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Spiritual Blessings



Vol. 25/3. May/June. 2011

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph. 1:3

The Book of Acts. (1)

By John Hutton, Newcastle, Australia.

In my previous study, I emphasised that God’s Word is absolutely reliable and was written by men who were driven by the Holy Spirit to write words that were tried in a furnace seven times. However men may interpret them, the Words of God must have the final say. I call upon you to have the Berean attitude to what I say in these studies.

We will begin our study of Acts by going to Genesis 12, but first let us remind ourselves of the words of Miles Coverdale, Bishop of Exeter from 1551-1553. He was an early translator of the Bible into English. He gave the following advice to Bible students:

“It will greatly help you to understand Scripture if you take notice not only of what is spoken, or written, but of whom, and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, in what circumstances, and what is the context that it is written in.”

Keeping that wise instruction in mind, let us remind ourselves of the time in history when the book of Acts was written.

The first part of human history, from Adam to the call of Abraham, covered about 1950 years and is recorded in the first 11 chapters of Genesis. The next 1620 years or so, from the call of Abraham to the last prophecy in the Old Testament, viz. Malachi, are dealt with in Gen. 12 to the book of Malachi.

Then God is silent for about 375 years, as far as Scripture is concerned, until the events recorded in the Gospels, which took place

between 4 BC to 29 AD approx. The book of Acts then covers the years between 29 AD to about 61 AD.

There were 14 New Testament epistles written in those 30 or so years of Acts, but I think there may be 15. If we include Hebrews, then seven were written by Paul: Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Romans and Hebrews. The other seven epistles, written by other writers, are 1 & 2 Peter; 1, 2 & 3 John, James and Jude.

I know of no Bible scholar who disagrees that those 14 epistles were written in the years covered by Acts, or as it’s often called, the Acts period. The 15th book that I mentioned above is Revelation, which I believe was also written during the Acts period.

That leaves us with seven epistles of Paul written after about 62 AD, i.e. after the close of the Book of Acts. As I said in the last article, the revelation of the Mystery that had been hidden by God until its revelation to and by Paul, that we read about **only** in those last seven epistles, comes after the close of Acts. These final epistles of Paul complete Scripture (Col. 1:25). They

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President's Word

Greetings once again to all readers of "Spiritual Blessings" around the world.

We often receive positive feedback on our magazine, and it is our prayer that it not only promotes the Word of God rightly divided, but that it also honours the Lord's name in doing so. This goal is central to the objects and tenets of the Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia, and our other activities, such as those outlined below, are carried out with those ideals in mind.

Annual Conference

It's time again to mark your diaries for the BBFA's Annual Conference. This year it will be held at Bethshan Conference Centre, Wyee (near Morisset, on the NSW Central Coast). Bethshan has upgraded its facilities since we were last there, and it will be a suitable venue for our meetings. The dates are September 24-26, 2011, so please plan now to join with us for a weekend of Bible study and fellowship.

Thornton Bible Study and Fellowship Day

We recently held one of our day meetings in the Newcastle/Maitland area on Saturday June 11th. Athol Walter gave two talks on why he believes Acts 28 to be an important dispensational boundary. We hope that everyone who attended enjoyed and profited from the day. Thanks should go to Sue Hall and her assistants for handling the catering, to Peter Ward for making sure the day ran smoothly, and to all those who helped with all the other bits and pieces that make these gatherings events to remember - for all the right reasons!

Changes to the Committee

This will be my last time writing this particular column for Spiritual Blessings, as I have stepped

down from the role of President as of early June 2011. My wife, Janelle, has also resigned from her role as the Secretary of the BBFA. Sadly, she has been diagnosed with cancer and will not be in a position to perform her duties on behalf of the Fellowship for some time. The long term prognosis is good, however, and we give thanks for that.

Obviously, this has already impacted upon our ability to carry out the responsibilities which our positions within the BBFA require, so, rather than be a hindrance to the Fellowship moving forward, we felt that it was far better to move aside and let others more able take up the reins. Janelle and I remain firmly committed to the tenets and objectives of the BBFA, and will continue as members of the Fellowship - just not as members of the Committee with added duties.

The remaining Committee members (Frank Haegler, Julie Milgate, Sue Hall, Allan Gallaher and Karl Edwards) will discuss and appoint a new President and Secretary shortly. These people have been very supportive of us during this time, and it has been our pleasure to work with them on behalf of the Fellowship's members. You may wish to pray for the Committee as they seek to make the necessary appointments, and continue to administer the affairs of the BBFA.

Finally, over the last month or so, many of the BBFA's friends and supporters have contacted Janelle and myself personally, and we would like to express our sincere appreciation to each one. Your thoughtfulness and love has been of great help. Only our God knows what lies in store for us in the months ahead, and whilst we pray for an improvement in Janelle's health, we also seek that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be lifted up in the process.

May He be glorified by the walk and witness of each one of us, and by the study of God's Word.

David Tavender.

For Your diary ... **BBFA 2011 ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

Bethshan Conference Centre, Wyee, NSW. 24th-26th. Sept. 2011.

Registration Forms available in later issue.

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are: Ephesians, Colossians, Philipians, 1st & 2nd Timothy, Titus and Philemon. To have an accurate idea of the historical time when the books of the Bible were written is very helpful, and I would say, even vital. Now we can turn to Gen. 12:1-4!

'Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: ²And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: ³And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. ⁴So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran'.

Please note the 'I wills' in those verses!

vv. 5-7: 'And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. ⁶And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. ⁷And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land'.

Again we have an 'I will' in verse 7.

Gen. 13:14-17: 'And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: ¹⁵For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.'

Notice that the land is not a spiritual land as some theologians suggest. It is an actual piece of land.

'And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. ¹⁷Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee'.

Again we have promises with some 'I wills'.

Turn to Gen. 15:1-4: 'After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. ²And Abram said,

Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? ³And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. ⁴And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir'.

Abraham had two great problems. Not only was Sarah barren but he had made his steward his heir and under the law of adoption, that appointment could not be revoked. Only the death of Eliezer would allow one of Abraham's own sons to become his heir.

V. 5: 'And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. ⁶And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. ⁷And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it'.

Here we have a picture of what it means to be justified by faith and Paul uses this Scripture in Romans and Galatians when he is explaining the doctrine of Justification by Faith.

Abraham believed that God meant what He said about the seed, but he may have had doubts about the land. Look at v. 8:

'And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?'

In other words, he was saying: "What guarantee have I got about Your promise of the land?"

Now comes a remarkable passage of Scripture.

V. 9: 'And he (i. e. God) said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. ¹⁰And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. ¹¹And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away'.

The carcasses of the animals were divided and laid side by side so that there was a corridor between the two parts. This was how a binding contract was made in those times. The two parties to the contract agreed on the terms and then passed through the 'corridor of death' signifying

that if they broke the contract, they were willing to suffer the same fate as the animals. When they came out the other end of the corridor of death, the contract or covenant was unbreakable.

V. 12: *'And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. ¹³And he (God) said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; ¹⁴And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. ¹⁵And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.*

V. 18: *'In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river ...'*

Up until this time God had been promising - 'I will' – now having made the contract, He says, 'I have'. "This is how you can know that what I promised you will come about, Abraham. I have made a covenant with you and guaranteed it by passing through death to make it sure and certain."

Who did God make the covenant with? **Himself!** Abraham was not allowed to take part in the covenant making. If God had let Abraham be one of the covenanting parties, what would have been the result? Abraham would have fouled it up somehow! When God later made what is called the old covenant with Israel in the wilderness – the covenant that Israel took part in when they said to God, 'All that you have said we will do' – they broke it. Jeremiah and Ezekiel tell us that, one day, God is going to make a new covenant with them that they can't break because they, like Abraham, will have no say in it at all. Please read Jer. 31:31-34 before proceeding.

Back in Gen. 15, God made a covenant with Himself concerning His promises to Abraham. How

absolutely trustworthy is that!

Now note Jer. 31:35-37: ***"Thus sayeth the Lord, Which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, Which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of Hosts is His name: if those covenants depart from before Me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall cease from being a nation from before Me for ever. Thus sayeth the Lord: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth be searched out beneath, I will also cast off the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord."***

Does the sun still shine? Does the moon still shine? Has God broken His covenant with Israel? As Heb. 10:23 says, we can hold fast to our faith without wavering, 'for He is faithful that promised'.

Those last verses in Gen. 15 are a picture of the work done by the Lord on the Cross, aren't they? God passed through death as a guarantee to Abraham so that Abraham could count on Him. The deal was sealed when God came out the other end of the corridor made by the dead animals – out of death.

So Christ alone died and passed through death, coming out the other side at His resurrection. The Lord's resurrection,

which showed that sin and death could not hold Him, is the guarantee to every believer that their own resurrection is sure and certain. In this connection, read 1 Cor. 15:13-19.

So our salvation and resurrection are sure because of the work of Christ. One of the hymns in our hymnbook has got it right when it says,

'I am amazed when I think of God's love – that we should be saved by the work He has done and not by the work that we do'.

But a chorus that I used to sing years ago said, 'God can do anything'. Is that true? No, it is not. God made a contract with Abraham and when He said, 'I **have done it**', He was not lying and could not change His mind or deny Himself.

"God can do anything." Is that true? No, it is not, because He cannot deny Himself or go back on His word.

But let's suppose for a moment that God can deny Himself or change His mind or that He does not always remain faithful to what He promises. If so, and God can change His mind about Israel for instance, how does that make you feel about the promises He has made to you? No, the truth is that God cannot lie or go back on His promises. His Word is sure and trustworthy.

Returning to biblical history, it was about 430 years between Israel's going down to Egypt to be saved from the dreadful famine in the land of Canaan and God appearing to Moses in the burning bush.

In Ex. 2:23-25, we read that the time came when God heard the cries of the Israelites in Egypt, and responded. In ch. 3, God appears to Moses in the burning bush. Ex. 3:7 is the first time in the Bible where God refers to Israel as His people.

I cannot guarantee that the number I am going to quote now is absolutely correct, but it is not wrong by more than 2 or 3. From Ex. 3 to the end of the Old Testament, God refers to Israel as 'My people', or the prophets refer to Israel as 'Thy people', or 'His people', or 'the people of God', 'the people of the Lord', or 'the Lord's people', or 'a special people', about 336 times. Israel are God's people – that is one of their titles. What about the New Testament? Turn to Matt. 1:21:

"And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS; for he shall save His people from their sins."

The angel leaves Joseph in no doubt that the Messiah was being sent primarily to save Israel from their sins. Now consider these verses:

Matt. 2: 1 & 6: ***"When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea ... there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem."*** ***"And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule My people Israel."***

Luke 1:54-55: ***"He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy: as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever."***

I ask you to read two more passages, which I will not quote because of limited space: Luke 1:67-73 and 7:1-2, 14-16. This next passage, however, I must

quote.

1 Peter 2:9 & 10: ***"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."***

Who is Peter writing to? Turn to Ch 1:1.

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout ..."

The New King James Version puts it like this: ***"Peter ... to the pilgrims of the Dispersion ..."***

The word 'Dispersion' translates the Greek word 'diaspora', which refers to Jews scattered throughout countries other than their own. Peter was writing to Jews, who are God's people.

In Rom. 9:25, Paul makes the same statement as Peter did above, viz. that Israel would again become God's people and once more receive mercy. Now we come to Rom. 11.

vv. 1-2: ***"I say then, Hath God cast away His people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew. ..."***

Now Rom. 15:8-10: ***"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy: as it is written, "For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name." And again He saith, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people."***

'My people' is a title which belongs to Israel and Israel alone. In all of the books written during and after Acts – written to churches which were comprised of both Jew and Gentile – Gentiles are never said to be God's people. This is a title which belongs to Israel alone.

Many King James Version Bibles had headings printed at the top of each page referring to the subject matter of the chapters. On examination, however, it will be seen that these headings are sometimes inconsistent. An example is found in Isaiah 29 and 30. The heading above ch. 29 is 'Judgment upon

Jerusalem', and that is what the chapter describes. Then the heading above ch. 30 is 'God's mercies towards His church'. But ch. 30 is still speaking about the same people addressed in ch. 29. This is wrong interpretation, confusing two quite separate families of God.

Now, here is a question for you to think about till our next study.

If I, as a Gentile believer, am not one of God's people, what am I?

Editorial

Another edition of Spiritual Blessings comes with our prayers that readers will be encouraged to go deeper into the wonderful Word of God. We also are very thankful to the Lord for His sustenance and guidance in preparing this edition, and personally, I am very grateful to the good folk who have contributed in so many ways.

First, the writers. John Hutton starts looking at Acts, and Anne Ward reminds us that we are part of the Temple of God in the Spirit. Then there are those who proof-read, arrange the printing, the folding and the mailing. In short, an inspiring joint effort. Now, dear reader, what is probably the most important part is up to you. What will you do with the information you have in your hand?

I am pleased that the article on Apologetics, in the last edition, has stirred more than a few to delve into the subject and prepare themselves to give answers to those who ask for reasons for our beliefs. This, of course, is an important part of our witness, but the thought occurs that all our words will fall on deaf ears if our behaviour and character do not portray the love and grace of God even more than do our words.

The announcement by our President, David Tavender, that both he and his wife, Janelle, are resigning from our committee because of Janelle's illness has saddened us all. We, in the Newcastle Group, have all been praying for both of these lovely servants of the Lord who have given so much to the BBFA's work, and we invite you to join us in prayer for them in this testing time.

Athol Walter.

The Principle Of Right Division

A Delightful Example

By Athol Walter.

Paul's instruction to Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:15, is:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

While spoken first to Timothy, this command does apply to us, and has become the guiding principle of biblical interpretation for Dispensationalists, whether 'ultra' or otherwise. We are sometimes accused of building too much on one verse, and that, certainly, is something which should not be done. So I am happy to say that there is another statement of Paul's that confirms 2 Tim. 2:15. It is, of course, Phil. 1:9 & 10, where Paul tells us to -

“... abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, (so) that you may approve the things that are excellent, (so) that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.”

The parallels between these two passages are quite obvious. It should be said, however, that the commands to rightly divide the word of Truth and to discern and approve the more excellent things, can only be applied by someone who, first of all, is in Christ and has also accepted the full inspiration and accuracy of Scripture. Without that foundation, these other commands mean practically nothing.

The phrase 'rightly dividing' is a little puzzling to many who are not familiar with the older translations of the Bible. By the way, my quotes are from the New King James Version, unless stated otherwise. The NIV, one of the most popular modern versions, puts it thus: "... a workman who ... correctly handles the word of truth." 'Correctly handles' is correct as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. To my mind, it weakens what Paul actually said. His word definitely contains the thought of cutting, of dividing one thing off from another, or of discerning or differentiating one thing from another. Because of this, I would suggest that an accurate, modern translation is "correctly **apportioning** the word of truth". One can handle something without cutting or

cont. on p. 10

A Holy Temple In the Lord

By Anne Ward, Sydney, Australia.

Ephesians 2:11-22 talks about the citizenship that we have in Christ as a result of what He accomplished on the Cross. Verse 21 states that the body of believers is a holy temple in the Lord.

The New Testament uses two Greek words for "temple". One is the word *hieron*, which denotes the temple complex, comprising all the buildings. Thus when Satan had Christ stand on the pinnacle of the temple (Luke 4:9), it is this word *hieron* that is used. The other word is *naos*, which refers to the Sanctuary, the Holy Place (or the Holy of Holies). Under Jewish law, no one but the High Priest could enter this place and this was only once per year on the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 16 describes what was involved on that solemn day. Suffice to say that the High Priest had to undergo a purification ceremony to ensure that he was absolutely free from blemish or sin in order to make the atonement on behalf of Israel. This included wearing sacred garments. If there had been the slightest taint, God would not have accepted the sacrifice and Israel's sins would not be forgiven. We read of this in Hebrews 9, including the fact that Christ entered the Holy Place, both as the High Priest and as the sacrificial Lamb, once and for all.

Ephesians 2:21 uses the word *naos* for temple. This is significant. A closer look at the temple that Solomon built can extend our understanding and appreciation of the privileges that have been afforded to us in this passage.

2 Chronicles, chs. 3 to 7 describe the building and dedication of the Temple by Solomon (see diagram below). Ch. 3: 8 to 14 describe the building of the Holy Place and the making of the curtain, which separated off the most sacred part.

Chapter 5:7-11 describes how the priests brought the Ark of the Covenant into the new Temple and then withdrew. After this, the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God in a cloud.

The inside of the temple was covered with gold and jewels and would have been dazzling to the eye. But the average Israelite never saw it, having access to the outer court only. Only the officiating priest could take in its splendor. Luke 1:8-11 describes how

Zacharia was officiating in the temple (*naos*) when the angel Gabriel appeared to him, standing at the right side of the alter of incense.

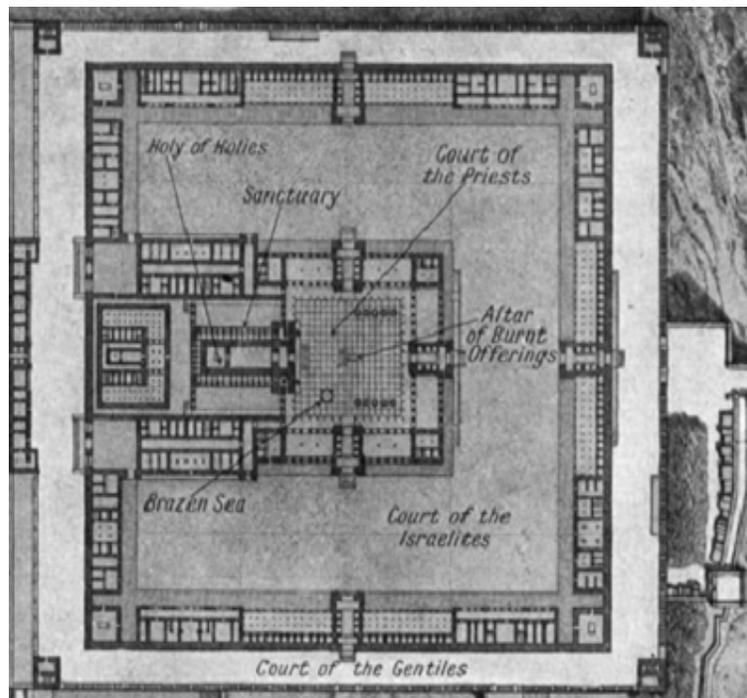
Allowance was made for foreigners to visit the temple and pray. However, their access was restricted to the court outside the wall, known as the Court of the Gentiles.

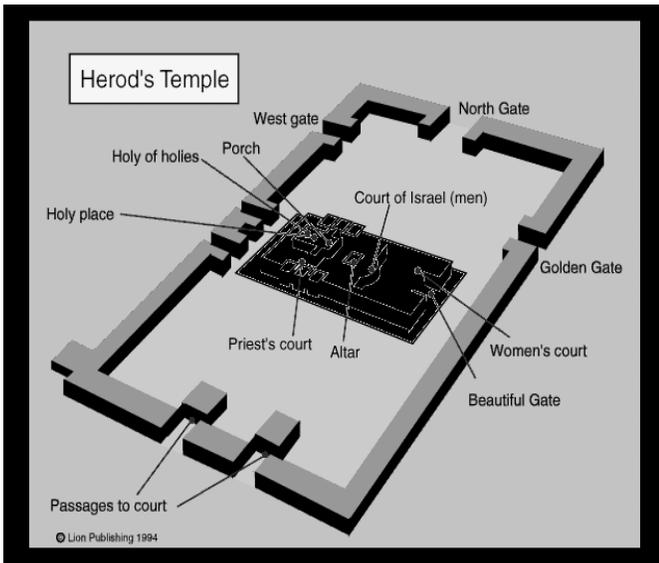
Slabs bearing an inscription in Greek and Latin characters,

warning Gentiles that death would be the penalty for breaking the rule, were placed in front of forbidden zones. One such stone is shown on the next page.

In dedicating the temple Solomon said:

"The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud: I have built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever" (2 Chronicles 6:1).





Here is a diagram of Herod's Temple, which was in existence during Christ's time on earth. It was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. Since that time, Jerusalem has been under Gentile occupation and there has been no temple and, consequently, no place for sacrifice by Israel.

We read in Ephesians 2:14 how Christ's sacrifice resulted in the wall, that prohibited the Gentiles from entering the inner court complex, being broken down (KJV). The KJV uses the phrase "the middle wall of partition" to describe the wall between the Court of the Gentiles and the inner temple complex, which restricted access by the Gentiles. The NIV refers to this as "the dividing wall of hostility". Thus we can get a sense of what Christ's death made possible for Gentiles. Having been aliens and foreigners, He

has made us fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household (v.19). Note also that Matthew 27:51 describes how the curtain of the inner sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom at the moment that Christ gave up His Spirit. Hebrews

10:19 talks of the believer being confident to enter the Most Holy Place, which was opened up through the curtain, by Christ's body.

In contrast to the temple building, Ephesians 2:20-22 describes the holy temple that is growing through the body of believers, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets and with Christ as the chief cornerstone. In 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, Paul warns the church at Corinth to flee from sexual immorality, stating that the body of a believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit. This is the same word, *naos*. Paul states that this revelation is the basis for his prayer for the Ephesians that:

- They would be able to understand his insight into the mystery of Christ (3:4)
- That God would strengthen them with power through His Spirit in their inner being so that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith (3:16-17)

He then prays, saying (v18):

"But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"

Following this, God answers Solomon's prayer (2 Chron.7). He promises to use the temple to accept Israel's sacrifices – note He doesn't promise to dwell in the temple – and to be attentive to the prayers offered there. However, this is conditional on Israel abiding by His commandments. He tells them that if they do not obey Him, He will reject the temple and make it an object of ridicule. This promise was ultimately fulfilled, when, as a result of Israel's disobedience, the temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. 2 Chron. 36:17-19 describes how the temple was burnt and all the treasures carried away to Babylon. Although the temple was later rebuilt, it never regained its previous splendour.

Mat. 27:51 tells how the curtain of the inner sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom at the moment Christ gave up His spirit.



Picture of one of the stones warning Gentiles not to pass.

- That they would have power to understand how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ (3:18).

This should cause us to ponder the condition of our heart and whether Christ would be comfortable dwelling there. We know that Christ's blood cleansed us and permitted the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So it is more a question of whether our "housekeeping" is up to standard. We are not left in doubt as to what the housekeeping standards are, as Paul sets these out clearly in Ephesians 4. He urges us to live a life worthy of our calling. The word for urge is the Greek word *parakaleo*. He uses the same word in Romans 12:1, when he says:

"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind".

Paul's instructions in Ephesians include being humble and gentle, patient, bearing one another in love. The KJV uses the word "forbearing" which conveys the idea of making allowances for each other's faults. This word is also used by Paul in 2 Cor. 11:1, where he asks the Corinthians to "put up with a little of my foolishness". To be humble requires us to forego pride. Pride is insidious, as it can creep up on us. In Eph. 4:29, Paul tells the believers to avoid unwholesome talk, and rather, to talk in a way that builds others up. Paul also urges us to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. This suggests that, regardless of differences in our views about passages of Scripture, we are to endeavour to seek peace and unity. This is not to say that we must agree with one another, but has more to do with how we treat each other – with love and kindness, as opposed to opposition, judgement or divisiveness. If we consider that we are pillars in a holy temple, this makes sense; as to weaken the unity of the Spirit is to weaken the structure of the temple.

At a future time, God will start dealing directly with Israel again. Another temple will be built and with the coming of the anti-Christ, an idol, (the abomination of desolation) will be set up in the Holy Place, defiling the temple. This temple will be destroyed when Christ returns, after which the temple

described in Ezekiel chs. 40-43, will be built. This temple will exist for a limited amount of time. Revelation tells us that, after the 1000-year reign, there will be a new heaven and earth, the old heaven and earth having passed away. When the New Jerusalem descends out of heaven, there will be no temple. Rev. 21:22 says that the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be its temple. This is the last mention of the word temple in the scriptures.

When we consider what an important place the temple of Jerusalem occupies in scripture, we can begin to understand more of the riches and privileges that have been promised to us as believers. We don't have to wait for a future temple, because we are already part of a holy temple, of which Christ is the chief cornerstone. We have unlimited access to our Heavenly Father through Christ. Knowing that He dwells in us, we can see how important it is for us to cultivate our minds so that we take on the attitude of Christ, as set out in Philippians 2. This can be challenging as we struggle still with the old nature that is within us. However, if Paul gave these instructions, it must be possible to live up to them. It seems that this is intended to be a life-long endeavour for which we will give account one day.

Our attitudes, and the daily actions that these give rise to, are part of the good works that God has prepared for us. It would seem that just as the priests had duties as part of their service in the temple, these works form part of our duties and service to God. In this, we are not governed by regulations, but are encouraged to use God's Word to come to a better understanding of God's love for us, our standing in Christ, and what this makes available to us in this life.

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Eph. 2:19 - 20.

Right Division. Cont. from p. 6

dividing it, but Paul is telling us to distinguish between the different parts of God's Word, and not confuse, for example, the Dispensation of the Mosaic Law with the Dispensation of the Mystery. Now to my example.

As a young man in the Salvation Army, I became a Bandmaster. On one occasion, my band was providing the musical support for quite a large meeting, with several important people taking part. The first hymn was announced, the congregation stood, I waved my baton and the band started to play, the congregation singing along heartily. It soon became painfully evident that something was wrong, as horrible sounds were coming from one section of the band. The singing continued, but the important people were glaring at me! I moved amongst the bandsmen as I continued to conduct them, and soon discovered that the wrong notes were coming from one of basses. For those who are not familiar with a brass band, a bass is known in the orchestral world as a tuba. The tubas provide the bottom notes, the foundation of the music being played. I stopped the particular bass player from continuing while we finished the remaining verses of the hymn.

As soon as I was able to check out the situation, I found that the tuba player had picked up the music for the second cornet, without noticing it. He was playing the notes of the correct tune with great gusto. Once he found the correct tuba part, harmony was immediately restored, and I received no further glares from the important people up front.

It was very amusing at the time – some of the bandsmen could hardly keep playing their instruments for laughing – and even now I have a good laugh when I think of it. But there are very important lessons for us in this little incident.

But before getting on to that, let me back-track a little. Some objections raised against the Dispensational interpretation of the Bible go like this: "You are nit-picking, God's Word is all one; the important thing is that we all love the Lord with all our heart, not worrying about differences in parts of the Bible; or (somewhat similar to the previous one) the main thing for a Christian is to be sincere." There are more, but these will suffice.

Now let's apply these statements to the situation in my band that night long ago.

Bill, the Bass player (not his real name), could not be faulted in his love for the Lord. He was also very sincere in his service for his Master, as well as being a very earnest and sincere musician. He played the notes in front of him accurately and with enthusiasm, doing his best to make a worthy contribution to the worship and praise of the meeting. But, as was painfully obvious, all his love, enthusiasm and sincerity did not alter the fact that his contribution dramatically spoiled the performance of the band, and had a detrimental effect on the atmosphere of the meeting.

When I stopped him playing, he could have responded, "Why are you such a nit-picker? It's all music. It's all one and the same. I'm playing the right tune. I'm not making mistakes by playing wrong notes. What's your problem, Bandmaster?" All of those things were true, but the critical point was that he was not 'rightly dividing' his part in the band's performance. He was playing by the wrong set of instructions (the musical notes printed on the page in front of him), wrong because they did not belong to him as a bass player. He was indeed playing the right tune, but not the right part of the tune – the bass part as opposed to the second cornet part – and in spite of all his good intentions the result was something of a disaster. He was applying someone else's instruction to himself, and they did not fit.

The application of all this to our study and interpretation of Scripture is obvious. We certainly should study all Scripture, because 'all Scripture is profitable for us', but not all Scripture is either to us or about us. There certainly is a harmony between the various parts of the Bible, and the more we comprehend that, the more we will appreciate our place in the scheme, and perform more acceptably in our living and witnessing. But if, to stay with our example, the Lord has appointed me to the tuba section, and then I, either through carelessness or design, try to play the 1st. trumpet part, I will not bring glory to my Lord, and I will gather shame for myself.

How do I apply this practically to my Bible study? There are some simple guidelines. The first question to answer is: "When was this book/passage written?" Closely associated with this question is another:

“Was Israel God’s chosen nation when this Scripture was written, or was it one of the times when God had disassociated Himself from them?” Then more particularly, we should ask, “Is this passage/book written after the end of Acts, when Israel was set aside as God’s chosen nation and the Dispensation of the Mystery revealed, or is it before that climactic event?” Answering these simple questions will solve about 90% of your Bible difficulties. I think it was Augustine who said, “Distinguish the dispensations and the difficulties disappear.”

As well as applying the principle of correctly apportioning the Word of Truth to our Bible study, however, it should also be applied to our lives. When I have understood that God has introduced changes in dealing with sections of humanity throughout history, I will see, for example, that I do not have to bring a lamb at the feast of Passover and slay it. That was the case for Israel before their Messiah came, but now that the Lamb of God has been slain – a sacrifice that can only be made once, I cannot — dare I say must not?— repeat the type. What I must do now is, in faith, place my hand on the head of that Lamb of God to identify with Him, and confess that He died for my sins, in my place.

I do not need to observe ‘festivals, new moons or sabbaths, which things are but shadows of things that were to come, for not only does Paul go on to say that the substance is of Christ (Col. 2:16, 17), but in Col. 2:9, 10 he has already stated:

“For in (Christ) dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him who is the head of all principality and power.”

I can testify that there is glorious freedom in these truths, once they are appreciated and appropriated to one’s own life and experience. It is not nit-picking or wrongly cutting up God’s Word to understand and apply these things. Rather it is to come, by faith, into the greatest and most glorious truths of God that He has revealed to our benighted human race.

One final thought. I am not criticising Bill now, but rather applying the incident described above to the lives of believers generally, including myself. Bill was a reasonably good musician, and, incidentally, had a lovely tenor voice. But he seemed to be totally unaware that he was playing the wrong notes. He did have a sense that something was wrong, but

could not work out what it was, and in spite of that, he kept on playing wrong notes, thus disrupting the good performance of the band as a whole.

So what about me in my work for the Master? Am I knowledgeable enough to recognise when I am observing a custom or a rite that belongs to a now past dispensation? It is not good enough to fall back on the excuse that as long as I am sincere in what I do and love the Lord, it doesn’t matter. I believe it does matter, and we should study and learn about God’s will for His children in this present dispensation, so that we may then walk as worthily as possible of our high calling in Christ Jesus (Eph. 4:1–3).

Paul’s command to us in 2 Tim. 2:15 starts with the word that means ‘Be diligent’ (NKJV); or ‘Do your best’ (NIV); ‘Try hard’ (NEB, which seems a little weak!). ‘Study and be eager and do your utmost’, says the Ampl. Version, which seems to wrap it up quite well.

While it is not hard to understand Paul’s point here. It may be a little harder to carry it out. But let’s do **“our utmost for His highest!”**

A Worthwhile Prayer:

*“Grant, Lord, that none
may love Thee less be-
cause of me;*

*That never word or
deed of mine may turn
one heart from Thee;*

*And, greatly daring,
Lord, one grace do I im-
plore,*

*That many hearts, be-
cause of me, may love
Thee more”.*

*If you find the going easy, be careful.
You may be going downhill!*

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