing happening before us every day in one form or another.

In less than five hundred years the light of God in the world was beginning to go out once more. Darkness and ignorance were spreading over the face of the earth. Men were worshipping the sun, the moon and the stars. They became interested in their own ways once more -- building, business, pleasure, and the countless other activities of man which turn to poison when man leaves God out of account.

What was God to do? How could He extend the lifeline down the ages when so many spurned His lovingkindness and grace?

He chose a man in a million.

A man in a million. A man who would listen and be obedient who although he was a sinner believed in

God. Make a note of his name -- Abram God made it a little longer and called him Abraham. God made him the treasurehouse of God's knowledge. Although we know hardly another name from those distant years -- 2000 B.C. -- Abraham's name lives on. Why is this? What is there different about him? What did he do? Did he write a book? No. Did he build a city? No. Did he become a king? No. Was he a hero in great wars? No. What then?

## **HE BELIEVED GOD.**

Make a note of that. It is the greatest honour a man can pay to God. It is known as having faith. Let us repeat it and let it stick to your mind. Paste it to the walls of your thinking and look at it:

## **ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD.**

Let us look now at this man in a million and see what happened to him. He lived near the great river Euphrates in Mesopotamia. In the fine city where he lived men have found it and dug it out of the desert sands in our own century men worshipped the moon and had a cultured and pleasant existence between the wars and troubles which came. Abraham lived there with some of his relations. Then God spoke to him. Abraham had a vision by which he knew that God was speaking to him:

“Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.” Genesis 12:1.

What would you have done? What did the man in a million do? He knew that God had spoken to him and he did just what God told him. He left his city, Ur, took his relations with him, and with Sarah his wife set out on the journey.

They travelled many hundreds of miles under God's guiding hand until they came to Palestine. Is it not wonderful that the land in which Jesus was to be born was the land to which God brought Abraham?

Abraham and Sarah and their nephew named Lot stood together in the land of Palestine and let their sheep graze there. We look at him and wonder why God has brought him all this journey. Was there a reason? Of course there was. God does nothing without reason. By faith Abraham has been separated from the idols of his homeland and brought to a new land trusting in God.

Pause for a moment. How are you going through life's journey? Like the men of Noah's day? Like the men of Abraham's day? Just getting along without God? I am sure you are not. If you are following these letters you will be drawn nearer to God. You will hear him say

“He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them which diligently seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6.

Now read for yourself: Genesis chapters 6 and 8 and 12.

## **AN UNBREAKABLE PROMISE**

Can you make an unbreakable promise? I do not think so. You might make a promise which you do not break. That's a different thing. We cannot make a promise which we can be absolutely sure of fulfilling. All sorts of things beyond our control can make it impossible to keep the promises we make. It is not that we are untruthful when we make the promise, it is simply that we do not always have the power to

fulfill our intention.

When God makes an unconditional promise there is absolutely nothing that can prevent its fulfillment. God will keep His word. This is of highest importance. You can trust God -- He does not lie, He cannot lie. If therefore He promises something to you He will keep that word.

There is comfort in that. Neither atom bomb nor hydrogen bomb nor the power of Communism nor even death can prevent God keeping His word. Nothing takes Him by surprise. He has prepared for every eventuality, foreseen everything and has the complete power to accomplish all He desires to do.

Therefore when God made a promise to Abraham it was as certain as the existence of God himself. God does not forget, is never late and never gives short measure. Even in the most unlikely circumstances God works His will. There was an occasion when God was going to punish a city for its extreme wickedness. But there was one family there who believed in him. God told them to gather together into one house -- the house of the one who had faith. The family came together and waited for the fateful day. Their house was on the wall of the city and they could see the army surrounding the walls into whose hand God had committed the destruction. Suddenly there was a great shaking, immensely powerful like that of an earthquake, and the city walls collapsed in a heap of rubble. Only one place remained standing. The place with the house in which the faithful were waiting. God had remembered. Read about it in Joshua chapters 2 and 6.

Now look again at Abraham. You will remember that we left him standing in Palestine, the land to which God had called him. He was a complete stranger there. Even Lot his nephew, whom he had brought with him, left him because he wanted better pasture for his sheep. When Abraham was quite alone God spoke to him:

“All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it.” Genesis 13:15.

Abraham's eyes must have smiled. He stood alone without the title deed to a square inch of that land. A stranger and pilgrim. A wanderer without a fixed home and without a city. His eyes looked around him:

“Look from the place where thou art, northward and southward, and eastward and westward: for all the land which thou seest to thee will I give it . . . “ Genesis 13:14.

Abraham looked. He could see the hills and plains, the fertile valleys and the luxuriant woods. All his. And yet not his. His only by promise. Yes, that's true. But the one who made the promise was God and therefore the words will be fulfilled.

God told Abraham to think about it and to do so in a practical way. “The land is to be yours: go and have a look at it.”

“Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee.” Genesis 13:17.

Abraham did just that. He walked all through the land. He saw where Jesus would walk in later years and his eyes rested upon the mount of Olives and the hill of Jerusalem. He walked by the Jordan and he saw where the village of Bethlehem would spring up like a flower. The hills of Galilee and the height of Carmel, the south country bordering on Egypt all flooded upon the inward eye. And Abraham believed that God would give him the land.

But the years passed by. Abraham still lived in a tent and kings and rulers still possessed their several portions of the land of promise. The man of faith became old and his wife Sarah died. Where was he to bury her? Should he go back to Ur and lay her to rest in his homeland? No. There was but one place. She was to sleep in the land of promise and Abraham had to buy a plot of ground for the burying place. Had God forgotten? Was Abraham tired of waiting for the inheritance? No indeed. Abraham died believing. Believing but never having received the fulfillment of the promise.

What do you think of that? Is it not a very strange story? Strangely wonderful, I think, because the last chapter has not yet been written. Abraham will receive that land. It was to be his not merely for a lifetime: he was to have a far greater and more enjoyable inheritance.

You will doubtless remember that in an earlier letter I mentioned to you that God has appointed a day when all the earth will be filled with his glory. It is the day when every faithful believer who has ever lived or who does live will receive the great inheritance at one and the same time. All of them will inherit the earth. The whole world will be theirs' and Christ will be here to give it to them. We shall learn more about that as we go but here is a catalogue of Scriptures which concern Abraham, and you will see from them that God has not forgotten him:

“God removed him into this land and he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession . . . “ Acts 7:4-5.

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country . . . “ Hebrews 11:8-9.

“. . . having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” Hebrews 11:39.

“Ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God . . . “ Luke 13:28.

All those words are in the New Testament which was written about 2000 years after Abraham had died. The last words there were spoken by Jesus the Son of God. God, therefore, has not forgotten his promise. Abraham is asleep in the dust of the ground and the passing of the centuries will be but a tick of the clock when God awakens him from his sleep at the return of Jesus.

Then he will receive the inheritance. Not in a body which grows old and dies, but in a never-dying, an immortal body free from every pain and sorrow. Abraham's inheritance will be forever.

There is something very wonderful about this particular promise. It probably seems a long way from our day and might not seem to concern us. Will you let God speak to you? As he did to Abraham so long ago. He wants you to follow Him through this life, believing like Abraham that God has promised you the earth. He has done precisely that.

Jesus said:

“The meek shall inherit the earth.” Matt. 5:5.

God said through Paul:

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus ... and if ye be Christ's then are ye

Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:27-29.

There are scores upon scores of places in the Bible where the children of God are promised the earth forever. See how many times you can find just that promise in Psalm 37. Read it for yourself. This is the lifeline of God reaching out to you. He wants you to believe Him and to do what He tells you. There is no other way to the inheritance with Abraham.

## **A KINGDOM WITHOUT A KING**

The Jews are a nation with a marvellous history. Their survival through the centuries is a miracle. Persecuted, scattered and separated they have appeared in every land under the sun. Great nations have oppressed them and, as one writer has remarked,

They have stood at the graveside of all their persecutors.

There is a reason behind their greatness and their littleness, their separateness and their survival. The reason is God. In our last two letters we considered a man who became known as the friend of God, Abraham the Hebrew. We saw his trek from Ur of the Chaldees, up the great fertile crescent of the valley of the Euphrates and down into Syria and Palestine. We heard God speak to him and promise him great things: things involving eternity and all the earth. His wife died and was buried; later Abraham died, still a pilgrim and stranger in the land of promise, and was buried alongside his wife.

His son, Isaac carried on the name and so did his grandson Jacob. The lives of these two men were like the life of Abraham -- wanderers and without permanent home. With Jacob began the growth of the family name. He had twelve sons and it was during a time of great famine -- to which that part of the world has been repeatedly subject -- that the whole company of them moved down into Egypt. Father, sons and wives made 70 souls.

This was their first fixed home. Egypt the land of the Pharaohs and pyramids. With their flocks and herds, hard work and the blessing of God they grew and prospered. Within a couple of centuries they were a small nation, virile and expanding. Pharaoh feared lest they should become a threat to the safety of Egypt and he brought them into slavery and cruel oppression. At this time two things happened. A baby was born and the nation cried unto God in their sufferings. They did not know that baby was the beginning of their deliverance from Egypt. The child was Moses who received both a Jewish and Egyptian court upbringing. He became the voice of God to the Jews and to the Egyptians. Under his hand, yet without battle or Jewish army, the whole nation -- men, women and children, together with all their chattels and cattle -- came forth from the furnace of affliction under God's strong hand. The Egyptians, wholly unwilling to lose a nation of slaves, were constrained by mighty plagues and terror, to let God's people go.

Moses led them forth and became their leader. Through him God spoke and the twelve tribes of Israel were forged into a nation with civil and religious laws, and had the fountain of their national life in the counsel and commandments of God.

After a lifetime's wandering in the wilderness on account of their sins and faithlessness, they were brought to the borders of Palestine where Moses bade them farewell and died. His successor was a man of God and a warrior: Joshua, courageous, faithful and successful in his tasks.

Within seven years they had settled victorious in the land which God had promised to Abraham and his

seed.

They had no king. At least they had not a king like other nations. They were the one nation on earth with God as its king. They were unique and their future could have been glorious.

But they were not satisfied. Don't be surprised. Such behaviour fits in exactly with the repeated sinfulness of man ever since the garden of Eden. Of course, it appears and is much worse when the sinfulness comes from people with such privileges and opportunities. As God told them later on:

“You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Amos 3:2

For more than four hundred years after the death of Joshua the national life of the children of Israel was mostly a disgrace with only short periods of repentance and reconciliation with God. But they were still the children of God's friend, Abraham: and for Abraham's sake and for the sake of his promise to him, God kept his part of the great covenant.

After seemingly endless wickedness there arose a new light in the darkness. A man of tremendous spiritual strength and zeal stepped into the midst of a dissolute people. He galvanized them into national action. They became a nation once more and turned away from the past wherein every man had done that which was right in his own eyes.

Samuel had come: the great judge and the remarkable prophet. The nation began to rise from its obscurity and the surrounding peoples, who had been ready like vultures to feed on the dead carcass of Israel, fell back discomfited.

But even good men do not live forever -- at least not in this life. Samuel grew old and his own sons were not fit to be his successors. The people, blown up with pride and forgetful of their reliance on God, asked for a king. A king! A king like all the nations round about. Samuel was shot through with sorrow. It was a personal wound made by a thankless people. But there was something far deeper than that: God put the spotlight on it:

“They have not rejected thee Samuel but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” 1 Samuel 8:7

They had forgotten that the kingdom was the Lord's. They had not chosen him: he had chosen them. He was the king and they were his people. It was this wonderful relationship they had failed to keep.

God gave them a king. He was such as they would have chosen: tall, valiant in battle, a figurehead of a man. But he proved unsuitable and God rejected him.

There followed another king. He was a man of outstanding character, in fact God described him as “a man after mine own heart.” The man was David the author of many of the Psalms and the man who, as a youth, slew Goliath the giant Philistine. David reigned as king but he knew he was sitting on God's throne. His eyes were ever turned to God, and his righteousness and love were an example to God's people.

This was a landmark. If we look back down the centuries and thousands of years, we see Abraham 2000 years before Christ and, one thousand years later, David 1000 years before Christ. God made promises to David which were a filling out, an expansion and extension of the great promises made to

Abraham. Let us take the things together for a moment and see how important they are:

To Abraham God said:

“Unto thy seed will I give this land Palestine.” Genesis 12:7

and:

“Thy seed shall possess the gate of HIS enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Genesis 22:18

Abraham was to have a seed, a man, who would inherit Palestine and bring blessings on every nation under the sun. Abraham never saw that one -- at least he never saw him personally -- but he looked upon him through the eyes of faith. He gazed into the future and knew that he would come. Jesus said:

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.” John 8:56

The promises made to David were of the same kind. David was descended from Abraham and God spoke in promise to David saying:

“And it shall come to pass when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons: and I will establish his kingdom ... I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom for ever: and his throne shall be established for ever more.” 1 Chronicles 17:11-14

What a wonderful promise! An everlasting kingship! Who could this one be? A descendant of Abraham and of David, one to bring blessings on all nations and to reign over God's kingdom for ever, an inheritor of Palestine -- who is this One?

I am not answering this question here. You can begin to answer it for yourself by reading the first verse in the New Testament. Read it and marvel that after 2000 years God remembered and began his work of fulfilment.

By the way, you are sure to want something else to read. Try Psalm 72 and read the description of the King and his Kingdom.

## **A KING WITHOUT A KINGDOM**

When the Romans were ruling in Palestine and Israel had no king the word of God by the prophets remained as a national treasure and hope. Israel under a foreign hand was waiting for the Messiah -- the anointed of God -- the promised Seed of David and Abraham, the coming King. The faithful Jews were filled with longing. Shortly before Jesus was born the national longing was most fervent and many men and women who trusted God were standing on the tiptoe of expectancy. In fact when John the Baptist came on the scene it is recorded that

“all men mused in their hearts whether he were Messiah or not.” Luke 3:15 ‘Christ’ = ‘Messiah’.

About this time Jesus was born. Even in the manner of the birth there was something very remarkable

and something unexpected. God was the Father of Jesus but the mother was not a woman of noble birth, she was a villager living in quiet obscurity. She was chosen of God and her character was one of beauty, humility and faith.

There was no announcement in Jerusalem that Jesus was coming: no fanfare of trumpets, no pageantry in the city temple. Just a quiet word to Mary and the peaceful acceptance of the will of God in her heart.

It was in this way that the Lord God began the fulfilment of the promises made to the fathers. Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world as a baby in the manger outside the inn in Bethlehem. This humble beginning was God's way of showing the lesson that "except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter the kingdom of God."

Even so, can we be sure that Jesus is the promised king? Can we be certain that He will reign? Nothing is more certain. Let us look at a series of messages from God designed to teach us the great truth:

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Matthew 1:1.

Here is the first stepping stone. From these opening words of the New Testament we are told that Jesus is the one promised to Abraham and to David: He is Abraham's seed: David's son. Let us go on from there:

"Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Luke 1:30-34.

Look carefully at those words because they have wonderful significance. God made it plain to Mary and she would know the promises to David by heart that Jesus was the appointed one, the one to rule over Israel and the one to sit on David's throne. Look at it again. It was a positive promise BUT it has not yet received its fulfilment. Two things are clear to the simplest mind:

a Since David's throne was in Jerusalem it must be there that Jesus will reign. He has never yet done this.

b "To reign over the house of Jacob" means that Jesus must reign over the Jews. He has certainly never yet done this because they rejected him -- and still do.

Let us not be put off the trail by the apparent delay in the fulfilment of these promises. There is no delay: it is God's way of working. He will fulfill his words - - completely. Jesus understood this quite clearly and he said as much to his hearers:

"Jerusalem ... is the city of the Great King." Matt. 5:35.

"When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." Matt. 25:31.

"In the regeneration . . . the Son of man shall sit upon the throne of his glory." Matt. 19:28.

The Lord Jesus Christ knew that his pathway to the kingship lay through humility, through death, through



resurrection, through an ascending into heaven, through a return to the earth personally in great glory to establish God's kingdom visibly on earth. The way to the throne was by Calvary. We shall discuss that together later on but we should take careful note of it as we pass by.

The truth and hope that Jesus would reign as king are expressed elsewhere in the New Testament with equal force:

“God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead.” Acts 17:31.

“God shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the time of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:21.

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” Rev. 1:7.

At the appointed time God will send Jesus Christ back to the earth in power and great glory, with all the angels of heaven, and Christ will take the kingdom to himself and shall reign. The Jews also will see him and acknowledge him as king. Then shall be fulfilled the words nailed over the cross:

“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” John 19:19

You will have seen that here is a wealth of evidence concerning the kingship of Jesus Christ. We need now to go a step further. How does this affect you? How can it affect you? How will it affect you?

The scriptures we have read give a clear indication that God has a purpose with the earth. We need to take note of it. When Jesus returns to the earth as king he will bring blessings for his followers. His followers are those who have believed in him and been obedient to his commands. We shall learn a little more of this as we go along but at this point it is our part to believe what God has said. We need to believe that Jesus is the appointed king: we should accept him ourselves as our personal king: we should live like people who are earnestly waiting for his return. All those who have this hope in their heart and fashion their lives according to the principles of Jesus are known as the saints of God -- those who have set themselves apart as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Such believers when they are still alive or have fallen asleep in Jesus will be remembered by the king when he comes. He will raise the dead and gather the living to himself. The faithful ones will receive two priceless gifts:

- a. Everlasting life in perfect joy and holiness.
- b. The inheritance of the kingdom of God on earth.

This is how one of the Old Testament prophets and believers described it:

“And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.” Daniel 7:27.

This glorious prospect set before us. This is the real hope. Let us set our hearts upon it and wait with longing for the return of Jesus Christ.

Now read some of the other Scriptures on this subject: Isaiah 2:1-4; Isaiah 35 and 2 Samuel 23:1-5.

## **THE KING ON TRIAL**

The birth of Jesus was remarkable. The whole of the Old Testament had said that He was coming. Prophets had made clear the purpose of God and the centuries had seen the first promises expanded into a life story. A life story written before the life had begun! Many men have had their life story set down after their death; but only one has had it written before it began.

Jesus was God's Son. He was born because God determined it: the choice was God's. The manner of birth was altogether unexpected. We have seen already that God selected Mary of Nazareth to be the mother of the Son of God. God was His Father. The almighty power of God, known as the Holy Spirit, came to rest upon Mary and the process started. There was no human father. Mary was unmarried and remained so until God commanded Joseph to fulfill the marriage vows Mary and Joseph had already promised one another.

Jesus therefore was altogether different. He was the son of God. This meant more than we can ever describe. In the same way that -- the son or daughter of a king and queen has special rights and privileges by birth so Jesus had special honour attaching to him. Let us never underestimate that. The angels did not. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem an angel of great importance uttered the meaning of the birth:

“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11.

“Christ the Lord.” Such was the title of Jesus. And, as though to add wonder to the message, the whole heavens were filled with a multitude of angels singing:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and goodwill toward men.” Luke 2:14.

Here, then, are the glory and mission of Jesus, the Son of God. Yet, supposing we had only the opening chapter of the story and simply that part of the end which concerns the death of Jesus -- what then? At the beginning we see the babe in the manger declared as Lord by the host of heaven; while at the end we see a man hanging from a cross dying in the darkness. Is this the Lord? Where now are the angels? Can this be the Son of God? Is this the King of Israel?

In these questions we come face to face with deep and deeply interesting questions. We expect a king with a crown of glory and we see a dead man crowned with thorns. We look for a throne and we find a Cross. We imagine a royal court with glittering splendour and we see Jesus, mocked by soldiers, disowned by his people and standing on trial for his life. Has something gone wrong -- seriously wrong? Has the purpose of God in Jesus collapsed in failure?

We look again. Among the very last words of Jesus we discover some powerful checks to our sorrow and dismay. As his life draws to its last minutes we hear him cry with the whole power of his being: It is finished. Shortly afterwards before his head rests silent upon his breast, he prays: Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. These are not the words of a bewildered, defeated man; they show

purposefulness and assurance. Let us look more closely.

When we examine the life of Jesus -- that time between his unique birth and his humiliating death -- we discover a time of exquisite beauty. If you have not read the life of Jesus through at one sitting in the quietness of your own room, then you should do so without delay. Take any one of the Gospels -- Mark to begin with -- and read it straight through with care and with prayer.

The life of Jesus is a life of complete righteousness. There is perfect and loving obedience to his Father in everything. He lives his life: he does not waste it. Apart from a brief glimpse of his boyhood when he lived in subjection to Mary and Joseph, we know very little of his first thirty years. And then he emerges from obscurity, without pomp, without glory, without angels and engages in public preaching and healing for about three and a half years until his death. Imagine, friend, what power is locked away in those three and a half years: they have changed the face of history, affected the destiny of nations and made new men and women out of thousands of sinners.

Let us try to understand something more of this marvel. It is true that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the seed of Abraham and David, and, therefore, the appointed king to rule over all nations. That purpose of God in Jesus still stands and, as we have seen in earlier letters, will assuredly be fulfilled. There was, however, another aspect of the work of Christ -- in many ways a greater work which had to be accomplished before his reign on earth would begin. It is for this other reason that Jesus gave his life on the tree at Calvary.

In the days of Adam and Eve there had been one King -- the Lord God himself. But his authority had been flouted and his word disbelieved. Our first parents rebelled against the kingship of God and as a consequence they were sinners doomed to die. Death came through the door when Adam and Eve let sin into their lives. The two go together. The wages of sin is death.

You will recall that despite this rebellion God was gracious and in his wisdom began to work out a plan whereby the earth would finally be filled with his glory. "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with my glory." In the Old Testament we saw this purpose made firm in great promises and personal assurance given to Abraham and later on to David. They were promised a famous descendant and there is no doubt at all -- read again the very first verse of the New Testament -- that Jesus was the One who was promised.

There was, in addition, another constant lesson taught in the Old Testament to all who wanted to worship God. They had to do it on God's terms; and that was reasonable enough, not only because God is Lord of heaven and earth, but also because man was the offender, the guilty party. The lesson God taught man was very simple but remarkably powerful: God is holy and man is sinful and dying. When a man approaches God, therefore, he must acknowledge these things. Very often God made it abundantly plain as, for example, when he told Moses to remove his shoes saying, "the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

The holiness of God was made plain by an appointed manner of approach to him and by the lives of those who were acceptable to him. But how did man declare that he was a sinner and worthy of death?

God told him how to do it. First of all he gave the lesson to Adam and Eve. A lamb was slain and they were given the lambskin to wear. Herein was a simple lesson. Their sin required a covering and an acknowledgment. The death of the lamb was their acknowledgment that "the wages of sin is death," and the lambskin was the God-given token that God would cover their sins.

Throughout the Old Testament men approached God in the appointed way bringing with them a sin offering, a sacrifice, to show their own unworthiness and their need of God's forgiveness, God's special covering. There was no magic in this. There was no special power in the blood of the sacrifice. The power lay in the faith of the one who made the offering, in his obedience to God's command, and in God's willingness to receive him.

This method of forgiveness had limitations. The first one is obvious; there was no real connection between the sacrifice and the one who offered it. The link was in the mind of the offerer and in the mind of God. The second limitation lay in the fact that although forgiveness could be obtained this way, the root of the problem remained untouched -- sinners were still born into the world, even sinners whose sins had been forgiven discovered that they soon sinned once more. What was required was something or someone to take away sin itself.

Throughout the thousands of years, from Adam to Jesus, sin had been the undisputed king: not one single human being had escaped his power, not one had been sinless. When Jesus came the kingship of sin was put on trail: for the first time a champion entered the field equipped and able to challenge the rule of sin and to restore the holiness and righteousness of God.

Read for yourself 1 Peter 1, and take up the threads of this wonderful salvation in our next letter.

## **THE KING DETHRONED**

The way which led to kingship for Jesus took him to Calvary where he died. This was no mistake. Herein was a great and loving work. The Kingship of Jesus is more than sitting on the throne of David in Jerusalem, ruling over all nations -- though He will certainly do that. The Kingship of Jesus will be righteous and perfect. There will have been no other king before him like unto him, His Kingship will be perfect.

His path to Kingship began in Nazareth and was completed when He died on the Cross. It was a life of conquest, of battle unto the death. No one but He could have accomplished it. This was work for a man who was righteous altogether.

What was the work and why did it cost Jesus his life? You will recall from our last letter that all the children of Adam and Eve through the centuries had been sinners and had died. Sin was the undisputed king. The temptations which assail us had been too strong for all our forefathers. Even the best of them had been brought to their knees and had declared:

“I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.” Psalm 51:3.

“We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and thy judgments . . . O Lord righteousnes belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces.” Daniel 9:5-7.

These words are true of everyone of us. There is not a man living who does not feel within himself this insufficiency and weakness. This is the root problem of mankind. Man cannot remove the cause even with the best intentions in the world. It is true of the best of us that, when we discover our sinfulness it is too late for us to escape. We know that we are as good as dead. If, indeed, the wages of sin is death, then all of us are under that sentence. We are like the condemned prisoner in the cell awaiting the day

of his execution.

The terrible hopelessness of the human race in this respect is described in the Bible:

“There is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

“There is none righteous, no not one.” Romans 3:12, 10.

“Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you.” Isaiah 59:2.

“For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us: and our sins we know them.” Isaiah 59:12.

We are like men thrown into the sea with iron chains around our hands and feet, and a great weight around our necks. However tremendous the effort we make, we are doomed to sink.

But God is merciful. No man is condemned merely because he is descended from Adam and Eve. He is not responsible for that. Man stands condemned because of sin; every man who comes to understand these things realizes that he is a slave to his own sins. We have inherited from Adam and Eve our human, mortal nature which takes us to the grove, and our inclination to sin which Adam and Eve chose when they chose to sin rather than to be obedient to God. But, beyond our inheritance we have our personal sins, our own iniquities and for those we have a special responsibility.

Now, whereas forgiveness of sins will remove our personal transgressions it does not take away the weakness of our natures -- its mortality and sinfulness. It was to this great and, humanly speaking, insoluble problem that Jesus came. He came with the express intent to take away the problem at the roots, to remove the cause and to make a new beginning.

This is how God described it in the Old Testament times:

“And God saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness it sustained him.” Isaiah 59:16.

God did not send an angel to do this work. Nor did He send a Son who, though sympathetic toward us, was outside our experience. Jesus was born of Mary of Nazareth for the express purpose of sharing our nature -- our weakness, our temptations, our trials, our mortality. No man can ever say to Jesus, “Lord, you do not know what it is to be tempted,” or, “Lord, you do not know what it is to face death.” The Bible makes the whole matter plain:

“When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them which were under the law . . .” Galatians 4-4-5.

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.”

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest . . . for in that he hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” Hebrews 2:17,18.

“He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15.

The Lord Jesus Christ attacked sin on its own ground -- human nature. Indeed there was no other way to victory. Sin had entered the beings of Adam and Eve by their own choice and death had followed in its train. Jesus strove with temptation on that very battleground. Within himself, in his heart and mind, temptation arose as they do with every one of us. But, for Jesus, each trial was a victory. By utter reliance upon his Father, in the agony of prayer and breaking of his own will, he maintained his righteousness. Even in the heat of attack by his personal enemies he could ask: “And, which of you convinceth me of sin?” There was no answer. In him was no sin. His perfect loveliness was unmarred by any transgression. The lily was pure white. Not because He could not sin, but rather that He would not. His life was a victory -- not shallow or makebelieve - but real and lasting.

This was a matchless time in all history. For the first time someone who bore the weak and temptable nature of his brethren was altogether and enduringly free from sin, Indeed, here was one who could die and yet was in no way guilty under the law which said: the wages of sin is death. Why then did He die?

This was the path marked out for him by God -- and the path which He willingly trod in perfect and loving obedience to his Father. He was the lamb of God. Not the lamb of the Old Testament which died unwillingly and in ignorance of why it was offered. Here was the Lamb truly related to sinners in that He was of their nature. Here would be the perfect acknowledgment of the sin of mankind and the perfect covering for the sinner's sin.

“He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.” Phil. 2:8.

“Behold, the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1:29.

So complete was the victory of Jesus that not only was sin conquered as he lived, but even the very source of temptation was put to silence in a willing death. The very source of sin was destroyed.

The day of his death, therefore, was the moment of final accomplishment. For this reason he cried:

“it is finished.” John 19:30

He had completed the work God had given him to do. Sin was no longer the undisputed king over all the earth. Righteousness had come in: God's holy Name was set up anew. The poison of sin had been removed. Adam's evil work had been undone. The gates of righteousness were wide open and Jesus went in even though the jaws of death closed upon Him.

Read for yourself: 1 Peter 2.

## **THE GRAVE WITHOUT A BODY**

Every year thousands of Russians and communists of other nations file past the tomb of Lenin to pay homage at the last resting place of the man to whom they owe their greatness. In Egypt great pyramids rise above the sands and house the elaborate and well-concealed rooms of the dead in which the mighty kings and queens of departed glory sleep. In Britain the ancient abbeys and cathedrals, the old churches of the land and many another spot mark where the famous dead are honoured at their burial place. One poet, when he had walked around Westminster Abbey, penned the following warning:

Mortality, behold and fear,  
What a change of flesh is here!  
Think how many royal bones  
Sleep within these heaps of stones;  
Here they lie, had realms and lands,  
Who now want strength to stir their hands,  
Where from their pulpits seal'd with dust  
They preach, 'in greatness is no trust.'  
Here's an acre sown indeed  
With the richest royallest seed  
That the earth did e'er suck in  
Since the first man died for sin:  
Here the bones of birth have cried  
'Though gods they were, as men they died!'  
Here the sands, ignoble things,  
Dropt from the ruin'd sides of kings:  
Here's a world of pomp and state  
Buried in dust, once dead by fate.

And so it is the world over. In your country, wherever you live, there is some remembered grave at which men pay their tribute in honoured memory of the dead.

But with Jesus Christ it is different. No one can go to his grave and say, "So, here He lies." There is no grave which holds the body of Jesus. The center of the hope of those who follow Jesus is an empty tomb. All is unique so far as Christ is concerned: His wonderful birth, His holy and wholly righteous life, His victorious death and His empty grave. Listen to the words spoken to those who came to the grave in hope of adding some lost touch to the embalming:

"Very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? and when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified, he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him." Mark 16:3-6.

The truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ dawned only very slowly on those first disciples. Even those who experienced the examination of the empty grave where Christ had lain were amazingly reluctant to believe that He was alive again. Only after repeated assurance in which they saw Him, talked to Him, ate a meal with Him, handled Him, did the glorious fact begin to make its impact upon them,

"The Lord is risen indeed." Luke 24:34.

Let us get the facts straight. This was no fantasy. Christ had truly risen. The body which had entered the grave had been raised from the dead by God. It was not another body: it was the same body. Jesus was at pains to dispel the idea that the disciples were seeing some kind of phantom:

"Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

Luke 24:38-39.

But, even so, Jesus would never again go back into the grave. His resurrection from the dead by God the Father was with the express purpose of giving him everlasting life, immortality:

‘Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more.’ Romans 6:9.

“God raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption.” Acts 13:34.

“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.” Revelation 1:18.

He is freed from the chains of death: no longer does He suffer temptation or pain. He has entered the glorious liberty and everlasting happiness of immortality.

This then is the center of the hope in Jesus Christ. We do not remember a dead Christ -- though He did die -- but a living One who can hear us as we pray, and can bless us with His personal comfort and guidance in everyday living.

Let us now look a little more closely at this matter. There is much more to it than meets the eye at first glance. Wonderful though it is that Jesus has come forth from the grave, it is equally wonderful to know why.

“Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.” Romans 6:9-10.

“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” Acts 2:24.

“Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” 2 Timothy 1:10.

“If we believe an him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our trespasses, and raised again for our justification.” Rom. 4:24- 25.

The victory which Jesus achieved in His lifetime by conquering sin completely and utterly, has been acknowledged by God in raising Jesus from the dead. If we can think of the process by which death came into the world -

“By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin” Romans 5:12.

we can better understand how that Jesus took away sin and made possible the abolition of death. Although He died in obedience to His Father and to make plain His supremacy over sin, we must understand that He was not worthy of death. Jesus was no sinner. For that reason God sealed his righteousness by life, opening the gates of death and bringing forth His Son unto eternal life.

This is the great break through. Until Jesus accomplished this work there was no way whereby the inexorable law of sin and death could be broken. In Jesus there is hope. His righteousness and His resurrection are God’s gift to us. If we can see the beauty of the righteousness of Jesus, if we can in some measure appreciate the depth of His love in willingly offering Himself to gain the great freedom,



then we can have hope.

We can share these things. Not because we ourselves are righteous - else would there have been no need for Christ to die -- but because God loved us. He has given us the opportunity of confessing our weakness, our need of forgiveness, and has revealed his own righteousness in Jesus for us to desire and to love. If we confess our bondage in Adam and our own sins, and desire with all our heart to be free in Christ, seeking God's righteousness in Him, then God is willing to receive us.

"Christ died for the ungodly." Romans 5:6.

"God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."  
Romans 5:6-8.

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus!" Romans 3:23-24.

The empty grave of Jesus is the doorway to everlasting life. His Cross is the death of our sins, if we make confession, and His resurrection is our hope.

Now read for yourself -- Romans chapter 5.

## **A WATERY GRAVE**

The victory of Jesus Christ became the worldwide message of the apostles. Those frightened men who were scattered in fear when Jesus was taken prisoner and who hid themselves lest they too should be taken, became dynamic, fearless and vital preachers. No longer were they like timid mice in their holes afraid lest the cat should appear. Instead they stood forth boldly in the heart of Jerusalem proclaiming with joy and fearlessness:

"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." Acts 2:32.

"ye killed the prince of life, whom God hath raised up from the dead; whereof we are witnesses."  
Acts 3:15.

"They preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead." Acts 4:2.

"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead . . ." Acts 4:10.

This was the basis of their teaching. The living Christ was God's assurance of everlasting life for all who would desire it. There was to be no other way. There were some -- even a short while after these events -- who declared that the resurrection was not as important as the apostles made it out to be. To these mistaken men and women the apostle Paul penned one of the most powerful chapters in all the Bible. With the power of inescapable reasoning he drove home the tremendous truth:

"Now if Christ is preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain . . . ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.

Let us not miss the lesson ourselves. Paul knows that the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead is the keystone to our faith. To deny it is to destroy the faith which Jesus preached. To accept it is to believe in the only way to the forgiveness of sins and to immortality.

Look at it this way. Paul tells us that the resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee that all believers who die will themselves be raised from the dead. Jesus is the first of many. He is the pattern of others to follow. He is God's deposit guaranteeing the purchase of the whole number of the saints of God. Take away the resurrection of Jesus and the whole house collapses in ruins.

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that are asleep. For since by man come death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.” 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

Here is the complete picture. By natural birth and by our own sinfulness we are Adam's children; and that brings death. “In Christ” whatever that means we are related to the resurrection of the dead and, should we die before Christ comes back, we shall be raised from the dead at that second coming.

We need now to ask the question: what does Paul mean when he talks about being “in Christ?” What is it to be “in Christ?” Quite clearly it is the opposite of being “in Adam.” We cannot help being “in Adam” because that comes to us by birth and natural habit. Is there a way in which we can be “in Christ” and thereby related to everlasting life? Surely, there is and the New Testament makes it very plain.

There is a great difference between Adam and Christ. Not simply the difference between life and death, but the difference between living for one's self and living for God. Being in Christ means that a man has decided to change the course of his life. It is as though he had been heading for rocks in a small boat, driven by a gale and with no hope of escape when suddenly a strong hand takes the helm and despite the apparent impossibility of it takes the ship to sea on a new and different course. Being in Christ means that Christ is Master. We have heard of Him, learned of Him and decided we want to serve Him. This change of mind is known as repentance. A man confesses his hopelessness, a sinner without chance of escape from eternal death, and he takes hold of the life-line of the promises of God made firm in Jesus Christ:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30.

This is no light decision to make. Jesus makes it clear that it is the decision of a lifetime. It is the greatest choice a man can make. It is though a man had been walking in pitch darkness toward the edge of a cliff and Jesus had laid His hand upon the man's shoulder and turned him around. The change is even greater than that. It is not simply choosing between life and death: it is choosing between everlasting life and everlasting death.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

Adam drags us down to the grave: Christ alone can bring us out. We need faith in Him, in the things concerning Him and concerning the kingdom of God. If we truly desire these things, if we recognize the love of God in Jesus and the love of Jesus in His life and death, and wish to be free from sin and all its

consequences, then we flee to Christ for safety. We seek to be in Him.

But how do we take refuge in Him? How can He cover us in safety? Jesus tells us quite simply:

“He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved.” Mark 16:16.

If we believe in Christ and His teaching, then we can be baptised into Him. Baptism is a burial in water in the name of Christ of a man who truly believes in the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. When a man does that, then God receives Him and covers him with the name of Jesus. He becomes Christ’s servant; he is in Christ. The apostle Paul describes it in this way:

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ.” Galatians 3:26-27.

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:3-4.

This is the great change. When a believing man goes into the watery grave of baptism he buries with Jesus his old way of life, his sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ and he comes forth a new man, newly born into the family of God. No longer does he bear the name “in Adam” but he is “in Christ.”

One of the punishments which Christians were made to bear during the persecutions of the first century was to have the corpse of a dead man hung around their neck: and they had to carry it, drag it around with them until they too died. Being in Adam is like that: we are tied to sin and death. By Christ we are cut free and united with Christ himself. All his saving work takes effect in us. We are new creatures in Christ. The watery grave of baptism buries our old life and we are new men in Christ.

Think about your own life. Are you tied to Adam -- united with death? Or are you with Christ sharing the joy of the hope of life everlasting in God’s coming kingdom? Christ calls to every man:

“Enter ye in at the strait gate because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life.” Matthew 7:13, 14.

Now read for yourself Romans chapter 6.

## **THE ROYAL FAMILY**

Royal babies are always an attraction. In Britain where the monarchy has lasted through centuries the children of the reigning king or queen are heralded with joy. They betoken the continuity of the monarchy. They stand for something greater than themselves: they have great privileges and tremendous responsibilities. They will be free from the struggles of life which come to lesser mortals -- no worries about homes and income: but they will hardly ever have a private moment, they can never walk the streets alone or lie on the beach in the sun wherever and whenever they wish.

Perhaps we have thought that there is something unfair about the wealth and honour into which royal babies are born without any choice of their own and without either deserving their lot or working for it. I think we have a point there, but there is nothing one can do about it; in greater or lesser degree it is

true of every baby born into every home. You and I cannot change our position in society, the colour of our skin or our nationality. They were our inheritance.

It is interesting. therefore to learn about a royal family whose babies are all there by choice! No doubt it sounds impossible: but it is perfectly true. What is more ANYBODY who really wants to can be in that royal family. More wonderful still is the fact that the family is the greatest one on earth.

Let us look at this step by step. It is no fairy tale or wild fancy of the mind: it is the real and sober truth.

The Royal Head of this Royal Family is God. You will remember from an earlier letter that God is King of the Universe. Everything belongs to Him: He is the Creator of heaven and earth: by Him everything continues to exist. He is the life which is in everything that lives: He is the power found in the whirling planets, the mighty seas, the flight of the birds, the hum of insects, the growing seeds buried in the good earth.

“The Lord is a great God, And a great King above all gods ...” Psalm 95:3.

“Sing praises to God, sing praises for God is the King of all the earth: Sing ye praises with understanding. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.” Psalm 47:6-8.

“Praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.” Daniel 4:37.

Let us get our bearings right. If you have ever seen an earthly king passing through the streets crowded with admiring subjects, riding in a gilded coach with horsemen in scarlet uniforms and long straight columns of soldiers presenting arms -- if you have seen that and have been taken into an ecstasy of wonder, admiration and, perhaps, a desire to share it, then you might think that the kingship of God is a less real thing, true but less important in everyday life. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We are dependent upon God:

“Seeing he giveth to all life and breath and all things ...” Acts 17:25.

We are never dependent upon any man to that extent.

Having understood that much we now ask the question: Are there any Royal Babies in God’s Royal Family? It seems a strange question to ask: it is marvelous to learn the answer.

We all know One of the royal children. Jesus Christ was the Son of the Great King. People did not recognize it and He was born in the stable because there was no room for Him in the inn. Make no mistake. He was a royal child. The angels knew the truth about Him. On the night when He was born in Bethlehem great things were said about Him:

“I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11

The Son of God! The King of Israel! If you want to test His credentials you can do so. Read His life and notice the wonderful powers which lie in His Hands. He can make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dead to live: He can feed 5000 people from the merest fragments of food: He can speak to the raging

sea and in a moment it is quiet: He can heal the sick by a word over a distance. These are the words of a King. No other man has had these great powers in his hand.

Of course men looked for the wrong things. They expected the outward show of earthly kings -- a sumptuous palace, a retinue of servants, splendid feasts and royal occasions, the glitter of gold and the colours of jewels. Jesus had none of these. But He had the marks of His Father, the King of heaven and earth; love, righteousness, holiness, truth, mercy, compassion, forgivingness. Not outward things but inward realities. Not mere appearance which wears away, but the royal character which endures.

That is true kingship. It was a kingship which God gladly acclaimed. "This is my beloved Son, hear Him." Moreover it is the kingship which will finally be manifest on earth in royal splendour when Jesus is enthroned in Jerusalem the city of David, when all nations are subject unto Him and the kingdom of God is fully established on the earth:

"The government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace: Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end: Upon the throne of David, to order it and to establish it . . . "

Christ will return to earth and reign as king over all the nations. All power has been given Him in heaven and in earth. When He reigns in Jerusalem all the earth will be His kingdom.

But are there any other royal children? There are none born as Jesus was. But there are others adopted into the royal family at God's invitation. They are born of royal seed and become royal children. They are true and royal heirs of the King of heaven and earth. They are God's children.

All who believe the royal charter of things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and are baptised into the royal name of Christ, become royal heirs:

"Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5.

"Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" James 2:5.

"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy ... for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth." Revelation 5:10.

This is the promise to those who are God's children -- an eternal inheritance in God's kingdom on earth with Jesus when He returns. Does not Jesus say in one of His wonderful parables:

"Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"? Matthew 25:34.

What a marvellous hope! But don't be deceived: if we want to be princes with Jesus in His kingdom, if we truly want to be royal children, then we must live the royal life. Not a life of outward show and vain pomp, but as

"A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, ... shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

Christ must be King in our hearts and His royal law the Sermon on the Mount the rule of our lives.

Now read that law for yourself. Notice how it rings with a majestic beauty which can be found in no other law. Read Matthew chapters 5 to 7.

## **CITIZENS**

In front of the United Nations building in New York there is an arc of flags. They are the flags of the member nations. Every visitor sees them and looks for the flag of his own nation in that colourful parade. It is hard to say what it is that moves us when we see the banner beloved of our home country -- star-spangled or crossed like the Union Jack. No one is exempt from some emotion concerning the feelings which belong to his own country.

When travellers come to the customs and immigration posts at the frontier of another land after their journey by land or air they find themselves divided into two groups -- those who belong to that country and have right of access because their passports speak of their nationality, and those who are "aliens" or "foreigners" and are admitted as guests and visitors.

These differences of nationality are there in times of peace and become painfully clear in times of war. Each of us bears the stamp of his own country and with it he carries privileges and obligations. The privileges are obvious -- we live unmolested in our home land and share its prosperity and joys; the obligations are always there -- we have to pay our taxes, obey the laws and refrain from acts of treason and betrayal of our nation. All this can be understood and in many ways is a good thing.

But citizenship is not without certain difficulties. For most of us it comes to us by birth. Not by any act on our part or any choice, we are Americans, Britons, Spaniards by birth. For a very few in every land citizenship has come by choice -- by marrying a member of another nation and taking on that nationality or by an act of naturalization in which we have renounced the citizenship we had by birth and have taken on another under an oath of allegiance.

All this is very interesting and appears to have very little to do with the way of life in Jesus Christ. Does Jesus make any difference to citizenship? If so, what difference?

Let us look into this very interesting subject for a moment or two and we shall discover that Jesus makes a difference in everything and everyone He meets. The accusation against some of the earliest believers in Jesus was that they said: "There is another king, one Jesus." Of course the accusers were twisting the meaning of these words into treason against the Roman Caesar. But, even so, there was a truth in the accusation. It is true that there is another King, one Jesus. The whole of the gospel message is shouting that as clearly and joyfully as it is possible for men to shout. Listen to them.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:10.

Jesus is higher than any king or lord or ruler or president on earth. No one can compare with him and no one should take the honour which belongs to him. What happens then when a man or woman decided to follow the Lord Jesus Christ? What happens to his or her natural citizenship? Is an American still an American when he becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ? Does a Briton lose his ancient heritage when

he confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord?

What do you think? Answer honestly to yourself after all the things you have read in our previous letters. I am sure that the least you can say is: Jesus must make some difference to me whatever nationality I am. And, that is true. Jesus does. Not that we can ever ignore the fact that we are American or English or Chinese. Nor can we cease to obey the laws of the countries in which we live -- we could not for our own safety and that of others fail to drive on the righthand side of the road, for example. That is obvious. But what about those deeper feelings concerning nationality and citizenship? Are they changed at all?

This is what the apostle Paul had to write about it in his day:

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:26-28.

Here is the key. Those who believe and are baptised into Jesus Christ have entered into greater privileges and assumed larger responsibilities than any which attach to natural citizenship. They have believed in another King, one Jesus: they are heirs to another kingdom, the coming kingdom of God; they are citizens of another city, the city of God.

Let us look at this again: it is important and it makes an incalculable difference to one's daily life. This is how Jesus puts it:

1. The gospel is the word of the kingdom.
2. The believers are the children of the kingdom.
3. The end of the world is when Jesus comes back to this earth and the righteous inherit the kingdom of God on earth.

You can read about that in Matthew chapter 13 -- verses 19, 38, and 43 tell about the points outlined above.

Sometimes it is easier to look at things from the negative point of view, saying what a thing is not rather than what it is. Paul does this when he talks about the man who does not belong to Jesus. He describes him like this:

“Remember . . . that at that time before believing in Jesus ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Ephesians 2:12.

What a terrible plight! Such is the man who doesn't believe. He has no passport to God: no communion with Christ: no hope of life: no citizenship of the kingdom of God. What then of the one who has heard the glad tidings of the kingdom of God and has believed it and has shown his belief by the humility of baptism by burial in water? Paul rings out the wonderful message like bells dancing for joy:

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God: and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” Ephesians 2:20:

This new relationship, this new citizenship is higher and greater than anything we have previously enjoyed. It makes demands upon us and it gives us boundless blessings. The demands can be summed up by saying that we must live like citizens of the kingdom of God while waiting for the return of Jesus Christ. The blessings can be described quite simply by saying that we are members of God's family and He looks after us.

What attitude then do we have to the state or country in which we live? Do we become rebels and plotters against the government? Do we despise the law and order which we enjoy and lead lives of disobedience and disruption? What think you? We are not left to guess: the Bible makes our position altogether plain:

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.” Romans 13:1 and 7.

“Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the gentle and good, but also to the froward.” 1 Peter 2:17 and 18.

From this it is clear that we are to become faithful, law-abiding citizens of the natural countries, being examples of doing good at all times and in all places. Prompt and full in the payment of our taxes without grumbling: respectful to dignitaries and all in authority: giving full measure in our daily work whether our employers are good or bad. Such is the exemplary service of the disciple of Jesus. He behaves always as though he is rendering his service direct to Christ.

But what happens when the law of the state comes into direct conflict with the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ? The answer is clear enough: Jesus has our first loyalty, indeed He has our only loyalty because even the service we render to the communities among whom we live we render it in the name of Jesus. Therefore, if the state or country to which we belong commands us to be disloyal to Christ by breaking His word, then we have no option but respectfully and humbly to refuse. Such occasions are rare. Most of the countries of the western world have centuries of tradition behind them which is based to a large extent upon some of the laws of the Lord Jesus Christ. But there are times when a cleavage appears.

Let us take an example from the Bible first of all. Peter and the other apostles were law-abiding men of Palestine. They used respectful language when they spoke to rulers and the like. When, however, they were commanded by those rulers to do something wholly different to the law of Christ, they said:

“We ought to obey God rather than men.” Acts 5:29.

“Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” Acts 4:19.

Therefore, they obeyed God even when it meant that they had to go to prison.

In our own days a similar situation arises when the state commands us to enlist in the fighting force in times of war. Quite apart from the fact that if we obey this we could well be engaged in fighting fellow believers of other nations, it is abundantly clear that the followers of Jesus must not fight and kill, no, they must not even hate another man in their hearts. At such a time with quiet firmness the follower of Jesus must make known his conscientious objection to military and allied service. It is the moment



when he must stand by the banner of Jesus even though it brings shame upon him.

For this reason too, the disciple of Jesus does not participate in politics and does not vote. He has cast his lot with Jesus and belongs to the army who wait for His coming kingdom. Therefore he is content to be subject to the country in which he lives, to obey its laws and to pay his dues, but not to be active in its government. This is clearly how Jesus lived.

I am sure you will wish to read more of what the Bible has to say on this whole subject. Here then are some key passages: Matthew 5:9, 21-26, 38-48; Matthew 26:47-53; Romans 12:18-21; 2 Timothy 2; 1 Peter 2.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Almost no one, except some scientists knows how many satellites are in orbit around the earth at the present moment. Their uses are many: military recognizance, television and radio transmitters and receivers, weather surveyors, magnetic field probers, and so on. From that first exciting day when the “beep beep” of Russian sputnik burst in upon our thinking the great work has gone on. We have need to marvel at the research and ingenuity which have gone into the vast programs of the great nations.

The Russians have stated that during all their rocket research, both manned and unmanned, they have never met God. If God is in heaven we ought to find him, they say, and we have not found a trace of him. To them this may seem to be conclusive evidence: to us it is a complete misunderstanding of the nature and existence of the God revealed in the Bible and in the person of Jesus Christ.

It is true that God is a person. It is not true that we can find Him by physical means. The Bible throughout all its pages makes it plain that the man who comes into contact with God will do so in his heart and mind by faith. Listen:

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” John 4:24.

Communicating with God is not by touch or by telephone and the like. The qualities of God’s character can be appreciated in the mind and that is the meeting point between God and man. God reveals Himself and man receives that message in his understanding, and if he is wise, he believes.

The scientific Russians who thought they had scored a point over the believer when they claimed -- quite rightly -- that they had not found God in space, had in fact confirmed the answer to an age-old question:

“Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?”  
Job 11:7

The Way to God is not by rocket or any other material and man-made route. There is but one way:

“Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye will build me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.” Isaiah 66:2

Communion with God is not bought with money, however rich we are: nor is it taken by power, however

strong we are: and we cannot obtain it by our own intellects, however wise we are:

“Thus saith the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.” Jeremiah 9:23-24

These things are the key to living with God to understanding and becoming like unto Him, to faith and communion with God. There is no other way. It is as though a farmer has failed year after year to grow any crop on his acres: in desperation he sends for the expert who informs him that one chemical essential to growth is missing from the make-up of his soil. He applies the remedy and next year his fields wave with an abundant harvest. So God by His word and ways injects a new knowledge into the dying human mind, brings a new dimension to living.

Jesus expressed it this way:

“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you . . . It is the spirit which quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.”  
John 6:27 and 63.

We can resist or accept this word of God. God will not force us to accept it: He does not want unwilling servants. He requires a willing mind, and an ear inclined to Him, a heart like good earth ready to receive the good seed. One New Testament writer -- and he was once a rebel against God's Son -- said:

“Receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls.” James 1:21.

That is the way.

Let us not underestimate the power and nature of what God is telling us in these simple and homely figures. Look at it this way. Toward the end of last century a man travelled through Palestine and came across a castle whose great stone walls were cracked and rendered useless. He asked his guide whether there had been an earthquake. In reply the guide shook his head and beckoning to the traveller took him to the walls and showed him the secret. Roots! Just the roots of trees, some of them thin as silken strands, which had pushed their way through crevices and undermined the strength of the wall. God's seed is like that. It has tremendous power, greater than dynamite or atomic force. It has power so to change a man's mind by instruction and guidance that he enters into communication with God and Jesus Christ. He becomes sure of their existence and love for him, and knows within himself that he is known of and cared for by God.

This power of the word of God, released into the believing heart has been known since the earliest time. Paul wrote about it like this:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

May I recommend unto you with all my heart the constant reading of the word of God? By this alone can a man tread the path of understanding and learn the ways of God and of His Son. Herein is the very essence of God's purpose: this is the guidebook to the life of Jesus and to our own. We neglect it

at our peril.

Sometimes men and women say: "I wish I could be a believer in the things you teach, but I cannot, my heart is not like that." There is one answer. If you truly desire to believe, then the word of God will do the rest. Others say: You say a man needs a change of heart, repentance and conversion. How can he obtain these things? The answer comes direct and clear from the word of God:

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." Psalm 19:7-8.

This is the path to understanding, to repentance and obedience in baptism. This is the way to a life lived in communion with Christ Jesus and with God His Father.

"The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Rom. 10:9-10.

There are no barriers which God cannot break down: no sin too great for Him to forgive if we desire it: no condition which He cannot remedy if we but trust Him and follow the path of His word.

This kind of approach to the subject of communion with God is both understandable and reasonable. There is no magic about it, no special power which a man must possess before he can enter on this way. On the other hand there is power here. It is not only that we learn about the ways of God from the printed page. We surely do that. But from that we enter into a living relationship with the living God and his Son.

Jesus makes this plain:

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." John 14:21.

This is the new and living relationship which is made between the believer and Christ. The believer lives in the knowledge that Jesus who died and rose again is ever-living: Jesus Christ takes him like a young bird under His own wings and cares for him.

Who could want a greater fellowship? Who could find one or name one? This is a communion which can be found in this life and which has promise of everlasting life in the age to come.

One Old Testament character is commended in these words:

"He walked with God." See Genesis 5:22,24; 6:9

Let it be understood that he never saw God or spoke with Him, never touched Him or heard Him. But he walked with God. How? By the one great way -- he learned God's precepts and got in step with them. He walked God's way in God's direction. The record of that man ends by telling us that God cared for him, looked after him personally and that in the coming kingdom of God the man will inherit everlasting life.

Which way are you walking? With the many who keep in step with death and have no hope beyond the

grave? Or with Jesus as His disciple in hope of eternal life?

Now read for yourself: Colossians 3; 1 Peter 1; James 1.

## **A MEAL TOGETHER**

In olden times when men wished to show that they meant no harm to one another they would have a meal together. Only a traitor or double-dealer would go back on that bond. Certain foods or acts, such as eating salt or smoking the pipe of peace, added solemnity to the ceremony. We no longer carry out this ancient practice. Nevertheless, however good the food when we eat alone it has added joy when we share it with companions. Some of the happiest family occasions are when the whole family, young and old, sits down to eat a meal at the same table. Birthdays and weddings would lose some of their charm without the joyfulness of the sitting at table.

The Jews had one great family meal. It was called Passover. This recalled the great night when they were delivered from their bondage in Egypt. On that night they had gathered together as families, or as a group of two families if they were small, to eat roasted lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. All the family were there and they dressed ready to commence a long journey. Despite God's pleadings the Egyptians had refused to release the Israelites and had increased their duties as slaves. That night God sent his angels through Egypt and all the first-born were slain while the children of Israel came forth unharmed to freedom.

Thus the yearly festival of Passover had deep significance for the Jews. It bound the family together and spoke to them of the great salvation by which they had been delivered from death in Egypt. The lamb spoke of their dependence upon God as their shepherd: the slaying of the lamb reminded them that they had been delivered in a night of death: and, eating the lamb showed their fellowship together as God's redeemed family.

When Jesus came the sacrifices and ceremonies of the old Jewish law were brought to an end. This was not because they were wrong but because their purpose had been fulfilled. In themselves they had bound the Jews together while they waited for the promised One of God. When He came there was no need for all the rites and forms which pointed to His coming. All the great Jewish festivals, including Passover, and all the sacrifices and acts of worship commanded the Jews by God, had in them a promise, a picture, a representation of Christ.

This was especially true of the Passover. All mankind were slaves to sin and no one but God could deliver them. Jesus was the appointed lamb of God, God's own firstborn Son, and he was One who by His own death would bring freedom to those who were His family. Is not that a wonderful picture? Is it not marvellous that the freedom of the children of Israel was in itself a foretaste of the greater deliverance to come?

What is even more interesting is the fact that Jesus died at Passover time! The apostle Paul took hold of this and said: "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." We are like the slaves in Egypt and He is our Lamb-Deliverer. It is for that reason that when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to the river Jordan at the beginning of His public work, he said: "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

Jesus knew all this. He knew His death was drawing nigh when the fateful passover drew near. With wonderful devotion He moved forward and did not shrink back. On the last night, when He was to be

arrested and taken to a mock judgment, He arranged to have supper with His disciples. A meal with a meaning! He spoke to them surpassingly fine things, words of comfort, of love and of faith.

Some of the words He used spoke of treachery and His coming death. It was shortly after this that Judas Iscariot, the traitor to Christ, slipped out into the darkness. He was to break the bond of the meal, and Jesus knew the old words, which he had said: "Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." Psalm 41:9. When Judas had gone only the friends of Jesus were left, He called them His brethren. They were a little family of God with the Lamb in their midst. Jesus said: "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." Their minds were knit together in the old meaning from the days when Moses instituted that first passover in Egypt: but Jesus had greater things before Him.

At that supper He took the bread and blessed it and said:

"Take eat, this is my body!" Matthew 26:26

And similarly, He took the cup of wine and gave thanks, and passed it to them saying:

"Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remissions of sins." Matthew 26:27-28.

What did Jesus mean? Quite clearly the bread and the wine were not His actual body and His actual blood, for He was yet alive before them. What then? Surely, He was taking hold of the feast of memory which the passover had been and was saying: This is my memorial feast, keep it. Remember me in bread and wine: meet me at my table and call to mind this new covenant, this new family bond, the family of people forgiven by faith in the shedding of my blood.

However, we have no need to guess at the meaning or to invent one of our own. The apostle Paul was given the meaning and has written it down for us:

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" 1 Corinthians 10:16.

Here then is a God-given meaning. We have a share in the bread and the wine because if we are Christ's disciples we are members of His family, His body. Paul makes this clear when he says:

"For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."  
1 Corinthians 10:17

Because of the importance of this subject we find that Paul writes about it again. He tells us that Jesus had spoken to him about it by special revelation and had given him the significance of the Table of the Lord:

"For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it and said, Take eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do ye in remembrance of me.

After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.

The meaning is still the same and is most impressive. There is one special feature to notice. The last supper of the Lord Jesus Christ had become, by His command, a ceremony which the disciples were to keep repeating in memory of Jesus and of the work of redemption He had done on their behalf.

The first disciples carried out this invitation according to Christ's own words. We read concerning them that "they continued in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" Acts 2:42. They called it the "breaking of bread." Paul had called it "the communion." Either description will do but "the breaking of bread" is more common.

The breaking of bread, therefore, quite rightly looks back in the same way as the Passover feast had been doing for over a thousand years. There was, however, another meaning which Jesus made plain on that last night before He died:

"With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

"Take this cup and divide it among yourselves, for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come." Luke 22:15-18.

This celebration was to be both a remembrance and an act of waiting for the coming of the kingdom of God. It looked backwards and forwards. Therefore, every disciple who truly keeps this feast says in his heart; I believe that this bread and wine show forth the death of Jesus Christ my Lord, and speak of my union with Him, and are an act of faithful waiting for His return to establish on earth the kingdom of God. Paul knew this and says:

"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."  
1 Cor. 11:26.

"Till he come." Three simple and significant words. They are family words. The family of believers sit down together and say: The greatest One is away and we long for the day when He will eat with us. It follows that the meal is only for the family. It has no meaning for anyone else. It is the regular act of remembrance and hope of every true believer. As each believer is baptised into the family of God so he continues in it by a faithful life and constant remembrance and dedication in the breaking of bread.

Each week as the believer comes to meet with his brethren -- and he can meet only with his brethren because they are members of the same family -- he remembers, he confesses his need and his faith, and rejoices in the hope of the coming of Christ.

We might ask the question: But why should this meal be exclusive? Why should it be confined to the family of God? The answer is clear; Jesus does not exclude us. Anyone can partake provided he is a believer, baptised and continuing in faith and baptism, or by turning back from the family into the love of their old ways and leaving the company of Jesus.

Those who are faithful remembrancers of Jesus will inherit everlasting life when He returns. He will call them to Himself -- whether they are living or dead -- and they will eat with Him at His table in His kingdom.

This is a prospect of perfect joy. No words can adequately begin to describe it. The obvious and clear call for us is to join the family of God. That is what is meant by being able to call him truly "Our Father."

Meditate now on the following Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 3; Ephesians 5; John 6.

## **THE PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE**

In the great law courts of the world every accused man can have a friend. However grave the crime of which complaint has been laid, however mean the station of the prisoner or alleged offender, there is someone who will speak on his behalf. The defending counsel will help. He is fully accustomed to the ways of the court and knows every possible way of escape from the punishment of the law. He knows the accused and has his confidence.

It is the same in other walks of life. Everyone delights in a friend, one who will always be loyal and true, in fair weather and in foul, and see to it that the name of friendship is preserved. In the great marathon races which have taken place over the centuries the runners have been urged to success and succored on the way by those who have helped them by the wayside or have run part of the way with them ministering food and inspiration.

He is a lonely man who has no friend and he is in sore straits when his hour of need comes and he has no helper. Very few can endure utter isolation without deep effects in the mind.

God knows this need. Nothing is plainer in the Bible than that God will provide strength and comfort in every adversity if a man will but trust in God's ways and strive to be obedient. Some of the greatest names given to God in the Bible are not technical names which theologians might delight in, but simple names which every man can understand. Here are some of them:

The Lord is my rock and my fortress.

The Lord is my deliverer, my shield.

The Lord is my keeper and my refuge.

The Lord is my strength and power.

The Lord is my light.

The Lord is my shepherd.

The Lord is my helper and deliverer.

God is love.

The mightiness of God draws near to us in ways of personal friendship and help. He is a comfort to the oppressed and strength to the weary. He is eyes to the blind and a guide to those who do not know the way.

It is this relationship which the Lord God is desirous of creating. He does not want to be a God afar off but a God near at hand. Anyone who reads the Bible will discover that those who have loved God throughout the ages have been sure of one thing: God cares. The man who draws near to God in faith and takes the step of faith in the waters of baptism has promise of God's personal care in terms which no one can misunderstand.

“I will be a Father to you” 2 Corinthians 6:18.

-- that is God’s word to the one who leaves his old way of life and commits himself to God. A Father. An everlasting Father. A Father who can do all things. Everyone of those names of God -- and a host more -- which we have just read will be true for the one to whom God becomes a Father.

There is one aspect of being in the family of God which provides great comfort. Wherever one of God’s children might be and whatever the time of day or night, or in whatsoever circumstance he finds himself, he can speak to God and be certain that God will hear him. This is the priceless privilege of prayer. One man who had enjoyed this opportunity described God in these words:

“O thou that hearest prayer.” Psalms 65:2.

What a beautiful description! When God replied to the prayer of a man in great distress, whose cry had ascended in faith, He said:

“I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold I will heal thee.” 2 Kings 20:5.

The greatest men of the Bible -- and those are the greatest men who have ever lived -- were men who learned the true value of prayer. They poured out their hearts to God in joy and in sorrow, in thankfulness and in adversity, in remembrance of His goodness and in seeking for help in time of need. God heard them and in unmistakable ways granted them His blessing.

The whole life of Jesus is touched with His communion with God in prayer. Time and again we see Him alone both at night and in the day seeking His Father’s guidance and help. In the great turning points of His life we discover that prayer lay at the heart of things -- he prayed at His baptism, during his temptation in the wilderness, before He healed Lazarus or fed the thousands, on the mount of transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane and finally upon the cross. It is small wonder that His disciples once asked: Lord, teach us to pray. He taught them. When He had gone to heaven we find the apostles meeting regularly in prayer and praise, confident that God would hear them.

The victory of Jesus over sin and His ascension to heaven have provided a new and most gracious blessing. He is called our High Priest, our Mediator or Middleman. Listen:

“Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people!” Hebrews 2:17.

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15.

Jesus is our personal representative in heaven. He is there on our behalf and is the channel of our prayers to God. There is no one who could better stand for us: He knows all our temptations and understands the sufferings of this life. Every breath of prayer is caught by Him and given power as by a faithful advocate and representative with God. This is the ceaseless blessing, always available, for those who accept the way of life in Jesus.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:16.



The Lord Jesus Christ watches over his disciples and cares for them. He knows their every need and temptation, and knowing He is able to help when they pray.

The apostle Paul who had been surprised at the nearness of Christ to His followers has written earnestly about prayer. It became his whole life and transformed his thinking. Jesus responded to his prayers in ways which amazed the faithful Paul. In writing about it on one occasion he said.

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think . . . “  
Ephesians 3:20.

“Above all that we ask or think.” Ponder the greatness of that.

Prayer is the link with headquarters, the instantaneous line of communication between the soldier of faith and his Captain. The link is never broken from the Captain’s side. He has said: I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. “Call unto me and I will answer” is the certain promise. “Draw nigh unto God and He will draw nigh unto you” is the faithful word.

God has always been willing to hear the prayers of those who believe in Him. It did not require Jesus to make God hear. God has provided Jesus for us to tell us how willing He is to listen to our prayers. Jesus is the God-given helper to lift us up in our hour of need.

Prayer is communion with God. It is well that we learn how to frame our prayers. Let us not be mistaken: God is not seeking flowery words and fine phrases. He is seeking minds which know His ways and fashion their prayers accordingly. A man who reads his Bible regularly will learn how to pray acceptably.

Paul rejoiced in the limitless care of God. His prayers took hold of all the blessings which God was holding out for him, and he has told us about them. He looks into the great courtroom where we stand in need of help and says:

“What shall we say then to these things? if God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” Romans 8:21, 23.

Here is a friend indeed. God speaks for us: God is our helper and our shield, our advocate and deliverer. Jesus has been provided to do this great work for God on our behalf.

“It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” Romans 8:34.

If God and His Son are for us who then could possibly be against us -- and win? “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” Romans 8:35.

“Nay in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:37-39.

Now read for yourself: Luke 18:1-14; Philippians 4:4-9; Psalm 130.

## THE JUDGE

The judge presides over the court. He represents the law of the land. To him is vested the knowledge of the law and the power to see it administered. He is a man and is there to judge men. In the solemnity of the court room sitting on his ornate seat on a raised dais he looks down on the accused. By the processes of law, the hearing and sifting of evidence, the question and cross-question, he will come to his assessment of the guilt or innocence of the man on trial.

In some countries rich in experience over hundreds of years the judge is assisted in major cases by the services of the jury -- twelve good men and true. They are not learned in the complexities of the law: only the judge is so equipped and he will advise the jury accordingly. But the twelve men and women know what men are like, and they are there to look and to listen and to decide whether in all the circumstances the man on trial appears to be guilty or otherwise.

Sometimes mistakes are made. An appeal court can put that right. Sometimes -- though not often in countries where fairmindedness and integrity hold fast in court -- an innocent man is pronounced guilty. Sometimes an innocent man has died for a murder he never committed.

There are occasions too when the law is "wrong" and a man has to be convicted even though common sense would lead us all to let him go.

The man who is truly found guilty has to be punished. In most countries the punishment is made to fit the crime: in some countries the guilty go free and the innocent are harshly treated.

Imagine then a perfect judge: one who never makes a mistake and never needs a jury to assist him to come to the right verdict. Imagine too a perfect law. Who could complain? If there were mercy with justice the process would be complete and beyond criticism. None of us would need fear to be judged if we were innocent because we would always be set free. Even the guilty would have no cause for complaint: their punishment would be just.

Supposing that such a judge could work not only in a courtroom to decide the verdict on one man but could stand among the nations -- for example at the general assembly of the United Nations -- and could give an unerring, clear and immediate judgement on the rights and wrongs of nations, the small as well as the great. What an asset this would be. It would require one thing more: the authority and power to execute the judgement found. To punish or restrain the offending nation, to deliver the oppressed and weak, the innocent and offended - such a power would bring sanity and solution to world problems and remove some of the great hindrances among nations.

But this is not a pipe-dream, a vain hope which has no chance of fulfilment. It is the very basis of the promises of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is God's appointed Judge and He will do just those things we have been thinking about but with infinitely greater grace and certainty than anything we can conceive in our own minds. Listen to what God has said about this:

"God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." Acts 17:31

If we ask the Bible: When will this be? What "day" is this which God hath appointed? We have the answer in the clear terms of the apostle Paul:

“I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the quick living and the dead, at his appearing and his kingdom.” 2 Tim. 4:1

The day when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be Judge on earth is the day of His second coming, the day when His kingdom will be established on earth. There is no doubt at all that He will judge the nations as certainly as if He were to stand in the great council chamber of the United Nations. He will make known the law of God and call for obedience to it. He will brook no permanent violation and will bring the offenders to obedience in mercy and in unfailing righteousness.

This is how the Bible tells us about it:

“For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” Isaiah 2:3-5.

Here is the solution to the problems with which the world has been grappling for centuries. All the contesting politics and the selfishness which has hidden under the cloak of patriotism will disappear like snow before the summer sun. No one will be able to deceive Him even should they dare to attempt to do so.

“He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.” Isaiah 11:3-4.

The mighty nations will need to be obedient: no nation will be too small to be heard. The poor, the peaceful will find their cause fully protected by this infallible and righteous judge. No nation will be outside His jurisdiction, none will be able to claim self-rule and independence for nationistic end, for the world will be one wide empire under the universal and gracious rule of Christ, the King and Judge. Has not God made this plain for all to read?

“Ask of me and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron: thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: Be instructed ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.” Psalm 2:8-11

Jesus will exercise the authority of God over all the earth and all the inequities and injustices of men will be abolished.

“He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, And shall break in pieces the oppressor ...

“For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy.” Psalm 72:4, 12-13

The world will be like an open book to Him. The secret services of the nations and the work of spies will be at an end. None will succeed against Him and He will need no one to tell Him anything in any part of His kingdom. Everything will be known to Him and He will judge all in every place. No notion will escape the surveillance of His powerful eye.

“Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.” Psalm 72:11.

And what will be the result of this wonderful exercise of law and perfect judgement?

“In his days shall the righteous flourish: and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth...

“His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun: And men shall be blessed in him: All nations shall call him blessed.” Psa. 72:7,17

This is the glorious prospect before the world. The Son of God shall be judge of all the earth. This is however only one side of the work of Jesus as Judge. Will he judge individuals as well as nations? If so, how? When? Where? To prepare for our next letter please read John 12:44-50; Romans 2:1-10.

## **DOOMSDAY**

Wrong-doers sometimes go unpunished and good men unrewarded. It is not difficult to think of examples: the pickpocket who disappears in a crowded street with his ill-gotten gains unseen and not overtaken by the arm of the law; the good man who having saved a child from drowning sinks himself into the swirling waters never to rise again.

Can a man deceive God in the same way or similarly find his goodness unrequited? Is there a time and place when men and women will be given the just desserts of their lives? If so, what is the standard by which they will be judged and who will the Judge be and when will he judge? These are important questions and the answers could well have a deep effect in our own lives.

Let us look at the matter step by step and trace the very interesting information which God has given to us. We shall have a clear picture when we have finished our journey and know that with God there are no perversions or miscarriages of justice nor are the righteous unrewarded.

First of all then let us ask the simple question: Is God aware of all that we do and say and think? Here is the answer:

“O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, And art acquainted with all my ways.” Psalm 139:1-3.

And the Psalmist continues by saying:

“For there is not a word in my tongue, But, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.” Psalm 139:4.

“Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?” Jeremiah 23:23-24.

This then is the truth about God's understanding of us. He knows everything. It is even more wonderful than that: He knows our words before we speak them. His knowledge is perfect and there is no defect in His understanding.

“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Heb. 4:13.

Such is the comprehension of God. Nothing escapes His eye: neither time nor distance nor light nor darkness is any hindrance to Him. Nothing can hinder His perfect understanding.

This need not make us afraid -- though it could if we were deliberately flying in the face of God’s ways of truth and righteousness. In fact of course this complete knowledge of God is intended to be a comfort to us, an assurance that we can never slip through His fingers or be beyond His care. Neither Jonah in the belly of the great fish nor Daniel in the den of lions could be beyond the hearing and rescuing power of the God of the heavens and the earth. Why, said Jesus, even the cheapest sparrow does not breathe its last breath without God knowing it. And, again Jesus told us that the very hairs of our head are all numbered.

God who has computed the great balance of “nature” and the gigantic clock of the universe also knows the minutest parts of His creation and the inner thoughts of all His creatures.

When the Lord Jesus Christ walked the hills of Palestine and passed through the crowded streets of the towns and villages He had a wonderful knowledge of all the people He met. He knew their needs, their secret thoughts and intentions. He told one man what he was thinking as he sat silent, looking at Jesus during dinner: He told a woman the events of her past life: He told a man who walked towards Him that He had seen awhile before as he stood under a fig tree thinking although Jesus was not near to him at that time.

We need have no doubts then about the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord God or of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our next question is: Will there be a doomsday, a day of judgment? This question is as easy as the other one to answer from the pages of the Bible:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:10.

There will be a day of judgment and the judge will be the Lord Jesus Christ. He will judge according to the life we have led here on earth. It will be a day of personal judgment and we shall stand before the Judge himself. He will not need to ask us questions or to have twelve men of the jury with him. No one need give evidence and there can be no hiding of the facts. Our life will be an open book before Him.

The apostle Paul when writing to the Romans talked about the same subject in quite clear terms:

“We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, as I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” Romans 14:10-12.

We shall be judged by the word of Christ. In other words we shall be compared with the standards which Jesus laid down for us in His words. We shall not be able to plead that we did not know -- all of us, each of us, can find out for himself from the word of God all that is required of us to do. The day of judgment which we have begun to understand is the day when “God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel,” said Paul.

Let us probe a little further into this highly interesting matter on which God has given us a great deal of helpful information. Our next question will be this: When will this day of judgment be? Are we each judged individually at death or is there a day when all will be collected together for one great day of judgment?

“I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom.” 2 Timothy 4:1.

This is a delightfully compact and clear verse. Jesus will be Judge when he returns to this earth at His second coming. At that time He will judge those who are alive at His coming the “quick” in the verse above and those who have died. The judgment takes place therefore at the time which Jesus described as “the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus promised to those who believed in Him that the day of reward and blessing would be the day of His return and the day of the resurrection of the dead:

“Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.” Luke 14:14

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he reward every man according to his works.” Matthew 16:27

From what we have seen so far is it not like watching a flower unfold in its beauty? We began with a bud and now we are beginning to see the full glory of the flower and to catch its fragrance.

The teaching of the Old Testament follows just the same pattern. Let us take one of the powerful declarations from the book of Daniel:

“At that time . . . many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Dan. 12:1-2.

The word “many” in this verse helps us to understand a difficulty. A great many people throughout the ages have died in utter ignorance of Jesus Christ and His ways. Will they come forth to be judged? If so how could they escape condemnation in view of the fact that they have not believed on the name of the One whose name alone is given under heaven among men for salvation? It becomes clear from the word of God that there are three classes of people on earth:

1. Those who live and die not having known the word of God.
2. Those who have known it and have strived to live obediently to it.
3. Those who have known the word of God and have rejected it by not living or wanting to live according to it.

The first of these classes remains asleep in the grave and is not awakened by the call of the resurrection and judgment:

“The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.” Proverbs 21:16

“They shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake.” Jeremiah 51:39.

The other two classes will necessarily be judged. Each of them has known the way of God: one of

them has been faithful to it, and the other has been unfaithful either by failing to respond to it after understanding it, or by turning back after going but some of the way. All these will be judged by the Lord Jesus Christ, who is a merciful and true Judge. Paul declared at the end of his life:

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

2 Timothy 4:8

To us who have not yet reached the end of our days the same apostle gives a plain word of warning:

“Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Galatians 6:7-8

Next time we must look a little further into what happens to the faithful and the unfaithful when they are judged by Jesus Christ.

If you would like to prepare for this please read: 1 Corinthians 15.

## **HOW ARE THE DEAD RAISED UP?**

How are the dead raised up? With what body do they come? These questions were asked two thousand years ago and are still asked by men and women in our own day. What answers can we give?

Let us look at the scene on the day when Jesus returns to earth. There will be three classes of dead people: those who through ignorance of the way of God will remain in the grave and never be roused; those who have known the way of life but have not been obedient to it; and those who have been faithful servants of God. There will be three similar classes of living people.

As we established in our last letter all those who have known the way of life, whether obedient or not, whether alive or not, will be gathered to the judgment seat of Jesus Christ:

“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:10.

The first work performed by Christ when he returns to earth will be to awaken the dead who are to be judged. They will come bodily from their graves:

“Many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake ...” Daniel 12:2.

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” John 5:28-29.

We can be sure therefore that all who are to be judged -- both the ones who are dead and those who are alive -- will appear bodily before the Lord Jesus Christ. This is as it should be because all sins have been committed in the body: therefore judgment should take place in the body. What kind of body will those possess who stand before Jesus to be judged? Quite clearly those who are alive when Jesus Christ comes back will have an ordinary mortal body. And the dead who are raised? Quite clearly they

too will have a mortal body because it is not until after the judgment that they receive their reward or their punishment:

“And these after judgment shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” Matthew 25:46.

Both reward and punishment will be received in the body. What will the blessing of eternal life be like? What difference will it make to the ordinary mortal body which we now possess? The change is almost too wonderful to describe, but this is how the Bible tells us about it:

“The Lord Jesus Christ who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” Philippians 3:21.

“We shall be like him ...” 1 John 3:2.

“This mortal shall put on immortality ... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Corinthians 15:54.

Our human bodies which though capable of many pleasures are finally overcome by pain, disease and death, will be changed, transformed by the life-giving power of the Lord Jesus Christ. All weakness, all suffering, all the changes of growing old and of decay -- all will be taken away. Listen to the truth as declared throughout the Bible:

“He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord shall wipe away tears from off all faces . . .”  
Isa. 25:8.

“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”  
Isaiah 35:10.

“And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain . . .” Revelation 21:4.

Is not this a wonderful prospect held out for men of faith to see? How much more wonderful to inherit such a life. Jesus Christ himself received such a blessing from God after his own resurrection from the dead, and the Bible tells us about it in these words:

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: In thy presence is fulness of joy; At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Psalm 16:11.

“He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him: even length of days for ever and ever.” Psalm 21:4.

Immortality is the word used to describe the blessedness of possessing an undying and perfect body. What then is the difference between this happiness and the bodily perfection which the Greeks admired and portrayed in the magnificent statues which have remained down to our own time? The perfect body, the perfect beauty was the object of their worship. Is immortality the achievement of what the ancient Greeks admired and sought for? Indeed, no! There is something far more wonderful behind the ideas of immortality and eternal life than mere bodily perfection. Let us listen to the word of God and discover the real beauty which will belong to the saints of God:



“I shall be satisfied -- when I awake -- with thy likeness.” Psalm 17:15.

This was the hope of David the shepherd-king. He was looking forward to reflecting the likeness of God. Did that mean he was expecting a bodily likeness, a likeness of feature? or had he something else in mind. Listen again:

“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied -- when I awake -- with thy likeness.”

David was longing for a likeness which he expressed in the word “righteousness.” This is the true joy which is described throughout the Bible in glowing words:

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.” Isaiah 61:10.

Everyone of the faithful saints who stands on the right hand of Jesus in the day of judgment will be like Jesus. Like him by being clothed in righteousness, like him by possessing a glorious, immortal body. This is the joy. Not the mere worship of external beauty in which the Greeks found pleasure, but the beauty of everlasting holiness, perfect fellowship with God:

“Exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might become partakers of the divine nature.” 2 Peter 1:4.

This is the destiny of men and women, who having believed the teaching of God and being baptised, have received the forgiveness of sins in Jesus, and have waited for the day when Jesus would return and they would be like unto him in mind and body:

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from failing, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” Jude 24,25.

Could there be a more fitting end? Adam and Eve brought disfigurement and death into the world when they first sinned. All their children have inherited their weakness. Jesus by the complete perfection of his life and death has “brought life and immortality to light.” 2 Timothy 1:10. All who are faithful to him will receive the blessing of complete happiness in him -- life for evermore in joyful holiness. Surely nothing else can ever satisfy those who have heard this message of hope and promise.

If this is the glory which awaits the saints of God what awaits the unfaithful. These stand in shame on the left hand of Jesus and listen to the words pronouncing their doom:

“Verily I say unto you, I know you not.” Mat. 25:12.

“Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 25:30.

“I know you not whence ye are; depart from me all ye workers of iniquity . . . ye shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God, and ye yourselves thrust out.” Luke 13:27-28.

Driven from the presence of Jesus Christ because they have not longed to be with him and have not served him, these wretched, unfaithful servants will go out with tears to lament their folly, to suffer for

their unrighteousness, and then to die for ever. Oblivion. Eternal oblivion.

We cannot escape the pressing exhortation of God when these things are opened to us. Where shall we stand in that day? On the left hand? Or on the right?

“I call heaven and earth to record against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing -- therefore choose life.” Deuteronomy 30:19.

## WHAT'S THE TIME?

At this very moment the time on the clock is different in different parts of the world. Noon in London is 7 in the morning in New York City and 10 at night in Sydney. World travellers by air have to accustom themselves to changes of the clock which can give them two dinners in one day! But not only are the times of day different in different zones of the world but the time of year is often different too! While the northern climes may be shivering in sub-zero temperatures others are basking in long sunny days on the beaches. What a strange thing time is.

But there is another way of looking at time. As the masterbuilder looks at his plans or the engineer at his blue print or the musician at his score so the man who reads his Bible knows that the plan of God represents a development through time. Six thousand years ago Adam and Eve walked in the garden of Eden: four thousand four hundred years ago the Flood came: less than four thousand years ago Abraham walked through Palestine: three thousand years ago David was King in Jerusalem: two thousand years ago or less Jesus lived and died. Six thousand years of God's programme have gone by. How long will it be before the completion of it? Who knows?

The key event of the future is the return of Jesus Christ. If we could pinpoint that date then we could gauge things accordingly. But can we? Can anyone? The first thing to remember is what Jesus himself has told us about the moment of his return:

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.” Matthew 24:42.

“Therefore, be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”  
Matthew 24:44.

These are two of many verses in the New Testament which teach us two lessons: a that we do not know the hour of the return to earth of the Lord Jesus Christ, and b that the return will be a surprise. Therefore, it is useless for us trying to fix the time according to God's timetable.

However, that need not deter us from having a look at the rest of Scripture concerning the divine calendar. In the same way that there are times of day -- and we cannot fix that so far as Christ's coming is concerned -- there are also seasons. Do we know the season when Jesus will come back if by the word “season” we mean the world condition when Jesus will come, the answer is Yes.

What are the facts? What will the ordinary people of the world be like before the last Day overtakes them?

1. They will be very interested in themselves:

“Eating and drinking,” “marrying and giving in marriage” and “buying and selling” and “planting and

building.” See Matthew 24:38 and Luke 17:28.

2. They will have forgotten God and many of them will be downright wicked:

“Lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” 2 Timothy 3:2-4.

3. They will not believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ:

“Walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?” 2 Peter 3-4.

What about the condition of the world generally in the time which heralds the coming of Jesus? What will world events and world affairs be like?

1. There will be world unrest and trouble:

“Upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity ... men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” Luke 21:25-26.

2. Nations will be at strife one with another:

“Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles ... let all the men of war draw near . . . “ Joel 3:9.

“There shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation”. Daniel 12:1.

Does the Bible say anything about the land of Palestine and the Jews at the time when Jesus will return?

1. There will have been a regathering of Jews in the land of Palestine after years of desolation:

“My people Israel and Judah . . . I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.” Jeremiah 30:3.

“Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land.” Ezekiel 37:21.

“For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.” Ezekiel 36:24.

These are some of the signs which the Bible gives concerning the world and the return of Jesus to the earth. Do these signs fit our world today? Is it not remarkable that the twentieth century has produced

--

a. A wave of self-interest, of pleasure seeking God-neglecting people, people who while not denying the teaching of Jesus by word of mouth deny Him by having little interest in Him:

b. The invention of the world’s most devilish weapons. Kruschev has said that a nuclear war would destroy 700 - 800 million people in the first onslaught! One nuclear bomb can kill 10,000,000 people! It is too terrible to think about and our minds cannot comprehend the magnitude of power and destruction involved in these things:

c. The return of the Jews to Palestine. In 1900 there were 50,000 Jews in that land. Today there are 2 to 3,000,000. The return of the Jews to Palestine after 1900 years of absence is one of the wonders of the age. In 1948, in the face of untold opposition from the nations around, Israel established her own state and nation. Today they flourish as one of the most progressive and industrious of the nations of the Middle East. This is the greatest sign that the return of Jesus is getting near.

It cannot be merely a coincidence that the two great prophecies of the Bible --

1. A time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, and
2. The return of the Jews to Palestine should have been brought together in our age, in our lifetime, by the invention of atomic weapons and by the establishment of the State of Israel after nineteen hundred years of barrenness and absence, in the land where Jesus was born.

What time is it? It is time we all began to take notice. The divine clock is moving up to the hour when Jesus will leave heaven and return to earth.

What time is it? Why not let Jesus speak for Himself? When He stood in the streets of Jerusalem, long before the Jews were driven out of their own land, He foretold two things:

1. The scattering of the Jews from Palestine; and
2. Their regathering to that land.

Listen to his own words:

“And they the Jews shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” Luke 21:24

The words of Jesus have been remarkably fulfilled. Forty years after His death the Jews suffered defeat at the hands of the Romans. Their nation was broken up and the Jews were scattered throughout the earth. Gradually Palestine sank into a wilderness and all her fruitfulness ceased.

Things continued in this fashion until the present century. There were Jews in every country of the world as living witnesses that God had led them away captive into all nations. And then came the great awakening. Not from any religious urge or because the Jews had repented of their sins, but from a great longing for Palestine. Slowly the movement gathered strength until it became a powerful tide. In the nineteen thirties and fifties the Jews returned to Palestine in hundreds of thousands.

Today Jerusalem belongs half to Jews and half to Arabs. Jews took Jerusalem in 1967 What did Jesus say? “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” Gentiles non Jews would control Jerusalem UNTIL their own opportunity would come to an end. And now the world is poised on the brink of great change. Half Jerusalem is in Jewish hands and half is Gentile. The Gentiles times are runnings out. The time switch is set. The warning lights are shining.

What time is it? Time to prepare for the return of Christ. It was just at this time that Jesus said:

“Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” Luke 21:27.

This is the season when Jesus is due. The day, the hour, the year are beyond our computation. But the season, the climate of world affairs, is upon us. Let us then listen again to Him as he gives the warning:

“Therefore, be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”  
Matt. 24:44.