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Spiritual Blessings



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“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

Tongues Speaking Today

By David Tavender

This article is the first part of the study given by David at our recent Bible Study Conference at Charlestown in Newcastle. The second part will appear in the next issue of Spiritual Blessings.

Part 1.

The phenomenon known as speaking in tongues is prevalent in many churches today. Whether carried out in church gatherings or in more private settings, about 20% of all people who call themselves Christians claim to speak in tongues.

So what is speaking in tongues? The phenomenon is sometimes called “glossolalia”, a term comprised of two shorter Greek words. The first of these is *glossa*, meaning “tongue”, and can refer either to a language, or to the tongue itself in your mouth. The second Greek word is *laleo*, meaning “to speak”. Thus, glossolalia is the ability to speak in another language, or perhaps, more than one language. Importantly, this ability is unlearned, so the ability to speak in another language, having been brought up in a multi-lingual household, or by studying another language at school or university, is not included under the banner of glossolalia. In a Christian context, it is said that this ability is God-given.

Attempting to define glossolalia immediately gives rise to debate, as not every instance of speaking in tongues is agreed as actually being a genuine language or “tongue”. We will discuss this aspect a little further on in this article.

A Personal Testimony

Many years ago, I faced a dilemma about this subject. I had observed that some of the New Testament writings referred to believers speaking in tongues. Of special concern were some passages from 1 Corinthians 14. For example: “Let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret” (v.13);

“I speak with tongues more than you all” (v.18); “If anyone speaks in a tongue” (v.27); “Do not forbid to speak with tongues” (v.39). Undeniably, speaking in tongues played an active role in the early church, and the Apostle Paul sanctioned it.

My problem was this. The phenomenon of tongues-speaking was obviously a common occurrence in the early Corinthian church, but it wasn’t present at all in the church I was attending at the time. Furthermore, speaking in tongues was carried out in several of the other churches in my local area, and this prompted some serious questions: Was my faith complete without speaking in tongues? (I had heard some say that if a person didn’t speak in tongues, then that person was not saved.) What about the other people in my church who didn’t exercise this gift – were they not truly sincere believers? Is tongues-speaking a mark of a person’s spirituality, and a sign of a person being truly blessed by God? Is it a sign of true, vibrant Christianity?

I didn’t ever attempt to exercise this “gift” back then, nor have I attempted since, and I now believe that we should not attempt it. It wasn’t long after those days when that dilemma surfaced, that I began to come across a few answers to some of these issues, and I’d like to share some of

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President's Word

Greetings once again to all our readers across the globe. We especially welcome anyone who is reading our magazine for the first time. Comments and questions about what you read in these pages, or indeed about any topic of faith, are invited.

Michael and Sylvia Penny in Australia & New Zealand

In September and October of this year, the BBFA and "Search and See" (NZ) hosted a number of special meetings given by Michael and Sylvia Penny from the U.K. Michael has authored almost 40 books and booklets, and is an experienced radio broadcaster and international speaker.

Michael presented over 30 sessions of talks in a period of five weeks, on varied topics, and Sylvia delivered numerous Scripture readings in the talks. Both gave willingly of their "free" time afterwards to discuss the Bible studies, as well as other issues. Here, I'd like to publicly express the BBFA's appreciation to the Pennys for what they have brought to the Fellowships in Australia and New Zealand during their visit. It is our prayer that those who attended the Bible studies will have received much to assist them in their own reading of the Scriptures rightly divided. Ultimately, our desire is that the Lord's name will have been lifted up by our time together around His Word.

We will let everyone know more about the available recordings, etc, also in the next issue. There will also be more about some of the gatherings in the next issue of *Spiritual Blessings*, but if you can't wait that long and would like to know more, or you wish to get a hold of some of the recordings, slides and handouts from the meetings, please write to one of the addresses on page 12.

My column in this issue would not be complete without acknowledging the hard work and support of our local members and supporters during the Pennys' visit. Many of our friends went the extra mile in providing accommodation, refreshments, meals and transport, as well as organising events, setting up equipment, distributing leaflets, etc, etc, - all of which aided in promoting the Word of God through Michael and Sylvia's time of ministry in Australia and New Zealand. A big "Thank You" to each one who supported these meetings.

New BBFA Committee

Every three years, the BBFA holds elections for Committee positions. This Committee is responsible for administering the affairs of the BBFA (organising meetings, publishing *Spiritual Blessings*, maintaining our website, etc), and all work is carried out on a purely voluntary basis. I'd sincerely like to thank the 2007-2010 Committee for

their hard work and support over the past three years, especially the outgoing members, Rom Harper and John Hutton, both of whom made major contributions to our Fellowship during their tenure. Both new members to the Committee (Susan Hall and Karl Edwards) have been involved with our ministry for some time now and I know they will bring much to the Fellowship during the next term.

So, the newly elected Committee is: David Tavender (President), Frank Haegler (Vice-President), Julie Milgate (Treasurer), Janelle Tavender (Secretary), Allan Gallaher, Susan Hall and Karl Edwards (Committee members). I look forward to working with the new Committee, and we all ask for your prayers and input as we go about our task over the next three years.

Meetings and Website

Our regular meetings continue to be held, and you can find the details on page 12. May I encourage each one to make it along to one of our meetings if there is one in your region. Don't forget to check our website also - www.spiritualblessings.org - and avail yourself of back issues of *Spiritual Blessings*, as well as hundreds of other articles and charts. You will find many books for purchase, but also for free, as well as links to quite a few works published online.

Until next time, may the Lord be glorified by our witness, our walk, and our study of His Word.

David Tavender

Editorial

The main articles in this issue are studies given at conferences held earlier this year. These studies are well worth putting before the wider audience of our readership, and we hope you will give them your thoughtful attention.

Coral Hutton, the beloved wife of John Hutton and much-loved mother of Anne and David, died rather suddenly some weeks back. John has been a supporter of the BBFA from its early days and Coral loyally supported him. Reared in a Salvation Army family in Brisbane, Coral loved her Lord. She was blessed with a fine soprano voice and loved nothing more than to sing, either as a soloist or in a choir. A crowd of over 200 people gathered at the Crematorium for Coral's funeral and the singing, especially of Coral's favourite song, "Would You Know Why I Love Jesus", was truly inspirational. That service was the inspiration for the article 'Resurrection'.

Reports of the meetings with the Pennys will feature in the next issue of *Spiritual Blessings*. As President David has explained, Mike and Sylvia have moved on to New Zealand, before returning home to the UK.

As ever, we wish our readers every joy and blessing, and pray that the offerings from our various contributors will be the means of growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Athol Walter

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them in two short articles. To do so, let's examine some passages of Scripture together, and see how what is often claimed about tongues today, measures up to the Word of God. There is not space to consider all of the issues involved in these two articles, but it is important to establish some basic principles about glossolalia before trying to tackle the more complex issues of the subject.

What's the point?

One basic question is not asked often enough about this perplexing issue, yet it should be among the first: What is actually the point of speaking in tongues, i.e. a language, which they themselves, and most people around them, can't understand in most cases? Thankfully, the Scriptures provide an answer. 1 Corinthians 14:22 tells us that "tongues are for a sign", and, more specifically that, "tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to **unbelievers**".

Therefore, whatever else we want to say about tongues, we see that their purpose was as a sign for unbelievers. The verse previous to this is also enlightening, as it includes a quote from the Old Testament - "In the law it is written: With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to **this people**; and yet for all that, they will not hear Me" (1 Corinthians 14:21).

This quote in Paul's letter is from Isaiah 28:11, and there the term "this people" refers to Israel. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written around 50 A.D., during the time covered by the book of Acts (c. 30 A.D. to 62 A.D.). During that time, God was still dealing with Israel as a special nation, as distinct from the Gentiles of the day. However, Israel had rejected Jesus of Nazareth as the rightful king, and were still refusing to accept Him in the decades which followed the crucifixion – the period covered by the book of Acts, and this is when the passages about tongues in 1 Corinthians were written.

In other words, the speaking of tongues was to be a sign for these same unbelieving Israelites scattered throughout the world at that time. This is an important principle in exploring the reason behind tongues-speaking in Scripture: it is closely associated with unbelieving Israelites throughout the Bible.

Associated with Unbelieving Israel

At the time those verses from 1 Corinthians 14 were written, God was still dealing primarily through Israel (as opposed to nowadays, when He deals with people regardless of nationality). The statement that

tongues are a sign for unbelievers illustrates that speaking in tongues was for the benefit of unbelieving Israelites.

Not only is Isaiah 28:11 (quoted in 1 Corinthians 14:21 – see above) associated with unbelieving Israel, but so is another passage in Deuteronomy. One of the curses which would come upon Israel if they were disobedient to God's law, was that "The LORD will bring a nation against you [Israel] from afar ... a nation whose language you will not understand". (Deuteronomy 28:15,49). Throughout the Old Testament, Israelites and Jews stumbled through a number of phases of unbelief and disobedience to God's law, and were duly subjected to the rule of several different nations, whose languages they could not understand (e.g. 2 Chronicles 36:15-17).

In these Old Testament instances, it was the enemies of Israel who spoke the foreign languages to the nation when they were in a state of unbelief. When we come to the New Testament, however, it is Israelites and Jews who are speaking in foreign languages, or "tongues". This time, it is to their own people, and, as we shall see, the theme of unbelieving Israel is still a major factor whenever we read of speaking in tongues in the Scriptures – Old Testament or New.

Let's turn our attention to Acts 2 for a moment where we find the first occasion of glossolalia in the New Testament. The setting is the Day of Pentecost, and it is no coincidence that this was a particularly Jewish festival (see Leviticus 23:15-22, where the same festival is called "The Feast of Weeks"). In Acts 2:4, we read that the apostles "were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues" (see also v.11). The listeners were all Jews, many of them having been born outside Palestine and living in various regions around the Mediterranean. These visitors to Jerusalem heard the apostles speak "each in our own language in which we were born" (v.8, see also v.6). Quite understandably, they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another "What could this mean?" (v.12).

So if it is correct that tongues are a sign to unbelieving Israel, what was it that these Jews didn't believe? Peter's speech, which follows, tells them exactly: they didn't believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Christ.

Notice that Peter is here addressing the "men of Israel" (Acts 2:22); not

Gentiles, nor the church today, but “men of Israel”. He speaks to them of Jesus of Nazareth, “a man attested by God to YOU”, but a man whom “YOU have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and have put to death”. Who is “you” in these instances? Israelites who did not believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Christ, when indeed He was. Don’t miss the connection – tongues are spoken, and then in response to the question “what does this mean?”, Peter responds by illustrating Israelite unbelief. The phenomenon of tongues-speaking is closely associated with unbelieving Israel.

It is sometimes said that tongues were used to communicate the message of Christ to unbelieving Jews who spoke a different language. This is possibly true, but perhaps something more was happening here.

At the time of Acts 2, in the first century A.D., Greek was the common language of the Roman Empire. Most people would have been able to speak it, and many could write it, as is evidenced by the fact that the New Testament was originally written in Greek. Tongues were present at the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, not only so that Peter could communicate, but as a sign to the unbelieving Israelites attending what was a very “Israelitish” festival.

In Jerusalem, on that day, many Jews from various parts of the ancient world gathered together to keep the feast. Although most would have been able to speak the commonly used Greek language, we are told that each one heard the word in their own native tongue – a reminder of Isaiah 28:11 quoted above, that with foreign tongues God would speak to unbelieving Israel. This brings us to our next point.

Intelligible Languages

Tongues in Scripture are always intelligible languages, not just religious babbling, unable to be understood by anyone else. In Acts 2, the Jews visiting Jerusalem heard the languages of their own particular locality, which they could understand. For instance, when Peter spoke, the Egyptian Jews present would have heard Peter in the Egyptian language. In both Isaiah 28:11 and Deuteronomy 28:49, the languages referred to were also genuine languages of the nations who invaded Palestine. And so we could go on.

Many sincere Christians think that once a person has a religious experience and begin to utter any syllables (so long as it isn’t English or whatever their native language might be), then they must be speaking in a God-inspired tongue. With this I cannot

agree. We will deal with the notion that people speak in the “tongues of angels” in next issue’s article.

Today, glossolalia, under the false supposition of being “spiritual language”, is employed not only by Christian groups, but also by many non-Christian groups. Variants of “religious babbling” are not at all unique to Christianity, and are exercised frequently amongst many tribal groups, some Buddhists, and many who practise Transcendental Meditation. This should make us think. Would the God of the Scriptures be endorsing the spirituality of those who worship a pagan god? Would the God of the Scriptures speak through the adherents of Buddhism in this way? Would the God of the Scriptures be edified in those who say that we do not even need God? Surely the answer is “No”, and it should cause us to consider carefully what is actually happening when people speak in tongues today, whether Christian or pagan. This is especially true in a dispensation during which Israel has been set aside as a special nation in God’s dealings with man.

Furthermore, we have ancient documents that tell of glossolalia being exercised well before Christian times. Possibly the earliest of such records dates back to around 1100 B.C., in an Egyptian document known as the “Report of Wenamun”. There is some debate about the interpretation of that document, but there is no question that Plato (Greek philosopher, c.400 B.C.) refers to religious babbling similar to tongues-speaking today in some of his works known as “The Dialogues of Plato”. Babbling purporting to be spiritual language was also a regular feature of the pagan worship in the Temple at Delphi in Ancient Greece, before the time of Alexander The Great (pre-330 B.C.) The Roman poet Virgil (1st Century B.C.) also referred to the phenomenon of speaking in tongues. This was not a practice that began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

At the time of Acts 2 itself, supposed “tongues-speaking” was still a common phenomenon in the pagan Greek temples. It was practised primarily by the temple priests and priestesses, who would often put themselves into a trance, and speak in tongues of religious ecstasy.

In light of 1 Corinthians 14:22 – “tongues are for a sign” – would such incomprehensible babbling be a sign to Israel? The Jews of Acts 2 would most certainly have rejected anything like this. Had they NOT been able to understand what the apostles were saying on that day, it would have been no different to the practices found in the pagan temples, and would have been no sign to Israel at all. In fact, it

would actually have been a deterrent to them, since, by this time, Israel had been “cured” of the idolatrous practices found amongst them so often in Old Testament times.

However, those listeners on the Day of Pentecost DID understand the words being spoken, and it was clearly something more than just random syllables - it was proper speech that they could comprehend. Because the words they could understand came to these men of Israel in such an unusual manner on that day, they asked, “What could this mean?” (Acts 2:12), after which Peter highlighted their unbelief towards God’s chosen one, Jesus of Nazareth. Once we establish this strong link between tongues and unbelieving Israel, it should give us cause to question the validity, and the point, of what we see claimed today as being God-ordained.

Summary

At this point, let us draw together a few thoughts from what we have seen so far. (a) In the Old Testament, prophecies associating foreign languages being spoken to Israel with their unbelief and disobedience. (b) In the New Testament, tongues were a gift to some believers, given as a sign for the benefit of unbelieving Israelites. (c) Tongues in Scripture are always real languages. (d) What is supposed to be tongues-speaking, today or in history, is not necessarily real language or God-ordained.

In the next issue, we will conclude our brief introduction to this phenomenon by taking a closer look at 1 Corinthians, chapters 12 to 14. There we shall examine some of the ways in which the gift of tongues was operating in the early church, consider the early church’s responsibilities in exercising this gift, and make some comparisons and contrasts with what we commonly see in many Christian gatherings today.

Not A Hoof cont.

stir up the mind by way of remembrance might not come amiss in a time when the snares and cares of this evil age are unremittingly pressed upon the believer as he seeks to follow the pilgrim path. “Let no man beguile you of your reward”. (Col. 2:18)

(This article is from the writings of Charles Welch, but I have not been able to track down just where it has come from. My apologies. Ed.)

Not A Hoof

By Charles Welch.

**“There shall not an hoof be left behind.”
(Ex. 10:26)**

**“Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness.”
(Num. 14:29)**

While the reading of these two passages together produces the feeling of a contradiction, that feeling is superficial, for it is an instance of the proverb “Circumstances alter cases.”

The quotation from Exodus refers to Egypt, the quotation from Numbers refers to the wilderness. The first passage stands at the head of a long line of passages, all of which teach in type, prophecy and doctrine, the blessed truth that salvation, being by grace through redemption, is thereby indefectible. Of all who are typified by Israel in Egypt under the shelter of the shed blood, it is true, “They shall never perish.” Were we concerned to develop the doctrine known as “the final perseverance of the saints”, we could easily fill more space than is at our disposal with passages of Scripture which would prove beyond question that those who have once passed from death unto life, can never pass back from life into that death again.

The second passage equally stands at the head of another long line of passages, all of which in type, prophecy and doctrine, emphasize that over and beyond the blessed fact of an unconditional salvation is placed a conditional prize, or crown, or recompence of reward. Again the passages which speak of present endurance being linked with a future glory, present conflict with a future crown, present denial with the attainment of a future prize, are too numerous for such a short article as this must be.

Together with these passages comes the converse, those which speak of the possibility of even Paul himself being disapproved (‘castaway’, A.V.), and of Moses, that man of God, forfeiting his right of entering the promised land. The believer who has been delivered from the bondage of sin and death cannot be left behind in Egypt – ‘not a hoof’ – but by reason of unfaithfulness, of murmuring, of the worship of self instead of the whole-hearted following of the Lord, many who were thus redeemed fell in the wilderness.

That there is nothing new in this line of thought we are well aware. but we felt a simple word to

Continued at bottom of prev. column.

The Tree Of Life

Further thoughts on the subject in response to Ron Hodge's article, from a discussion among the Brisbane BBFA group, compiled by Frank and Merilee Haegler.

The Brisbane Bible Study group made the 'Tree of Life' their topic for one of their regular Discussion Nights. We found we agreed with Ron on many points, e.g. that Adam had a physical or 'fleshly' body that could die. Thus we, like Adam, do not have immortal souls, but are given immortality at resurrection.

But we all thought that, being physical, Adam and Eve had to terminate at some time, not being deathless, as all the physical realm cannot continue without assistance. Frank thinks that, if Adam had not sinned, he may have lived, proved himself faithful, and then been changed, as will those alive at Christ's return. As to what would have happened, or could have transpired under different circumstances, is uncertain though interesting.

We could not, however, see Ron's conclusion that the Tree was for restoring accidental death. We would like to ask, "How could one eat the fruit if one were dead?" Also, some of us could not see that there would be accidents in a perfect Eden.

We had some discussion about the exact effect of the fruit of the Tree, and considering Gen. 3:22-23, (...and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken), we felt that the continued eating of the fruit must somehow sustain life for the age, which God was preventing by banishing them. It could not

have been that one bite (of the fruit) meant that Adam and Eve would live for an age, as they had already had free access to the Tree. And as Ron said, they were not immortal or deathless, as it is evident that they did die.

We speculated on what 'an age' might mean, seeing that Adam (and even his descendants who never had access to the Tree of Life) lived for nearly a thousand years. We wondered if 'an age' might mean the whole age of man's history, i.e. approximately seven thousand years.

The group did agree, however, that, in the New Jerusalem where the Tree of Life will again flourish, there can be no death, but that it is implied that some state of 'less than perfection' will exist. Rom Harper said that 'the nations' (Greek – ETHNOS) could mean 'multitudes' and he pointed out that the number of the 'twelve manner of fruits' (Rev. 22:2) tied in so well with Israel, as does all Revelation.

We did not get far as to what the 'leaves of the tree' that 'were for the healing of the nations' (also v. 2) could mean. We noted that 'the leaves' are not mentioned at all in Genesis. But as our time had almost expired by then, we were content to leave that topic and the implication of 'less than perfection' existing alongside the New Jerusalem, for the discussion of another day.

(Ron's article on 'The Tree Of Life' appeared in the May/June issue of Spiritual Blessings. Further comments or questions from our readers are invited.)

The Uncertainty of Atheism

"Rational certainty has always been that glittering dome, imagined or otherwise, on the huge edifice of philosophy. The modern father of the quest for rational certainty is Renè Descartes. He found his starting point in "cogito ergo sum" – "I think, therefore, I am." David Hume chiselled the statement down further and said we must eliminate the "I" and reach an even more fundamental assertion: "I think, therefore thinking exists." Hans Driesch, Danish biologist, went one better and said, "I am something (I can't be sure of what) at this very moment when I raise this question."

All this is reminiscent of the student at New York University who intimidatingly asked his professor this question: "Sir, how do I know that I exist?" A lingering pause preceded the professor's answer. He lowered his glasses, peered over the rim, and riveted his eyes on the student. His simply response finally came, "And whom shall I say is asking?"

From the book "The Real Face Of Atheism" by Ravi Zacharias, p. 109.

THE PLACE OF PENTECOST

By Athol Walter

This article is the transcript of a study given at the Bible Conference Day held recently at Charlestown, Newcastle.

The Day of Pentecost is celebrated in different ways in many Christian denominations. But many Christians have lost sight of the fact that Pentecost is a Jewish feast, not a Christian one. As a result, the significance of Pentecost has been largely lost, to the detriment of our Scriptural understanding.

The word Pentecost, of course, comes from the Greek word 'Pentecoste', which means fiftieth. More important, however, is the Hebrew name for this feast, viz. the Feast of Weeks. So what is the place and the significance, of Pentecost? For this we must turn to Lev. 23:1–22, and I urge you to read this passage before going on with this study.

Firstly, notice how these sacred ceremonies start with Passover. The Passover lambs were to be killed on the 14th. of the month Nisan. That evening, which in Jewish time is the 15th., Israel ate the Passover meal. The 15th. marked the commencement of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted for seven days, during which time they ate nothing with leaven in it, and leaven was banished from their homes for the duration of the Feast. Leaven, of course, is what we call yeast.

On the day after the beginning of Unleavened Bread, seven weeks plus one day were counted off, and on that 50th day, the people of Israel were to bring special offerings and sacrifices. That fiftieth day is called the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost in our terminology.

Now, in contrast to the offerings of Unleavened Bread, on the Day of Pentecost, there was an offering of two loaves of bread made with leaven. We'll come to those things shortly, but now, a little sidetrack. In Acts 20:6 & 7 we read: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread ..." So that means Sunday, doesn't it? No, for the Greek says literally, on the first of Weeks. It was the first day of the fifty days to Pentecost. Notice that the preceding verse speaks of the Days of Unleavened Bread, and then in v. 16 we read that Paul was hurrying to get to Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost. That journey would take many days.

Each Gospel has a reference to 'the first of Weeks', which has been incorrectly translated in our versions

as 'the first day of the week'. We will look at one only—Luke 24:1.

"Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women came to the tomb ..." Now in this case, it probably was Sunday, but that is not the meaning of the verse. It was on the first of Weeks, in other words, it was 'Day One' of those fifty days that finished on the Day of Pentecost.

One other reference is 1 Cor. 16:2, "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside ... so that there will be no collections when I come." The Greek in this verse is slightly different, but the Comp. Bible note says that it does mean "on the first of Weeks". Paul was not telling these Corinthians to put money aside every Sunday, but rather to have a special collection on that first of the fifty days.

If we are to see, then, the significance of Pentecost, we must set it in its place amongst Israel's sacred feasts. I will leave aside the weekly Sabbath, the Sabbatical year, and the year of Jubilee, not because they are unimportant, but to keep this study as simple as possible.

Israel's Sacred Feasts, Leviticus 23.

The Feasts provide a spiritual and prophetic picture of Israel's history, some parts of which have been fulfilled, while other parts await fulfillment. There are many lessons for us Gentiles to learn from these events, but we must ever remember the principle of correctly apportioning the Word of Truth, and not take for ourselves things that belong exclusively to Israel.

1a. The Passover. Lev. 23:4. The annual celebration of the departure from Egypt. The Passover redeemed Israel from Egypt, the place of bondage and death. Now while we are not Israel, we, and indeed all sinners, have to start at the Passover, or, in other words, at the Cross. Now we know of course, that Passover was on the 14th. day of the first month, and the next day was –

1b. Unleavened Bread. V. 6. Both Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits are closely linked with the Passover, and in one sense they are three parts of

the one Feast, which lasted 7 days from the 15th. Leaven stands for sin, so **unleavened** bread shows the sinless character of God's Lamb, who would take all their sins away. (1 Cor. 5:7 & 8.)

1c. Firstfruits. V. 10. Two sheaves of early ripening barley were to be waved before the Lord as a thank-offering for all the Lord had provided. It also pictured the resurrection of Christ. (1 Cor. 15:20.)

These first three feasts, which occurred in the first month of Israel's sacred year, have been fulfilled.

2. Pentecost. V. 15. Also called the Feast of Weeks, it occurred fifty days from the day after Passover, so it falls in the third month of the year. Pentecost marked the beginning of the main harvest. The prophetic meaning of Pentecost is the beginning of the harvesting or re-gathering of the scattered people of Israel to their own, long-promised land. The fulfillment came when, at Pentecost in Acts 2, 3,000 Jews believed. The final ingathering, the completion of the harvest, awaits the Lord's Return.

3. Feast of Trumpets. V. 23. After Pentecost, there is a gap of four months till Trumpets. Trumpets comes on the first day of the 7th. month and prepared Israel for the next two feasts, which point to the climax of Israel's part in God's purposes. Trumpets figure in Revelation and is strongly connected with the time both before and at the Lord's return to set up the Kingdom, or in other words, with the Day of the Lord. Then closely following Trumpets we have –

4. The Day of Atonement. V. 27. This was the day when the high priest made atonement for the sins of the whole nation during the preceding year. While the Lord's Sacrifice included what the Day of Atonement stands for, the part that the people played in the ritual of the Day, i.e. repentance, confession of sin, and mourning for their transgressions, is to be fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus, when the mourning of Israel will be great indeed. (Zech. 12:11).

I want to make a point here without staying to explain it. Passover is when the sinner is forgiven and is thereby made a child of God. The Day of Atonement is not a repeat of Passover. It does not bring a sinner into a relationship with God. Rather, it deals with the sins that the child of God commits, while a child of God, thus maintaining the relationship already established. So don't confuse those two aspects of the Lord's work on our behalf. But here we have the reason why the two loaves offered on the Feast of Weeks were baked with leaven, for those loaves refer not to the sinless sacrifice of the Passover Lamb, but to the work and witness of men

and women of God, who though saved and sanctified by the work of Christ, nevertheless, still have the leaven of the sinful nature in their bodies.

5. Tabernacles/Booths or Ingathering. V. 34. This last feast was held when the harvest was complete. It is more often called Ingathering than Booths, and the title of Ingathering helps us understand its significance. The booths hark back to the Exodus time, when Israel dwelt in makeshift dwellings in the wilderness. The prophetic import is that, as the 'harvesting' or 'ingathering' of Israel that was started at Pentecost in Acts 2 is now complete, and the rule of their Messiah-King established, they will then be able to dwell in safety, even in tents.

We must keep the Day of Pentecost in its proper place in God's calendar, as we now turn to Acts 1.

If you have ever compared the closing section of Luke's Gospel with the opening verses of Acts 1, you will know that, between His resurrection and ascension, the Lord opened the disciples' understanding concerning the Scriptures, and gave them detailed instructions from the law and prophets about the Kingdom of God. The disciples then had but one question, which is in v. 6. "Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Many say this question missed the mark completely, but I believe they were right on target.

In answering their question, the Lord did not rebuke the disciples, but told them that the timing of that Restoration was not their concern. They had a job to do, and they were to wait in Jerusalem until they were given the necessary resources to do it.

Now to what I think is an important point. We often equate the Day of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit in power, but I think that is not quite correct. Certainly, the power and associated tongues of fire are connected with the harvest in some prophetic writings, but we tend to miss the point by being dazzled by the power aspect. The disciples certainly needed that power to carry out their special task. However, the true significance of Pentecost lies in what occurred later in the day, when after the phenomenon of the speaking in foreign languages had brought a crowd together and Peter addressed them, **3,000 of them believed and accepted Jesus as Israel's Messiah.** Those 3,000, together with all those converted during the Acts ministry, were the beginning of the harvest of Israel, which the Feast of Weeks typified.

Don't forget that what Peter said that day was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Note first of

all, that he was speaking only to Jews.

V. 5: “And there were dwelling in Jerusalem JEWS, devout men, from every nation under heaven.” V. 10. “ ... Jews and proselytes.” You have it twice. The crowd was composed of Jews and proselytes, a proselyte being a Gentile who has converted completely to Judaism, even to the point of circumcision.

Then note how Peter addresses the assembled crowd. V. 14. “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem.” V. 22. “Men of Israel ...”. V. 29. “Men and brethren ...”. He wasn’t just being polite. He was addressing his fellow Jews. V. 36. “Therefore let all the **house of Israel** know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, **whom you crucified**, both Lord and Christ.” If this was the beginning of the Christian Church, what what has it got to do with the house of Israel? And who crucified the Lord? Israel.

But then we come to Peter’s quotation from Joel. Speaking of the amazing things the crowd was witnessing that day, he says most emphatically, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel ...”. I hope you have read Joel, for you will see very clearly that Joel is not speaking of the Christian Church, but the nation of Judah. The thought of the restoration of Israel not only permeates the Book of Joel, but is to the forefront in these opening chapters of Acts, and I am not referring only to Peter’s address. Note these verses.

1:6. “Will you RESTORE the Kingdom to Israel at this time?”

Then, in 3:19, after the healing of the lame man, “Repent ... so that TIMES OF REFRESHING may come,” and 20, 21, “...that He may send Jesus Christ, whom the heavens must receive until the TIMES OF RESTORATION of all things ...”

If we can let Peter speak for himself without putting our preconceived ideas onto his words, we will see that he has the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel, based on the promises of God to their forefathers, firmly in mind. You can charge him with having missed the point entirely if you wish, but you cannot say that his words have nothing to do with Israel and the filling up of her destiny in God’s plans.

Come back to Acts 2. The verses Peter quotes are from Joel 2:28–31. PLEASE READ THEM NOW! Note that Peter stopped his quotation halfway through the last verse, but look at what that last part said. Don’t miss the mention of the REMNANT, for that is what those who believed on that day and

succeeding days became – part of the Remnant of Israel.

They were the beginning of the harvest, and like the two loaves baked from the first grain of the main harvest, they were a guarantee that the complete INGATHERING of the nation from the four corners of the earth would indeed take place. It depended on one thing – the repentance of the nation who had murdered their Messiah.

Now some final points. Peter’s quote from Joel is in two parts. The first part is Acts 2:17 & 18. The things foretold in those verses – the Spirit being poured out, the prophesying and the visions – happened on that very day and continued till the end of Acts. The second part, vv. 19 & 20 – the signs and wonders in heaven and earth – is reserved for the future Day of the Lord, and we find this in Revelation. V. 30 – “that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” – applied then in the Acts period, and will apply also in the future period.

Also, don’t miss Peter’s focus on David. This is important. Peter reminds them that David died and his tomb was still there in Jerusalem. But David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and believing the promises God had made to him—especially that God would raise up his greater Son to sit on his throne—foretold the resurrection of that greater Son, the Messiah.

I have mentioned Israel’s destiny several times in this study. It is important to know that Israel’s destiny is to be a nation of priests for God. Just listen to these few verses out of many:

“And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” Ex. 19:6. “But you shall be named the priests of the Lord, They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast.” Isa.61:6.

“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such, the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” Rev. 20:6.

I trust that this study has given you a better understanding of the place of the Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost, which is the beginning of the harvest of God’s people of Israel. In spite of what some hymns say, Pentecost has nothing to do with the Church Which Is His Body.

Resurrection: Vital Doctrine or Afterthought?

By Athol Walter.

The recent loss of a beloved sister in the Lord brought the subject of resurrection to the fore once again, especially in connection with the almost universal belief amongst Christians that the 'soul' of a deceased believer goes immediately to Heaven to be with the Lord. It may come as a surprise to many believers, as it did to me some years ago, to discover that the idea of 'sudden death, sudden glory', as the doctrine is sometimes called, comes not from the Bible, but from the teachings of ancient Greek philosophers.

Several early Christian teachers, however, saw the danger embedded in this teaching. For example, Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) wrote this:-

"If you fall in with those who are called Christians who confess not this truth (namely resurrection) but dare to blaspheme the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in that they say there is no resurrection of the dead, but that immediately when they die their souls are received up into heaven, avoid them and esteem them not Christians."

Justin Martyr, obviously, was not one to hold back when he had something to say, and while we could not join him in questioning the standing in Christ of a fellow-believer who accepted this doctrine of the souls of the dead going to be with the Lord immediately at death, nevertheless, highlights the fact that this doctrine calls into question the great scriptural truth of resurrection. To put it bluntly, if a believer's soul goes directly into the presence of the Lord at death, what is the point of the bodily resurrection? It becomes almost superfluous. But, you might respond that the resurrection of the body is necessary to reunite soul and body. My answer is this. If a soul has already been enjoying life in the Lord's presence for some time without its body, why is there any need at all for the body? In the case of believers who died back in the first century – e.g. Stephen, Peter or Paul – they will have already spent 2,000 years with the Lord, in round figures, without their bodies.

So how did this teaching find its way into the Christian Church? I can only give the briefest answer in the available space. The Rev. H. A. Barnes, in an article titled "The Platonic Tradition" says this:

"At an early period in the Christian Church it became fashionable to believe that there was much similarity between the teaching of Plato and that of

Christianity, until it actually came to pass that the authority of the heathen philosopher was recognized almost as if he had been a teacher of true religion".

Another writer, Dr. E. Petavel, in his book "The Problem of Immortality", writes this:-

"The rising tide of Platonic theory was made to triumph in the Christian Church by the false Clementines, Tertullian, Minusclus Felix, Cyprian, Jerome, and especially by St. Augustine, but the primitive teaching was maintained here and there".

The strong connection between the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and 'sudden death, sudden glory' can be clearly seen from these quotes. I'll come to that a little later, but let's stay with the central place of resurrection in biblical teaching. Bypassing many worthy quotes, I want to lay out before you a rather long passage written by Tyndale, who paid with his life for his work in translating the Bible into English. The language is quaint, to say the least, but it has an added force and attraction because of that. It is worth persevering with. These words, upholding the fundamental place of resurrection in our faith, come from writings refuting the beliefs of Sir Thomas More.

"And when he proveth that the saints be in heaven in glory with Christ already, saying, 'If God be their God, they be in heaven, for He is not the God of the dead': there he stealeth away Christ's argument, wherewith He proveth the resurrection: that Abraham and all saints should rise again, and not that their souls were in heaven; which doctrine was not yet in the world. And with that doctrine he taketh away the resurrection quite, and maketh Christ's argument of none effect. For when Christ allegeth the Scripture, that God is Abraham's God, and addeth too that God is not the God of the dead but of the living, and so proveth that Abraham must rise again: I deny Christ's argument if I say with Master More, that Abraham is yet alive, not because of the resurrection, but because his soul is in heaven.

And in like manner, Paul's argument unto the Corinthians is nought worth: for when he sayeth, 'If there be no resurrection, we be of all wretches the miserablest; here we have no pleasure, but sorrow, care and oppression; and therefore, if we rise not again, all our suffering is in vain'; Nay, Paul, thou art unlearned; go to Master More, and learn a new way. 'We be not most miserable, though we rise not again;

for our souls go to heaven as soon as we be dead, and are there in as great joy as Christ that is risen again.'

And I marvel that Paul had not comforted them with that doctrine, if he had wist it, that the souls of their dead had been in joy; as he did with the resurrection, that their dead should rise again. If the souls be in heaven, in as great glory as the angels, after your doctrine, show me what cause should be of resurrection?

And ye, putting them in heaven, hell, and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection. What God doth with them, that shall we know when we come to them. The true faith putteth the resurrection, which we are warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that the souls did ever live. And the Pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together; things so contrary that they cannot agree, no more than the Spirit and the flesh do in a Christian man ... And again, if the souls be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good a case as the angels be? And then what cause is there of the resurrection?"

These are quite wonderful words, and to repeat myself, if you find it hard to take in the different style, I hope that you will go through the quote as often as necessary to get Tyndale's meaning. His reference to Corinthians is, of course, to 1 Cor. 15, often called 'the resurrection chapter'.

The other two subjects that are intimately connected with that of resurrection are 1) the immortality of the soul, and 2) are any believers actually in heaven now?

Believers In Heaven

I will deal with the second subject first, as it requires less room. Surely we only have to read John 3:13 and allow its significance to sink in for the point to be settled once and for all.

"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from Heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven."

I expect the thoughts of some readers will go to Enoch and Elijah, but surely the Lord's words must also apply to them.

Then there is Acts 2:34:- ***"For David did not ascend into heaven ..."***

It would seem to me that, if anyone would qualify to go to heaven immediately at death (if that is what

really happens), David would because of his faith in God's Word. But here is Peter, speaking under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, saying that David did not ascend into heaven. In fact, he is contrasting David with the Lord Jesus, who did ascend to heaven.

2. The Immortality of the Soul.

Much has been written on this subject, so I will confine myself to a few salient points.

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul is an import from Greek philosophy along with the idea of the soul going directly to heaven at death. The two ideas go hand in hand. I can say quite confidently, that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is not taught in the Bible. Gen. 2:7 explicitly states that when the Lord breathed into Adam's body the breath of life, Adam 'became a living soul'. We have been so conditioned by the pagan doctrine that we fail to see that this verse does not say that Adam was given a separate soul. The breath-filled body **became, or was in totality**, a living soul. Each human being **is** a soul, but does not **have** a separate soul. At the end of our lives, when the 'breath' leaves the body, we become dead souls.

The other scriptural statement, which also should put an end to any argument if it is accepted, is in 2 Tim. 6:16. Here Paul, speaking of Christ Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, goes on to say of Him:-

"who alone has immortality..."

Dear Reader, who do you believe, Plato or Paul? Read 1 Cor. 15 again, and note vv. 51 to 54:

"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on corruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying: "Death is swallowed up in victory".

(The various quotations in the above article are taken from the article 'Resurrection' by Charles Welch, in An Alphabetical Analysis, Vol. 7, p. 168.)

Are you aware?

Are you aware that it is commonly taught that the Kingdom of God is within us, meaning the Kingdom is inside us, in our hearts?

The verse in question is found in Lk. 17:21 (K.J.V.) and reads, "Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you." The marginal note in the Companion Bible states that the word translated "within" should be "in the midst of, or among". These words were spoken by their King who was, indeed, in their midst or among them.

It is wise to remember that a King can exist without a kingdom, but a Kingdom cannot exist without a King.

Remember God's word is consistent and logical.

Ron Hodge.

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