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Spiritual Blessings



Vol. 26 No. 3. May/June. 2012

“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

Exposition

The Book of Acts (7)

By John Hutton, Newcastle, NSW

Please read 1 Cor. 12 before continuing.

In the last study, we looked at some miracles in the Acts period, i.e. between about 30 and 62 AD. Please understand that we are not now talking about basic doctrine i.e. justification by faith, redemption by the blood etc. Rather, we are talking about practical Christianity in that period of time. Later in our studies, we will talk about practical Christianity after the Acts years, but for now I want us to approach the Book of Acts as if the books that came after Acts, and with which we are so familiar, did not yet exist. This will also mean that we have no knowledge of Church history after AD 62. Hard to do I know, but let us try.

When we looked at certain miracles carried out by Peter and Paul, we saw that they had the gift of healing regardless of the ability of the recipient of the miracle to display faith or not. We also saw that, in Acts, there is no record of any failure in any attempt to perform a miracle. Even Peter's shadow, falling on a sick person as he passed by, brought instant healing.

We didn't have many miracles to look at because Acts mainly records the deeds of Peter and Paul, and is quite selective in what is recorded. Imagine how many cases we would have to look at if every miracle performed by all who had the gift of healing in that time had been recorded!

In this study, I want to look at a few

more miracles in Acts, and then consider various gifts that believers received when they were baptised by the Holy Spirit with 'holy spirit', or power from on high.

Turn now to James 5:14-15.

'Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: ¹⁵And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him'.

James is writing to believers of the Jewish dispersion. If any of them were sick they were to call for the elders of the church, who would anoint them with oil and pray over them. Please note in verse 15 that the sick person **would** be healed, not **might** be healed. *'The prayer of faith shall...'* If you tell someone that something shall, or will, happen, then it must happen otherwise you are lying. There were no doubts about the results of the prayer of faith – it would work. If it failed to work, then the problem had

to be with those praying the prayer, not because of any lack of faith on the part of the one seeking healing.

Now turn to Mark 16:16-18

'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. ¹⁷And these signs shall follow them that believe;

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President's Word

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

I'd like to let you know about a few events coming up, and you can read about them in the paragraphs below. We pray that these gatherings will not only promote the Word of God rightly divided, but that they will also honour the Lord's name in doing so. This goal is central to the objects and tenets of the Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia, and all of our activities, such as those outlined here, are carried out with those ideals in mind. You can find out more about these and other meetings on pages 7 & 12, or by visiting our website at www.spiritualblessings.org and clicking on the "Meetings" tab.

Brisbane Study and Fellowship Weekend

We're pleased to announce a Bible Study Weekend for June 23rd and 24th in the Brisbane area. It will be held at St. Augustine's College at Springfield, and the speakers will be Karl Edwards and myself, presenting a range of dispensational topics. Session times vary for each day, so please refer to the ad on page 7 for more details. Attendance is free, and everyone is welcome.

Thornton Bible Study and Fellowship Day

Once again a mid-year day of study and fellowship has been planned for the Newcastle/Maitland area. It will be on Sat. July 21st. at the Pat Hughes Memorial Centre at Thornton (known to some of us as the Thornton Salvation Army venue). The day begins at 10.00 am, and finishes about 3.30 pm. Lunch and light refreshments supplied at no charge. As with all our "one-off" study days, attendance is free, and everyone is welcome. Our last few meetings like this have been well attended and well received, and this will be a good day to bring along a friend (or yourself, if you've never been before!).

Annual Conference

It's time also to mark your diaries for the BBFA's Annual Conference, to be held again at Bethshan Conference Centre, Wyee (near Morisset, on the NSW Central Coast). Bethshan has upgraded its

facilities and it is now a most suitable venue for us. The dates are Sept. 22 -24, 2012, so please plan now to join us for a fulfilling and enjoyable weekend of Bible study and fellowship. For those who have never attended, there are options to book for the three days (Sat, Sun, Mon) or just for a portion of the time. This is the only one of our regular gatherings which involves a cost - but don't let money be the reason you don't attend! If you'd like to join us for some or all of that weekend, but feel you may not be able to afford the cost, please get in touch with me or one of the Committee members (contact details are on page 12), and we will see what can be arranged. All the finer details about the programme, costs, etc., will be sent out with the next issue of Spiritual Blessings.

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

David Tavender.
admin@spiritualblessings.org

Editorial

I am happy to report that there are some good studies waiting their turn to appear in future editions of Spiritual Blessings. There are still a number of articles to come in John Hutton's Acts series, of course, and Karl Edwards has provided a short series about the Hope of believers in the Acts period. Part 1 is in this issue. Incidentally, the little article on Hope in the last issue is a good introduction to Karl's articles. Next in line is a series by Peter Ward on 'The Steward of the Mystery', which he has given to groups in both Sydney and Newcastle. I am very grateful to these folk for their hard work in preparing these studies and making them available for publication.

I must apologize to any who have been trying to send me emails over the last month or so, as our satellite service has been experiencing troubles. It has proved to be anything but a simple matter to rectify. We live in hope that resolution is close, but past experience does not engender much confidence. How different is our hope in the Lord and His work! His Word is sure, and He knows what He is doing. Therefore we can wait confidently, for our hope, anchored in His Word, is guaranteed.

Athol Walter.

cont from Pg. 1

In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; ¹⁸They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover'.

The word 'shall' occurs nine times in those three verses. Unless the things mentioned in Mark are guaranteed, the nine promises are lies.

In our last study, we read about Paul on the island of Melita, but did not look at the incident in which a poisonous snake latched on to his hand. Paul simply shook the snake off (instead of dropping down dead as the islanders expected) and kept putting wood on the fire. No big deal! As I said before, if all of the miracles performed in the Acts period were recorded, there would have been many incidents like this. And there could have been no doubt that something wonderful had happened. Don't overlook the fact that this incident with the deadly snake is a direct fulfilment of those verses from Mark 16 quoted above.

But there's more. Turn to Acts 5:1-11

'But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, ²And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet'.

Remember what happened in Acts 2. Those who believed, sold their possessions and distributed the proceeds amongst the believers so that no one lacked anything. I suggested they did that because, at that time, the return of the Lord was imminent. If the Lord's return could have happened in their near future, what was the good of possessions?

Please note that Ananias and Sapphira were believers. They sold a possession but only brought a part of the proceeds to be shared. The sin they committed was to say that they had given **all** the proceeds of the sale. Peter, exercising another of his gifts – that of knowledge – confronted Ananias with what he had done.

' ³But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? ⁴Whiles it remained,

was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. ⁵And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. ⁶And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him .'.

What caused Ananias to fall down dead? We might argue about the cause, but there is no doubt in the case of his wife.

Acts 5:7–9 tell us what happened.

'⁷And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in, ⁸And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. ⁹Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out'.

In effect, Peter said to Sapphira, "Drop dead!"

'¹⁰Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband'.

They told a lie and were judged for it and the consequences were as drastic as they could be. What was the result of this act of judgement?

' ¹¹And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things'.

The Greek word for fear is 'phobos', and Strong's Concordance says that it means terror. If you have a phobia about something, you will know how it feels. If you and I were present at this event, what would our reaction have been? Even if we hadn't done anything on a par with what Ananias and Sapphira had done, we would at least find it worrying, wouldn't we? If, however, we had done something that was on a par with what they had done, we would be terrified. As well as the gifts of healing and miracles being present in the church in Acts, some, such as Peter and Paul, had the gift or power of judgement.

When Christ comes again and sets up the

When Christ returns ... and sets up the Kingdom of Heaven ... sin will not be tolerated!

'Kingdom of Heaven or God' and rules for 1000 years, sin will not be tolerated, whoever the sinner is!

Turn to Psalm 101. This is a psalm about the true David who will rule when the Kingdom is set up.

Verse 4

'A froward (or perverse) heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person . ⁵Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off (or destroy): him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. ⁶Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. ⁷He that worketh deceit (what were Ananias and Sapphira guilty of? - deceit) shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. ⁸I will early destroy (literally, 'morning by morning'- in other words 'everyday') all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the LORD'.

Could the early chapters of Acts be a taste of what the Kingdom would be like when it is set up? Did Ananias know that? Did he know what his fate would be? Is that why he fell down dead when his deceit became known or did he get the 'drop dead' from Peter? Note in the verse quoted above, that it is not only deceit that will bring judgment. Verse 5 says a slanderer will be cut off. Anyone with a big head will not be suffered. If they did know that the fate of Ananias and Sapphira was a taste of the coming Kingdom, it is no wonder they were terrified.

Now to Acts 13:4-12

'So they, (i.e. Paul and Barnabus) being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

⁶And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: ⁷Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. ⁹Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled

with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, ¹⁰And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. ¹²Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord'.

Elymas, literally 'the knowing one', was a sorcerer and a thorn in Paul's side as he preached to Sergius Paulus. Paul, in the power of the Holy Spirit, made him blind for a season. Here was another miracle of judgement performed. As with the case of Peter and Ananias, Paul did not need to pray that the miracle might work. He simply used the gift that he had.

Now let us go to the passage I asked you to read at the beginning, viz, **1 Cor. 12**. Before we look at it, let me state the obvious. Gifts were a problem in the church at Corinth.

Verse 1

'Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

Verse 4

'Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵And there are differences of administrations, but the same

Lord. ⁶And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. ⁷But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. ⁸For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; ⁹To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; ¹⁰To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: ¹¹But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will'.

Then in verses 4–11, he explains the diversity of gifts, and uses the human body as an illustration. The human body is made up of many members with

As with the case of Peter ... Paul did not need to pray that the miracle would work. He simply used the gift that he had.

each member or part having its own job to do, so that the body can act effectively as a unity. Similarly, the church at Corinth had many different gifts so that it might be complete and effective.

Verses 12-26 explain this point. If the believers all had the same gift, the church would be lopsided. Some gifts were likened to the job that the eye does for the human body, some the hands, and so on. Some parts are not quite as important or comely but, comely or not, all are important to the overall working of the body. The human body is a diverse unity. It seems apparent to me that the Corinthians all wanted the more spectacular gifts and were not so keen to have the more mundane – or uncomely – ones.

Verse 27

'Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular'.

Before we go any further, let me explain something about this verse. Paul did not write, 'you are THE body of Christ'. He wrote, 'you are A body of Christ'.

Please turn to Romans 12:3-8

'For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. ⁴For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: ⁵So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. ⁶Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; ⁷Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; ⁸Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness'.

Sounds like a summary of 1 Cor. 12, doesn't it?

Although the Roman believers were not, apparently, having the same problems with the gifts as the Corinthians, they were told in verse 5 that they were a body in or of Christ. The Corinthians were a complete body representing Christ in Corinth, the Romans were a complete body representing Christ in Rome and this was true of all the churches

in other places. Those who were the eyes in the church at Corinth were not the eyes of the church at Rome and vice versa. Each church had all the gifts to make them a complete unity in the places in which they operated.

So back to 1 Cor. 12:27

'Now ye are a body of Christ, and members in particular'.

Was every member at Corinth the eye of the church, or the brain, or the spokesmen, or the hand, or the foot, or the big toe? No.

In **verse 28** Paul lists some of the gifts present in the church, apparently in order of importance.

'And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues'.

Then he asks some questions.

'Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? ³⁰Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?'³¹But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way'.

He then goes on to point out the more excellent way in ch. 13, the well known 'love chapter'. It starts off with the gift of the Spirit which was apparently causing the biggest problem.

Ch. 13:1.

'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass (or gong), or a tinkling cymbal'.

The gift of tongues was as necessary as any of the other gifts, and there was nothing wrong with it. The problem was the way the Corinthians used it.

The problem of tongues is dealt with in ch. 14, and the magnitude of the problem is apparent by the fact that it is the subject of the whole chapter. The only comment I want to make about tongues is that in 14:22, Paul makes it plain that tongues were a sign for unbelievers, not believers.

V. 22. *'Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not'.*

If every member in the church had the same gift, the church would be lopsided.

We will come back to the subject of gifts when we get to the end of Acts, but before we finish with the subject of miracles there is a dark side to consider.

Go to 2 Cor. 11:14-15.

'And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.'

Consider this. If Satan's ministers are transformed into the ministers of light, in what spheres do you think they will be active? They might be politicians who present things as wonderful, but the results often lessen the moral standards of the land. They might be active in other apparently good things for the general population but which have turned out to be bad. Surely adulation of celebrities and hero worship, whilst seemingly harmless, leads to disaster in many cases. It seems apparent to me, however, that the most likely sphere of activity of ministers of righteousness will be in the church, and so it was in the Acts period.

Acts 2:43.

'And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles'.

Many 'wonders and signs' were done by the Apostles!

Now 2 Thes. 2:2-12.

'That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand'.

Paul is saying that they were in the last days. Believers in the Acts period believed that the second coming was very near, a belief which was in accordance with the Lord saying that the Apostles would not have gone over all of the cities of Judea before He came again.

Verse 3.

'Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away

first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

Verse 9

'Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, ¹⁰And with all deceivableness of...'

"Many will say to Me 'Lord, ... in Thy name (we) have cast out devils'. And then I will profess to them, 'I never knew you ... Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.'"

The Greek words for 'signs and wonders' in v. 9 are exactly the same as those used in Acts 4. Satan's agents will have signs and wonders, but there is a big difference between the signs and wonders of the Apostles and their fellow-workers, and

the signs and wonders performed by Satan's workers. These are called 'lying' signs and wonders.

Think about Matt. 7:21-23.

'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity'.

Notice that the Lord does not say to them 'you didn't do any miracles'. Rather, He is saying to them, 'you may have done miracles, but not in My name'.

Whose name must those miracles have really been done in, then?

So, if and when you see miracles happening all around you, beware! ❖

If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering; but if we and our prosperity neglect its instruction and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury all our glory in profound obscurity.

Daniel Webster.

(I'm not sure which country is referred to here, but surely, events in our own countries show the truth of these words.)

Coming Events ...

Brisbane Study and Fellowship Weekend

Come and join us for a time around God's Word in fellowship with other believers.

When: June 23rd & 24th, 2012.

Dates and Session Times:

Sat. June 23rd - 2.00pm, 4.00pm

Sun. June 24th - 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.00pm

Speakers:

Karl Edwards (Vic.)

David Tavender (NSW)

presenting a variety of dispensational topics.

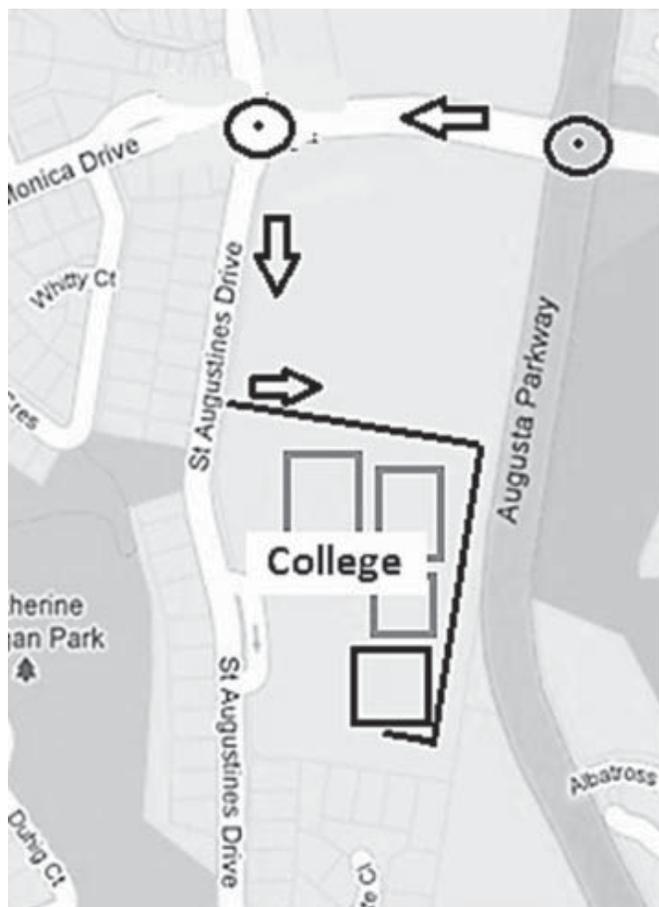
Venue:

St. Augustine's College

(on St. Augustine's Drive, Springfield).

(See accompanying map)

For more details, ring Rom Harper on 0412-239-907 or Allan Gallaher on 0414-412-603. Questions and comments about the talks are encouraged. Bring a Bible and bring a friend! No cost. All welcome.



Thornton Study and Fellowship Day

(Newcastle / Maitland region, NSW)

Come and join us for a time around God's Word in fellowship with other believers.

Date: Saturday July 21st, 2012.

Times: 10.00am to 3.30pm (approx).

Venue: Pat Hughes Memorial Centre, Taylor Ave, Thornton (next to the shopping centre).

Speakers: Peter Ward and Athol Walter will speak on dispensational topics.

Lunch and light refreshments will be served free of charge. Pick up some great reading from the bookstall (plenty of bargains and free literature). Questions and comments about the talks are encouraged. Bring a Bible and bring a friend! There is no cost to attend these meetings and everyone is welcome.

BBFA Annual Conference

Bethshan Conference Centre, Wyee, NSW.

Sat. – Sun. 22nd. – 24th. September, 2012.

Mark your diaries now! Booking details in the next issue.

Whose Hope Is It Anyway? (Part 1)

By Karl Edwards, Melbourne, Vic.

When talking about dispensationalism to people who are not familiar with the term, I sometimes explain it as an approach to reading the Bible that attempts to put things in their right place. For instance, recognition of the times and cultures of the people to whom the text was first delivered can greatly enhance our understanding as to its proper meaning. But of course, the opposite is also true. Taking a Biblical truth out of its place and applying it to a people and culture for whom it was never intended will undoubtedly lead to confusion.

Few Biblical doctrines have fallen out of their right place more than “The Rapture,” which has also been mislabelled as “the rapture of the church.” I know that many people would disagree with that last statement, because it would seem from its popular usage that the doctrine of the rapture is a clearly established fundamental Christian truth beyond question. Not only is the rapture well accepted in Christian circles, it is also well known by many non-Christians. This is due to the multitude of books, TV shows, movies and websites that portray this event as a catalyst for chaos. Scenes are drawn where planes fall out of the sky, cars pile up on freeways, trains crash and derail, and millions of people are thrown into hopelessness and despair as family members and friends who are Christian simply disappear, leaving them in a Godless world to negotiate their survival against the armies of the antichrist.

This interpretation of the events is, for the most part, derived from 1 Thess. 4:15-18 which reads:

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

And also 1 Corinthians 15:51,52:-

“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.”

Putting these verses together draws a picture of Christ descending from heaven, the dead in Christ being raised first and then those who are alive, both groups being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, all of which takes place instantaneously, “in the twinkling of an eye”. While there are other verses used to support this view, most Christians will point you to 1 Thess. 4 as the “proof text” of this doctrine. Added to this is that the rapture is evidently imminent. In short, the events described above, coupled with the possibility that they can take place at any moment, has become the Christian hope.

The Word Rapture

The word rapture is taken from the words *caught up* in verse 17 of 1 Thessalonians 4, which is a translation of the Greek word *Harpazō*. Some have argued that the word rapture is technically not a Biblical word, as it is not found in any of the Greek texts; however if you happen to be reading the Latin Vulgate, which was the common text for about one thousand years after the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, you would read *rapiemur* in 1 Thess. 4, which is the Latin translation of *caught up*, and it is from this word that the word *rapture* is derived.

The Greek, *Harpazō* is used 13 times in the New Testament and its basic meaning is ‘to be taken by force’. This meaning can be seen clearly in some of the English words derived from *rapture*: rapids, ravish, raptor and rape, all of which are forceful words.

In its simplest form, the rapture is the mode of transport for those who are taken to meet the Lord in the air. In other words, the rapture is the journey, a part of another more important event, yet it has

been made to be “the event” for Christians today. Isolating the rapture from its context and magnifying it to the point that it becomes greater than the event of which it is only a part, misses the point completely. Whenever specific sections of Scripture are isolated and magnified out of their place in this way, they usually introduce a host of other problems. When the rapture is made to be *the event*, some of the problems that arise are; confusion regarding the *hopes* of Scripture, removing all hope for Israel, and providing a false hope for the church. It also keeps Christians in an unhealthy state of heightened anticipation and in a wider context, it brings Christianity into disrepute.

The last two points are the inevitable consequences of the first. Many Christians who are eagerly anticipating the imminent return of the Lord often fail to live a balanced life, failing to plan for their future or the future of their children. They see the rapture as the panacea for all their problems. Some even become so obsessed with the nearness of Christ’s return that they attempt to fit every major world event into a scheme of Biblical interpretation that brings the rapture closer and, in turn, twists Scripture to support their view. The more recent history of Christianity is a testament to the many failed date-setters who, in their desire to predict the timing of the rapture, have caused many to go astray. Such schemes and schemers do nothing more than bring Christianity into disrepute.

Failure to Adhere To Pauline Doctrine

It is interesting to note that Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:15, “This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me.” When Paul wrote those words, Christians were being martyred in Rome, a fact that Paul would have been aware of. They had not turned away from Christ, but they had turned away from Paul and his doctrine. Today’s rapture doctrine is a result of failing to rightly divide the epistles of Paul.

To understand where the rapture fits into Scripture, it is necessary to dispel the myth that Christ came to start a new church which officially came into being on the day of Pentecost, and that the book of Acts records the progress of this new church age, providing an example for all believers to follow. In many Christian circles these things are considered to be foundational truths and they provide a

framework in which the rapture doctrine sits as the jewel in the crown, being the culmination of the church age. But a closer look at the context in which the ministry of Christ and the disciples’ actions in the book of Acts took place, paints a different picture.

Context, Context, Context.

In Matthew 3:1-3, John the Baptist heralds that great proclamation, “Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand,” which was also a key element in the ministry of the Lord, and His disciples. For many, this is where their Christian journey begins; to them it is as though John was revealing something brand new to his listeners. However, his declaration was not without a context. In Matthew 3:3, the Scripture associates John the Baptist with the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3, showing that he is “the voice of the one crying in the wilderness”. This clearly places John’s declaration of the Kingdom in the context of Isaiah 40, a context that is solely concerned with the physical rule of the Lord on the earth.

The Hope in Isaiah 40

Isaiah 40:1-11 foretells of the comfort that Israel could look forward to under the rule of their Messiah when the glory of the Lord is revealed. It highlights the physical changes that will take place on the earth when the Lord comes to establish His Kingdom, and how Israel will be regathered from all the places where they have been scattered, (compare this with Ezekiel 34:11-14). In verses 15–17, we see the total insignificance of the nations in the face of that glory. Every Israelite who heard John’s declaration on that day would have understood exactly what Kingdom he was talking about. Far from being the start of something new, the Kingdom that was declared to be near by John, by the Lord and the disciples, had been the subject of many of the Old Testament prophets. It was not a new beginning. It was, in fact, the opposite; it was the *end of the ages*, a term used emphatically by Paul in Hebrews to describe the time of Christ’s presence on the earth and His sacrifice of Himself.

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.*”

That Paul considered the period of time in which he lived to be the end of the ages, is evident also in

1 Corinthians, where he refers to himself and the Corinthians believers as people “upon whom the ends of the age had come.”

1 Cor. 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.*”

All the writers of the Acts period epistles believed they were living at the end of the ages, a time that anticipated the soon return of the Lord to establish the Kingdom that both John the Baptist and Isaiah had spoken of. There was no thought in their minds of a new church which would function independently of the promises made to the fathers. In plain words, they were looking forward to *the hope of Israel*. The view that Paul’s epistles gradually moved from an Old Testament kingdom perspective to that of a New Testament church is not borne out by the statistics. The following table shows the accepted chronological order of the Pauline epistles that were written during the Acts, comparing the approximate number of Old Testament references in each. Notice that Romans, which was the last epistle written during this time, (and which most scholars agree was around Acts ch. 20), contains over 50% more Old Testament references than those found in the book of Hebrews.

Acts Epistles in written order	Approx. References
Galatians	8
1 Thessalonians	0
2 Thessalonians	0
1 Corinthians	15
2 Corinthians	16
Hebrews	30
Romans	70

What about the rapture then?

So, you may well ask, what does this have to do with the rapture? Well, think about it! If the Lord’s earthly ministry was set in the context of the Old Testament hope of Israel, and if the apostles continued to think and preach about this kingdom, and if Paul’s latest Acts period epistle is full of references concerning the Old Testament promises to Israel, whose hope is the rapture of 1 Thess. 4? Bear in mind that Thessalonians was written 6 to 7

years before Romans! How then, can the rapture be anything other than the hope of Israel? It is interesting to note that even as late as Acts 28:20, Paul, while a prisoner of Rome, declares to the Jews in Rome that, “for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.” This verse speaks volumes regarding the hope that Paul was concerned with at that time. It was not the same hope that he later writes about in Ephesians, which is a heavenly hope, where the believer is seated together with the Lord in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:4-7).

The Hope of Romans

Bearing in mind the timing of the writing of Romans, it is worth taking a closer look at the hope outlined in ch. 15. Paul writes in v. 4, that the “things that were written before were written for our learning,” for the purpose of providing *hope*, and he closes this subject in v. 13 with a prayer that the “God of *hope*” would fill them with joy and that they may abound in *hope* by the power of the Holy Spirit. Reading on from v. 5 to 12, it could not be any clearer which hope Paul was referring to. He shows in v. 8 that “Christ was a minister to the circumcision”, meaning Israel only, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, again Israel only. He then proceeds to quote four Old Testament references which are listed below, that leave no doubt as to the nature of the hope he had in view. Take the time to read these references, looking them up in their passages, to gain a full understanding of their setting.

The Hope Of Romans 15

Rom. 15:8, 9. “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy ...”

Compare with **Psalm 18:49**, “Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name.”

This looks forward to the kingdom rule of God where Gentiles will be included, but not equal.

This is the Hope of Israel.

Next Rom. 15:10. “And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.”

Compare with **Deut. 32:43.** “Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his

servants ... and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.”

This is the Hope of Israel.

Now Rom. 15:11. “And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.”

Compare with **Psalms 117:1.** “O praise the Lord, all ye nations; praise him, all ye people.”

This is the Hope of Israel.

Lastly, Rom. 15:12. “And again Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in him shall the Gentiles trust.”

Compare **Isa. 11:10** - “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria ...and from the islands of the sea.”

Isa. 11 is the great millenium chapter that shows the Messiah coming to rule in wisdom and righteousness and to slay the wicked (3, 4).

There will be no hurt in the Kingdom (6-9).

And the Gentiles will seek Him (10), and Israel will be regathered (11).

This is the Hope of Israel.

Sheer logic dictates that, if Paul, as late as Acts 28, was still writing about the hope of Israel and speaking about the same Kingdom that John the Baptist and the apostles spoke of, the hope of 1 Thess. 4 must be that same hope, *the hope of Israel*.

Following the setting aside of Israel as the favoured nation at Acts 28:28, Paul wrote seven other epistles which reveal a new hope for the church which was not known at the time Thessalonians was written. To take the hope of Israel in 1 Thess. 4 and give it to the church, is to place something where it does not belong, and doing so will result in error, as always. Now, a question that may arise as a result of this view is that, if the hope of 1 Thessalonians is the hope of Israel and not the church, then it must be possible to find it in the Old Testament. This is just what we do find, and in part two of this article, I will show the hope of 1 Thess. 4 in the Old Testament, in its correct setting, clearly establishing it as the hope of Israel. ❖

Quotes About The Bible

Plenary Inspiration.

(The first, and most basic, of the BBFA's tenets is that the Bible is fully inspired by God. 'Plenary' means full or complete, so the following is a very relevant quote.)

When people say that the doctrine of plenary or full inspiration of the Bible fails to do justice to the individuality of the biblical writers, they simply show that they do not know what they are talking about.

Yes, what a wonderful variety there is in the Bible. There is the rough simplicity of Mark, the unconscious yet splendid eloquence of Paul, the conscious literary art of the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, the matchless beauty of the Old Testament narratives, the high poetry of the Prophets and the Psalms.

How much we should lose, to be sure, if the Bible were written all in one style. We believers in the full inspiration of the Bible do not merely admit that. We **insist** upon it. The doctrine of plenary inspiration does not hold that all parts of the Bible are alike, nor does it hold that they are all equally beautiful. It only holds that all parts of the Bible are equally true, and that each part has its place.

J. Gresham Machen. Quoted by J. Sidlow Baxter in 'Explore The Book', Vol. 2, p. 214.

What Is The New Testament?

The New Testament does not set out primarily a system of ethics, but tells how God entered into history and how eternity entered into time. It is the only authentic record of the life of Christ.

Author unknown.

Is The Bible Written Only for Doctors of Divinity?

The Bible is indeed a deep book when depth is required, that is, by a deep people; but it is not intended particularly for a deep people. And therefore the first, and generally the main and leading idea of the Bible is on its surface, written in the plainest Hebrew, Greek or English, needing ... nothing but what we might all give — attention.

John Ruskin.

God didn't write the Bible for Himself. He wrote it for us!

John Hutton.

‘Then many came to Him and said, ‘John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.’ And many believed in Him there.”

John 10:41, 42.

Could this be said of our witness?

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4th. Sunday each month. 10 am. St. Augustine’s College, Springfield. Co-ordinator: Rom Harper, 0412-239-907.

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 info. phone David & Janelle Tavender, (02) 4950 6708.

Thornton:

Alternate Wednesdays, 10.am. 13 Drayton Ct. Thornton. Group Co-ordinator: Susan Hall, (02) 4028 6260.

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