

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

They came from far and near ...

Here are some of the “happy campers” at our recent annual conference. Rodney Knight’s report starts on p. 10. Photos are by Julie Milgate.



Imogen & Mark Foster, Hervey Bay, Qld.



Joy McKeachie, Dungog & Dulcie Farley, Thornton, NSW.



John Craig, Sydney, NSW, turned 89 at the conference.



Graham & Maibury Marshall, Muckadilla, Qld.



Rodney Knight, Sydney and Ron Milford, Thornton



Tim Andrew, Singleton, NSW.



Helen & Warren Cocking, Newcastle, NSW.



Con & Jo Damm, Wagga Wagga, NSW.

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President's Word

What a fantastic turnout we had at the annual conference at Bethshan! Sixty seven people all told attended throughout the three days, many of whom stayed for the duration.

The speakers were great and the fellowship warm. Thank you so much to everyone for contributing to a memorable weekend of fellowship around God's Word, even if your contribution was "just by attending".

Bethshan proved to be quite suitable for our needs once again and I am fairly sure it will be the venue for the next conference - dates will be advised a little later.

On a personal note, I was particularly blessed to be at the conference, as a fortnight before I had come out of hospital diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer. I am not accepting the 'terminal' part of the diagnosis and have put myself on a regime that looks as though it is beginning to work. As I write I feel well enough to concentrate.

A couple of days ago I read my Bible in the morning and shared what I had seen with Merilee, who was stunned that I was able to do so. My family, our little Bible study group in Brisbane and the work of the BBFA are what keep me going. Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has helped us out in any way in these last few weeks. It means more to me than I can express.

Janelle Tavender seems to be continuously on the improve, and your continuing prayers for both Janelle and David would be very much appreciated.

Again, thanks to everyone who contributes to the work of the BBFA in any way at all – by giving, attending meetings, referring people to the website, forwarding the magazine etc. You are what the fellowship is all about. I know I plug it to death, but visit the website. If you haven't, you may just be surprised at what is on there!

*Until next time,
Frank Haegler*

Editorial

Our annual conference weekend in late September, is featured in this edition of Spiritual Blessings. The report is on p.10, and I am glad that we have photos of some who attended.

The attendance was beyond expectations, for which we thank the Lord, and it was a pleasure to meet new folk. The studies were well received, and we pray that the seeds of truth sown will bear much fruit in our lives. We must remember that this really depends on how we cultivate the 'garden' of our hearts and minds.

I've received feedback from one reader about the last issue who said that there was only one paragraph in the whole edition that was true! At least we were not totally wrong! I'll try to get a better proportion this time, but, naturally, I don't agree with that assessment. Nevertheless, I'm grateful for the feedback. I am still hoping that someone will yet join in the discussion concerning Plato, Paul and the immortality of the soul. Surely some reader – even one reader – has something to say on the subject. Vigorous discussion, conducted in the right spirit, is a very helpful means of growth in knowledge and understanding.

In this issue, we continue John Hutton's study of Acts. The other major article is by Karl Edwards from Melbourne, who was a speaker at the recent conference.

I am grateful to Rodney Knight for tackling the job of writing a report on the conference for us, a job he has done very well. And speaking of vigorous discussion, there was plenty of that at the conference.

I am glad that our President, Frank, who is far from well, has nevertheless been able to provide some thoughts for us via The President's Word. It is quite inspiring to see his positive attitude and faith.

Readers who know my wife, Eveline, will be interested to know that she has recently undergone an operation on one of her carotid arteries. The blockage of this artery threatened a stroke, at the least. I am happy to report that all went well, and Eveline is now home again and regaining her strength.

As usual, we send this issue forth, praying that the Lord will use it for His purposes and glory.

Athol Walter.

The Book Of Acts (3)

By John Hutton, Newcastle, Australia.

In our first study of Acts, I pointed out that Israel had a very special place in the purposes of God as far as the earth was concerned, from the call of Abraham and God's covenant with him, at least up until the time in history covered by the Gospels. In the Bible, the nation of Israel is said to be God's People.

In the second study, I emphasised that Israel were a redeemed people because God had redeemed them from their house of bondage i.e. Egypt. The amazing thing about that redemption is that it covered every generation from the time of the Exodus right up to the Gospel period, whether the nation was faithful or not.

I then pointed out that, in the historical period covered by the Gospels and the book of Acts – and also in the epistles written during Acts – the Gentiles were in an inferior position to Israel as far as God was concerned. Paul sums it up in a few words in Romans 3 when he asks, 'What advantage has the Jew then?', and answers his own question so there is no doubt, when he says 'much every way'.

In this study, we will look at events which happened about 8 years after Pentecost. Read Acts 10:9–17.

The first point to notice is that what Peter was to be asked to do must have been something momentous, for it needed special preparation on God's part to get Peter to do it. The vision that Paul had when the Lord confronted him (Acts 9), fails in comparison with the repeated vision that Peter had in Acts 10.

Peter was in the city of Joppa, and while waiting for a meal to be prepared, he went to pray up on the rooftop. He was very hungry when he saw the vision. The trouble with the food being offered to him in the vision was that it was forbidden by the Law of Moses.

A voice said, 'Kill and eat the food, Peter'. Peter said 'No, Lord'. He obviously recognised who was speaking to him and understood what he was asked to do, but he did not know what it meant at that stage.

He was being a faithful Jew when he refused to eat the offered food – and could be commended for that – but to say no to God, especially after being told that the animals had been cleansed by God, was less than obedient, to say the least.

Reader, what would you do if something like that

happened to you? If you had no doubt that it was God speaking to you, would you dare say no? I doubt it! But Peter said 'No!' to the Lord three times.

There are two important points to note in this passage:

1. The task Peter was to carry out was something that he would never dream of doing without special preparation.

2. Peter had no idea what the vision meant (v. 17).

Let's look at the chapter from the beginning. The three men whom Cornelius sent to Peter were Gentiles, and God knew that when Peter saw them, he would resist. Remember Peter's reaction to the Gentile woman's approach to the Lord for healing in Matt. 15? 'A Gentile, send her away'.

Look at the last part of verse 20 in Acts 10:

'Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore you are come?'

In other words, 'You are Gentiles, what could you possibly want me for – (you dogs)?'

In vv. 22-28, we come to the crux of the story! It began to dawn on Peter what the vision was all about! If he had not had the vision and the 'don't argue' command, he would have considered Cornelius common, or unclean – a dog!

In v. 29, Peter asks "What do you want me for?" It had not dawned on Peter that what Cornelius needed to hear was the Gospel. Cornelius was a Gentile, and it is obvious from Peter's actions, that the Lord had never said anything about Gentiles being saved, when He taught the apostles in the forty days prior to His Ascension. Don't forget that the Lord had 'opened the ears of their understanding' in that forty day period.

In vv. 30-33, Cornelius tells Peter why he had been called and ends up in v. 33, by saying, 'You are here to tell us what God has commanded you, Peter'.

V. 34 is quite amazing.

"In truth ... I perceive that in every nation whoever fears God ... is accepted by Him."

This was when Peter finally realised what the vision of the unclean food meant. He then preached to the Gentiles and they believed.

But that was not the end of the matter. Look at chapter 11:1-3.

Back in Jerusalem, the other Apostles, who had also had their understanding opened by the Lord when they were instructed by Him after His resurrection, contended with Peter because he went to Gentiles. The NIV says that they ‘criticised’ him.

In vv. 5-16, Peter recounts the whole story, including the ‘don’t argue’ that he received. He concludes in v. 17, by saying: “... who was I that I could withstand God?”

When I read those words, it sounds to me that he meant, “I could not withstand God – but I would have, if I could have”.

The words of v. 18 show that it was a complete surprise to the assembly in Jerusalem that Gentiles were granted repentance to life. All this must mean that no Gentiles were saved at Pentecost. If there were, what is chapter 10 all about?

Before we leave the story of Cornelius, consider this. Paul had been converted in chapter 9, and was to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. Why then didn’t God send Paul to the Gentile Cornelius instead of sending Peter? The answer is in Matt. 16:17-19:

“... And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ...”

The keys of the Kingdom were given to Peter, not Paul. Peter used them to open the door for Israel at Pentecost and then to open the door to the Gentiles in Acts 10. Now please turn to Acts 15.

A big dispute had arisen about whether Gentile believers should be circumcised. Peter again tells them the story of Cornelius and says in v. 7 that God had chosen him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles first. It obviously was very important that it was Peter who preached to the Gentiles, in effect opening the door to them. Having settled the dispute regarding Gentiles, Peter disappears from the book of Acts. He is not mentioned again.

After Gentiles are saved for the first time in Acts 10, it is apparent that many Gentiles became believers, and some churches were apparently entirely made up of Gentiles. Romans 16:4 refers to ‘the churches of the Gentiles’. It is apparent, at least to me, that there was a change at Acts 10 from what had been taught by the Lord in the Gospels, and what had been happening in the early church up to Acts 10. Now the

question I ask is:

Why were Gentiles let in at all?

The first 8 chapters of Romans are mainly concerned with explaining what it means to be justified by faith, and ends by asking, ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?’ Implied answer: ‘Nothing!’

Chapters 9–11 of Romans are a section all by themselves and talk about the differences between Jew and Gentile in the plan of God.

In Rom. 9:1–5, Paul speaks about his kinsmen according to the flesh, i. e. Jews, and what God had given to, and done for, them. Note v. 4: ‘Who are Israelites; to whom **pertaineth** the adoption’. The NIV says ‘Theirs **is** the adoption’. Notice the present tense is used, He doesn’t say ‘to whom pertained’ or ‘theirs was’. If we had a legal document drawn up for us and the tenses were mixed up, it could cause all sorts of trouble. If we accept the Bible as God’s Word and His words as tried in the furnace seven times, we can be sure He doesn’t mix up the tenses.

Please read vv. 9-29, in which Paul speaks about Israel. But go on to vv. 30-33. What or who was the stumbling stone that Israel stumbled over? Messiah Jesus. In chapter 10 Paul expands his argument over Israel’s failure to accept Christ as the Messiah, and in v. 1 of ch. 11, he starts to make his applications,

“I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite ...”

The Roman Catholic Church says that God did cast Israel away and that they, the Catholic Church, have taken their place. They are ‘Spiritual Israel’ and have taken over from Israel ‘according to the flesh’. Most Protestants agree with them. I can’t find the title, ‘Spiritual Israel’, in the New Testament. Traditional teaching of any group should not be accepted without testing those teachings against the Scriptures. We read on to v. 2.

“God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew ...”

From v. 7 on, Paul returns to the theme of Christ as Israel’s stumbling block, and in v. 11 writes:

“I say then (or I ask then), have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! (No) but rather through their fall, salvation is come unto the Gentiles, (Why?) to provoke them (Who? – Israel) to jealousy.”

Now turn back to 10:19, where Paul is quoting Moses:

“But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: ‘I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.’”

In 11:13, Paul speaks directly to the Gentile converts. and the rest of the chapter should be read very carefully. I will quote vv. 13 & 14:

“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.”

Surely Paul is saying here that he emphasises his mission to the Gentiles for the express purpose of provoking his fellow-countrymen to jealousy in the hope that this will make them turn to Jesus the Messiah. And this, as he says in the next chapter, is the direct fulfilment of Moses’ prophecy. These statements of Paul demand our careful and thoughtful consideration.

The question that we need to ask now is this. Did the provocation to jealousy work? Sadly, no. One day, however, in the future, ‘all Israel’ will be saved.

Now to our next point. Please turn to Rom.1:16:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation, for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Gentile.”

But what does it mean, ‘for the Jew first’? Turn to Acts 17:1-5. Note v. 2:

“Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them (the Jews in the synagogue), and for three Sabbaths, reasoned with them from the Scriptures ...”

Notice the reaction of the Jews in v. 5, when some Jews and many Gentiles accepted Paul’s message:

“But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace ... and ... set all the city in an uproar ...”

An earlier instance of Paul going into the Jewish synagogue is found in Acts 13:14. Further down in the chapter, we find both Jews and Gentiles wanting to hear more, and crowds flocked to hear Paul speak. But many Jews opposed Paul, which caused him to declare that he would turn to the Gentiles (vv. 46, 47). Note Paul’s words in v. 46:

“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first, but since you reject it, and

judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.”

Note that Paul only preached to Gentiles by themselves, after the Jews had heard the message and rejected it.

Some believers teach that it was at this point that the new Dispensation of the Mystery commenced. But we only have to read on into ch. 14 to note that, in the next town Paul and Barnabus visited, they went straight into the Jewish synagogue to preach to the Jews first. This is the rule right to the end of Acts – Jew first, and only then Gentile.

Before we finish this study, we should note ch. 15:25-27, for here we see the different position that Gentile believers occupied in comparison with Jewish believers, who were still observing the Law of Moses during Acts. Gentiles, however, were only required to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from (eating) blood or meat from animals that had been strangled, and from sexual immorality. I ask you, are you in that position relative to Jewish believers now? Do you even know any Jewish believers?

Here are a few more questions that I challenge you to consider:

Have we Gentile believers today, only been saved to provoke Israel to jealousy?

When we preach the Gospel, are we bound to preach it to Jews first?

If we set ourselves above Jews and Jewish believers and boast, are we in danger of being cast out of God’s plan? Have we only been grafted in to the olive tree, i. e, Israel, and can we be grafted out if we stop believing?

Are we bound to support Jewish believers today on the basis that we have been partakers of their spiritual things?

If you answer “No” to these questions, ask yourself, why? Something must have changed, mustn’t it? If something has changed, I want to see it in Scripture, don’t you? I don’t want to believe something just because some Church leader or teacher has told me it is right. All of the denominations in Christendom differ in some way or another. Have we got a final arbiter as to whose teachings are right or wrong? I think we have. I am convinced that the Bible, God’s Word and words, are the only guide to Christian belief and practice.

More next time.

The End Is Nigh

By Karl Edwards, Melbourne, Australia.

Whenever I hear the words, “the end is nigh”, it conjures up in my mind images of cartoons I’ve seen over the years. These show bearded street preachers holding placards bearing the slogan, usually with a witty remark added by the cartoonist.



Many people in the world today genuinely believe that the end is near; but most of them don’t stand on street corners with placards. Instead, they write articles and books, make movies and use the internet to promote their particular brand of the coming doom and gloom. Whether it’s due to climate change, the year 2012 on the Mayan calendar or the current situation in the Middle East, there is no end to the modern day prophets of disaster. It also seems that, now more than ever, the proponents of such views are Christians attempting to interpret current world affairs and events in the light of Biblical prophecy. Every earthquake, tsunami, hurricane, war and other extraordinary event is attributed to **Matt. 24:7**,

“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.”
(References are from NKJV.)

This is done despite the fact that nations have been rising up against nations, and famines and pestilences have been permanent fixtures in the two thousand years since Christ uttered these words. It is also worth mentioning that there are not enough worldwide

meteorological records from the past 2000 years that would make it possible to compare the frequency of earthquakes or other such disasters since that time. So, using the criteria of Matt 24:7 as a guide, it could be argued that *end has always been nigh*.

Although many Christians take these modern end-time prophets with a grain of salt, it often comes as news to them that there was a time in history when “the end was nigh” and there did exist a group of people who would have been justified in carrying placards. But, of course, they didn’t do that. Instead, they went around proclaiming that the kingdom of God was *nigh* and demonstrated its nearness with illustrations of the power that would be typical of the kingdom age that was to come (See Heb. 6:5).

John the Baptist was the first to proclaim that “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:1, 2), closely followed by the Lord Himself. He also instructed His disciples to do the same, and they went about Judea declaring the nearness of the kingdom. This declaration anticipated *the end of the world* as they knew it, or more accurately *the end of the age*, as this would give way to a new age of government under God. That the kingdom of God would come on earth had been the hope of Israel throughout the Old Testament, and as far as the disciples were concerned—with the confirmation of the King Himself—that kingdom was imminent.

Although it may be the accepted worldwide Christian view that Christ came into the world to live His life as an example for all to follow and thus start a new church, this is not how these disciples saw it. For example, the writer of Hebrews quite clearly states that Christ’s physical appearance on the earth came at *the end of the ages*. **Heb 9:26:—**

“He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the END OF THE AGES, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

So, far from being the beginning of something new, the Lord’s life and ministry was the fulfilment of something old. Christ came to offer Himself as the sacrifice for sin, a work that had started as far back as Genesis 3:15. An examination of the actions and writings of the disciples during the time of the book of Acts, shows that they clearly expected the proclaimed Kingdom to be restored soon. **Act 1:6-8.**

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time

restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Contrary to common belief, the Lord did not tell them to forget about the Kingdom and concentrate on a new work. This is evident from the rest of the chapter, where, in anticipation of the coming Kingdom, the first task they get busy with is appointing the twelfth apostle who, in line with the promise made in Matt. 19:28, must be present to sit on the throne forfeited by Judas.

Twelve thrones are promised, twelve apostles are required to occupy them, and their appointment of Matthias shows that, at the very least, they were expecting that regeneration to take place within their own lifetimes and, more than likely, in their very near future. The same sentiment is seen in all the Acts period epistles. In fact, it is quite astounding to see how many times the imminent return of Christ is referred to, leaving no doubt about the level of heightened expectancy amongst the disciples. Every one of the writers of the Acts period – Peter, James, John, Jude and Paul – held the common belief that *the end was nigh*.

Here are a few verses from these writers that clearly illustrate just how deeply rooted was the belief that they were living in the last days and that the hope of Israel would soon be a reality.

Heb. 1:1, 2. “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has **in these last days** spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;”

Heb. 10:35-37. “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: **for yet a little while**, and He who is coming **will come and will not tarry**.”

Here in Hebrews ch. 1, we see a comparison between how God spoke in *time past* and how He had spoken in *these last days* by his Son, and in ch. 10, He exhorts them to endure *yet a little while* as Christ will come soon. Surely, neither the writer nor the readers at the time of writing, would consider the phrases, “*these last days*” and “*will come and will not tarry*”, to mean sometime in the next two thousand

years, especially remembering that the Son had not long before been in their presence speaking with them.

James, the Lord’s half-brother, was also convinced that the coming of the Lord was imminent.

Jas. 5:8-9. “You also be patient. Establish your hearts, **for the coming of the Lord is at hand**. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the **Judge is standing at the door**.”

Then, the apostle John writes in **1 John 2:18**,

“Little children, **it is the last hour**; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that **it is the last hour**.”

Also, in Revelation, John describes events that must shortly come to pass. See **Rev 1:1 and 1:3**.

Even the little epistle of Jude, when talking about ungodly men who had crept in unawares, reminded the believers that this was to be expected in *the last time*. **Jude 1:18**.

Peter, speaking about Christ’s sacrifice for sin, writes in **1 Peter 1:19, 20**,

“... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in **these last times**...”

Peter was certain that Christ was raised from the dead to sit on David’s throne (Acts 2:30, 31). This can only mean that he expected that throne to be occupied soon and this is exactly what he said would happen if the house of Israel would repent (Acts 3:19-21).

Nor is Paul slack to proclaim the same nearness, mentioning it in most of his early epistles. In 1 Thess. 1:10, one of the earliest epistles written, he praises the Thessalonians because they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to **wait for His Son** from heaven. In ch. 4:15, it is evident that he expects both himself and some of the Thessalonian believers to be alive at the coming of the Lord.

Similar is his exhortation to the Corinthian believers. In 1 Cor. 1:4–8, he thanks God that they were enriched in everything and lacked no spiritual gifts while **they eagerly awaited the revelation** (apocalypse or revealing) **of the Lord**. These confirming gifts would remain **until the end**.

So, far from being the beginning of something new, the Lord’s life and ministry was the fulfillment of something old.

Ch. 10:11, is more clear where he uses the judgement of God on the Israelites in the wilderness as an example.

1Cor. 10:11. “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom **the ends of the ages** have come”.

As far as Paul was concerned at the time of writing to the Corinthians, **the end of the ages** had come upon them. This is further clarified in the epistle to the Romans, which is his last epistle before being imprisoned in Rome, when he writes in ch. 16:20, that Satan will be crushed under their feet **shortly**.

It is also interesting to compare what Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers concerning marriage, with that which he wrote much later to Timothy. In 1 Cor. ch. 7, he suggests, “because of the present distress” it is better not to get married, as “such will have trouble in the flesh”. What could that mean? He goes even further, giving suggestions as to how they should live their lives, not being caught up in the things of the world, and quite emphatically states the reason for his advice in v. 31, *for the form of this world, as they knew it, is passing away*.

Now consider Paul’s advice to the Corinthians in the light of Matt 24:7 and onwards, where the Lord describes some of the dreadful events of the last days and the things that will befall the faithful. After speaking about false Christs, wars, pestilences, earthquakes, tribulation, martyrdom, betrayal, false prophets, deception of many, lawlessness and the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, He says in verse 8, “**Whoever reads, let him understand**”. He then tells them how difficult it is going to be for them, especially pregnant and nursing women (v. 19. But read vv. 16–20).

Paul’s exhortation is consistent with the belief that it was the end times, and he was dispensing the same advice that Christ gave to his disciples in preparation

for the coming tribulation. Getting married now would lead to children, making it more difficult for those who would have to flee Judea, just as Christ had said a few years earlier. Whosoever reads let him understand indeed!

Now compare this with the advice given in **1Tim. 5:14.** “Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house... “

This is the opposite of what he wrote to the Corinthians. These verses have been a puzzle to believers for years, but when Corinthians is fitted into the context of the imminent return of Christ, it makes perfect sense.

It is obvious that Christ did not return to sit on David’s throne or establish the kingdom in Israel back in the first century AD, and the only logical conclusion is that something changed between 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, (a period of approximately twenty years), which served to postpone the return of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom in Israel. That something was the setting aside of Israel as the favoured nation at Acts 28:28 .

The subsequent revelation given to Paul, concerning the “Church which is His Body”, does not contain the same urgency or exhortations in relation to the last days as is evident in the Acts period. The post-Acts epistles – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon – have nothing about an imminent return of the Lord.

With Israel now being no different to any other nation in God’s eyes, we live in a very different age to that of the believers of the Acts period. However, God will remain faithful to His promises of establishing the Kingdom in Israel and there will be a time again in the future, when the prophecies uttered by Christ in Matthew 24 will be in progress. At that time, there will be believers on the earth who will truly say,

“ the End is Nigh”.

Tradition or Truth.

By Charles H. Welch.

To a great number of God’s children there comes a parting of the ways marked by a signpost bearing two arms:

Tradition – Truth

and it is for the help and guidance of such that we write these lines. Scripture speaks of tradition thirteen times , a number that is significant in Bible numerics, as some readers may already know. Of these

thirteen references, two only are spoken of with approval, all the remainder showing that tradition is the foe of truth. Let us first of all see the two passages that speak favourably of tradition:-

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thess. 2:15).

“Withdraw yourself from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received

from us” (2 Thess. 3:6).

It will be seen that these passages are qualified by the words “our epistle” and “received from us,” so that these traditions are but oral instructions passed on by the apostle or those approved by him. Such apostolic instructions are (now) superseded and no longer necessary, for we, unlike the Thessalonians, have “all Scripture”. Even Paul never mentions these traditions again. Let us read Matt. 15:1–3:-

“Then came to Jesus scribes and pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do Thy disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But He answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandments of God by your tradition?”

After revealing their hypocrisy in the evasion of the fifth commandment, the Lord continued:-

“Thus have ye made the commandments of God of none effect by your tradition ... but in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 6–9).

Such apostolic instructions are (now) superseded and no longer necessary, for we, unlike the Thessalonians, have “all Scripture”.

The record in Mark 7 puts the same matter in slightly different words:-

“For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men. Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition” (Mark 7:8, 9).

It is evident that tradition here contravened truth, and it is well that we weigh over what is said about this enemy of faith:-

1. Tradition TRANSGRESSES the commandment of God.
2. Tradition makes the commandment of God of NONE EFFECT.
3. Tradition LAYS ASIDE the commandment of God.
4. Tradition REJECTS the commandment of God.
5. Tradition is VAIN, being the substituted “commandments of men”.

The apostle Paul shows how violently opposed to God’s truth was the tradition of his fathers:-

“For ye have heard of my conversation in times past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it ... being more exceeding zealous of the traditions of my

fathers” (Gal. 1:14).

His fathers had the unspeakable privilege of the written Word while the nations stumbled along in darkness (Rom. 3:1, 2), yet the blight of tradition had settled down upon the fair flower of prophecy, so that when their Messiah came of whom their Scriptures were full, their traditions led them to crucify the Lord of glory, and to persecute those who believed in Him. Paul knew and Peter knew that no man can be delivered from tradition by argument:-

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver, and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

Tradition made Paul a persecutor, tradition led Israel into such a vain manner of life that nothing less than the blood of Christ could deliver from its thrall.

Tradition and the truth of the One Body.

We are particularly concerned with the teaching of the epistles

to the Ephesians and the Colossians, for, as a result of the power of tradition, many a true child of God hesitates, refuses, or confuses the glorious calling revealed in this present dispensation of the mystery:-

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and NOT AFTER CHRIST. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are filled to the full in Him” (Col. 2:8–10).

Tradition is in league with deceit, with vanity, with the world, and its death blow is sounded in the words: “And *not* after Christ”. One traditional teaching that holds many children of God in its grip, and prevents them from entering into the high glory of the revelation of the mystery, is the teaching that “The Church began at Pentecost”. We believe “a” church began at Pentecost, but the church of Ephesians, that “of the two has been created one new man”, the church “where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all”, that church is entirely dissociated from Pentecost, the fathers, Israel and the covenants. It belongs to a new dispensation, a new revelation, a new sphere.

Cont. on p. 11

BBFA Conference Report 2011

By Rodney Knight

Another year has rolled by and once again the BBFA has held its annual conference on the NSW Central Coast with great success. This year we were back on familiar territory at the Bethshan Conference Centre in Wyee after a few years away. The facilities at Bethshan have been expanded and improved since our last visit, which was just as well because the numbers were up again this year. We had over sixty people attend on the Saturday and Sunday sessions, and the Monday's numbers were also quite healthy, around 45 – the highest we can recall for a Monday.

As usual, this year we had visitors from near and far with a number of families making the long trek to stay for the weekend. Visitors came from Sydney, Newcastle and the Hunter Valley, Wagga Wagga and Tumut in NSW; Brisbane, Hervey Bay and Muckadilla in Qld; and also Melbourne in Victoria; and I'm sure I've missed a few. Thank you to everyone who made the effort to travel so far, and a special welcome to those who attended for the first time.

It also was great to see so many children this year. There were certainly enough to keep themselves entertained and form a few friendships during the breaks, and it's also good to have them sitting in on the studies and joining in the singing.

Allowing the travellers time to get settled in, Day One started with a cuppa to warm the blood from the cool, wet weather (which just happened to also be settling in for the weekend). This was also a brief opportunity to meet and greet some of the gathering friendly faces, all eager for a weekend full of fellowship, learning and discussion around the Word.

As is our custom, each of the studies was preceded with a hearty round of hymn-singing. With our number and enthusiasm we raised quite a din.

This year we were fortunate to have four speakers presenting studies over the weekend. Much appreciation goes to each of them – David Tavender, Karl Edwards, Athol Walter

and Peter Ward – for their commitment and efforts in preparing their studies. And an extra thank you to Peter who also led the singing and acted as MC through the whole weekend. Peter managed to keep us in check and on time with military precision!

We had the usual bookstand available for browsing a varied selection of publications, but David was keen to reclaim some of his living space at home, so the bookstand was full of “freebies” to help him with that challenge. There was quite an amount at the start, but it was all well cleared by the end. Nice work, David!

The first study was delivered by David, who spoke about the different books of the Bible, the different groupings of books in the Old and New Testaments, and in particular, the position of the New Testament epistles. Even though they are not listed in order of writing, the NT books can be put into three groups -

those written during Acts to the Jews only, those written during Acts to both Jew and Gentile, and those written post-Acts.

David talked about “Who is the ‘you’?”, an important principle when considering any epistle - i. e. who is it addressed to, and who is it talking about? The “you” may not be you!

We also learnt why the NT epistles are ordered the way that they are in the

Bible, which is not at all chronological, but almost arbitrary, listing them by author and by their size.

After lunch, Athol Walter gave an important presentation on the subject of the judgment seat of Christ, the “bema” (Greek), before which we must all one day stand to give account of our walk. This judgment does not concern our salvation (which is given by grace and holds firm), but the Lord will “test by fire” our works - our daily walk – for which we may receive reward (which is given over and above salvation). But being subject to fire, these are also vulnerable to loss. Our walk builds upon the one foundation of Christ Jesus, but is our building material



The Speakers (l. to r.): Peter Ward, David Tavender, Karl Edwards and Athol Walter.

worthy to endure the test by fire? (1 Cor. 3, Rom. 14).

Athol also pointed out that, because our judgment will be based on the Lord's instruction to us, it is important for us to understand correctly what those instructions are, by rightly dividing the word of truth.

Following the afternoon tea break, Karl Edwards presented a closer look at the familiar passage of 1 Thessalonians 4, and applying the principles of right division, we discovered that the so-called "rapture" is not new teaching, but is part of Old Testament prophecy. This means it is pertinent to the hope of the nation of Israel. Karl pointed out that the "rapture" moment is not an event in itself, but is merely a final part in the lead up to the real event - the coming of the Lord. We also saw that the 'coming of the Lord' event is pre-figured in OT accounts, such as the fall of Jericho and the giving of the covenant in Exodus 19.

In the evening session, Peter Ward gave a brief presentation on "sanctification". He talked about the first tabernacle built by Moses in the wilderness, saying that it was an "uncommissioned" tabernacle until it had been sanctified. As it was sanctified, God appeared in the Holy of Holies (the centre), and the people of Israel knew that God was there by the radiant cloud that appeared over the tabernacle - the "shekinah" (Hebrew), which means "God is present".

Peter then drew a parallel between the tabernacle and our bodies; the three parts of our bodies (ie. the body, the mind/soul, and the spirit) parallel the three chambers of the tabernacle (the outer court, the holy place, and the Holy of Holies). Our bodies are like the outer court which allows us to interface with the world around us (our senses); our mind/soul is like the Holy place where resides our ability to reason, think and communicate; and our spirit is like the Holy of Holies

that allows us to communicate with God.

On Sunday morning, we held the Annual General Meeting of the BBFA. Various reports were presented, and items of business dealt with. A good number attended, and it is great to see genuine interest in the welfare of the Fellowship.

Our thanks go to the committee members and office bearers who help to keep the BBFA ticking along as an organisation. A special word of thanks to David Tavender for presiding over the meeting in place of Frank Haegler, who is far from well.

The Sunday study sessions by David, Karl and Athol were a continuation of their earlier presentations, and expanded on what had been introduced on the Saturday.

After dinner, there was some lighter entertainment, with a musical performance by the Haegler children's band led by Merilee Haegler. The band led a chorus time and performed a number of songs that the group had written themselves.

On Monday morning, there were two study sessions to close out the conference. Peter gave an excellent presentation on Philippians 3:10 – "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings" and what that meant.

The final study was by Athol on "right division" - a great foundational talk on the concept and appropriateness of right division in understanding Scripture.

All in all, despite the constant rain, it was an excellent conference which everyone enjoyed. We look forward to meeting again at the next one. As a final note, all the studies were recorded and will be available in the near future for anyone who is interested.

Tradition v. Truth, cont. from p. 9.

Let the reader test Acts 2 & 3, observing what is actually said, to whom Peter speaks, and about what he speaks. Notice, "Israel", "the fathers", "David's throne", "unto you first", etc., then read Eph. 1:3–14; 3:1–10; Col. 1:25–27, and he will see that the traditional teaching concerning Pentecost makes the revelation of Ephesians of none effect, and he will see, moreover, that there is a temptation to "reject" this later revelation of grace in order that traditional teaching may be retained. Dear reader, which is it to be,

Tradition or Truth?

From The Berean Expositor, Vol. 18, p. 45.

QUOTEWORTHY:-

"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else."

C. S. Lewis. Quoted by John C. Lennox in "Seven Days That Divide The World", p. 103.

Speaking about what many folk accept as correct Bible interpretation, Arthur Custance says this: "Unfortunately, human beings accept authority rather easily. It saves having to think for oneself ..."

From "Without Form And Void", p. 5.

BBFA Regular Meetings

You are invited to attend

Regular Bible study meetings are held in Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle and Thornton. Meetings include hymn singing, prayer, and a Bible study, approx. 45-60 mins. in length, followed by refreshments. Questions and comments about the study are encouraged. These meetings are free of charge and everyone is welcome.

Brisbane:

Every Monday. 7pm. 231 Andrew Rd, Greenbank.
Group Co-ordinator: Frank Haegler (07) 3297 1981

Sydney:

4th. Sunday each month 3pm.
45/45 Philips St. Cabarita.
Group Co-ordinators: Peter & Anne Ward, (02) 9743 3452.

Newcastle:

Every Monday, 7:30pm. Baptist Retirement Home, Warabrook.
For details, phone

Maitland:

Alternate Wednesdays, 10.am.
13 Drayton Ct. Thornton.
Group Co-ordinator: Susan Hall, (02) 4933 9009

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Articles which honour The Lord Christ Jesus and acknowledge the principle of right division will be considered for publication. All articles are accepted on the basis that they may be used as the BBFA sees fit, unless otherwise requested by the author. The interpretation of Scripture by various authors is not necessarily the one held by the majority of the Fellowship.

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1. Full Inspiration of the Scriptures.
2. The Deity of Christ.
3. All sufficiency of Christ's One Sacrifice.
4. The Bible study principle of right division.

The BBFA Committee:

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Vice President: Karl Edwards
Secretary: Karen Milford
Treasurer: Julie Milgate
Committee members: Sue Hall, Allan Gallaheer.

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