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WHO MAKETH THEE TO DIFFER?

“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)

Conflict has assaulted mankind since the very early days of human history. Indeed it was the eldest son—Cain—of the first human parents—Adam and Eve—who committed the first murder when he killed his younger brother Abel (Gen. 4:8).

Actions to harm another spread from that time until, in the days of Noah, “... the earth was filled with violence” (Gen. 6:11).

The violence soon developed into warfare: *“And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar... Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim, And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan... And they returned, and came to Enmishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezontamar. And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim...”* (Gen 14:1-8).

The brute creation

Conflict is not limited to the human species but assaults the brute creation also: one animal species devouring another is regarded as being a natural part of the “food chain”. For example, lions are regarded as the king of the jungle because they devour several other species of land animals.

Also mankind is in conflict with many animal species, eating them for food or classifying them

either as vermin or pests and consequentially taking measures to exterminate them.

Sacrifices

Another aspect of the conflict between the brute kingdom and human beings is that God has required mankind to kill animals as a sacrifice to honour Him. Although the text in Genesis 4:4 does not detail what Abel intended to do to the firstlings of his flock (*and the fat thereof*) in order to sacrifice them to the Lord, subsequent practices have led to the assumption that he was going to kill the lamb.

The situation is clearer regarding Noah—he killed the animals and offered them as a burnt offering on the altar: *“And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark. And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar”* (Gen. 8:18-20).

The kingdom arrangement

Thus the stark contrast between the situation that exists today and the arrangement that will prevail in

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God's kingdom—the new heavens and new earth—is brought into sharp focus as recorded in several prophecies in the Old Testament: *“And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Isa. 2:4); *“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD”* (Isa. 65:25). Both of these prophecies tell of a time when there will not be animosity of any kind: not between the nations of human beings, not amongst the brute creation, and not between man and beast.

The present day

Thus the prophecy is that the situation in the new earth will be vastly different from the situation that exists today. In spite of concerted efforts by the nations, particularly since World War 2, to promote peace through such agencies as the approximately 193 member United Nations, the 28 member North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO—now defunct; it disbanded in 1976 after 22 years), there is much strife and war in the world. However the current situation should not perplex the Christian: the widespread conflict and turmoil is at least a partial fulfillment of what Jesus told His disciples would eventuate before the new heaven and new earth would be established: *“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows”* (Matt. 24:6-8).

The Christians' challenge

And so it is that the Christian today is confronted with animosity and conflict all around them, and hence the Apostle Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians is of particular moment: *“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:3).

Every word in that verse makes its own contribution to Paul's message.

In common speech, “endeavouring” implies effort has been expended, but not necessarily that success has been achieved. The Greek word from which “endeavouring” is translated (*spoudazō*) supports the idea that unity might not always be achieved, and observation confirms that is the case. Nevertheless the Christian must continue to endeavour to achieve unity of the spirit.

The onus on the Christian is made more pointed by the word “keep”: *“keep the unity of the spirit”*. The significance of “keep” is that it implies unity has previously existed, and so the Christian must do all in their power not to destroy it; that is, to not cause division or unrest amongst the brethren. Such an exhortation is in accord with Paul's words to the Romans: *“But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another... It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak”* (Rom. 14:15-21).

Of the Spirit

A further point is that the unity which Christians are to keep is the unity of the spirit. “Spirit” is translated from the Greek *“pneuma”* for which one meaning is “mental disposition”. In other words the Christian's principal objective must be to cultivate a love of the Lord and His plan and purpose, regardless of any differences in opinion amongst the brethren regarding the technical details of the outworking of that plan; any differences of opinion regarding God's ways of working out His plan should not destroy the mental disposition of love for the Lord and His people.

Tolerating differences

Tolerance of differing views and aptitudes might be deemed to present a threat of “liberalism”—not purity of truth—and therefore might be considered to obscure the truth and therefore be contrary to James' exhortation: *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy”* (James 3:17). However the Apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to accommodate differences amongst the brethren. His argument is based on the similarity of the members of the human body and the body of Christ: *“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; To another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To 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: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another” (1Cor. 12:4-25).

There are numerous points in Paul’s explanation that warrant emphasis.

Firstly, the differences are ordained by One Lord; the same God: *“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him”*. Recalling that God has placed all members in the body provides considerable tolerance of differences.

A second point that deserves emphasis, additional to the fact that all members are placed by the same Lord, is that He has given them different aptitudes: *“For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit...”*. Calling that fact to mind on every occasion when differences between brethren are apparent should promote consideration of the other’s disposition.

Thirdly, members have need of every other member, in spite of the fact they are different—different personality, different understanding of some doctrinal points, different aptitude to witness to others, different ability to express their thoughts.

Other causes of differences

As well as understanding, and applying, the lessons to

be learnt from a recognition of the authority by which each member is placed in the body, it is helpful, in maintaining harmony in the body, to acknowledge the causes of differences that arise from the weakness of human nature. There are several characteristics that must be overcome but two that merit particular mention are egotism and jealousy.

Whereas all aspects of the previous exhortation are derived from a consideration of the body as a whole, egotism and jealousy relate to looking inwards at oneself, and hence the Apostle’s exhortation: *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”* (2 Cor. 13:5).

Jealousy stems from covetousness—wanting something possessed by someone else. Jealousy is a powerful enemy, hence Paul exhorted each church to be wary of it:

- To the Philippians he wrote: *“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”* (Phil. 4:11). Paul’s example presents all Christians with a challenge—to be content in each and every state in which they find themselves: in hunger, in poverty, in abundance, in comfort, in labour. Paul wrote that he had to learn to be content, which implies development of his disposition is a process, so the Christian must strive to develop an attitude of contentment.
- To Timothy, Paul wrote: *“But godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Tim. 6:6). In the preceding verses he warned about those who, *“doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness...”*, and simply advised Timothy: *“from such withdraw thyself”* (1 Tim. 6:4-5). Consequently it is manifest that jealousy arises not only from coveting material things but also intellectual agility and the ability to argue. Again the Christian is to be content with the intellectual powers the Lord has given them.

In the succeeding verses Paul warned Timothy of the danger of covetousness for material goods, just as he did to the Philippians: *“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”* (1 Tim. 6:6-10). Observation confirms the accuracy of Paul’s warning.

Egotism

Egotism presents yet another foe for the Christian. In essence, egotism causes division amongst the brethren by one member claiming to have superior knowledge or ability, and consequently imposing their thoughts and understandings on everyone else. The feeling of superiority may not be limited to doctrinal understanding but might also be related to the organization of their (or other's) ecclesia, or indeed any other aspect of another's life. Paul exhorted the Philippians to be aware of this temptation also: *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"* (Phil. 2:3-4).

The failure to suppress egotism may arise from one's failure to examine themselves and to esteem others, which in turn stems from a failure to remember that whatever knowledge one has is a gift from God, as Paul wrote: *"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase"* (1 Cor. 3:5-6).

Once again the Apostle Paul is an example the Christian may follow, just as he followed Christ: *"Be*

ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). From a human perspective the revelations Paul received at his conversion authorized him to claim superiority above his fellows. However his response was: *"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord... Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me"* (2 Cor. 12:6). The bottom line is that egotism inflates, whereas ultimately observers will see the man for what he is.

The whole question of egotism may be corrected by observing the words of Peter: *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."* (1 Pet. 4:11).

Summary

If we differ from another, it is the Lord's doing: He has given us the knowledge we treasure, and He is moulding our characters to fit in to the body He is forming, all to His praise and glory!■

CHRISTIAN CONSTANCY

The article below is based on an address given at a Melbourne Convention in 1944. The speaker had consciously experienced World War 1 and was now experiencing World War 2. The year 2014 A.D. is 70 years after the address was given, and the world is again in turmoil, not globally as it was in 1944, but nevertheless there is much unrest among the nations. Additionally the speaker referred to the lawlessness of that generation—one may wonder what he would say if he were alive in 2014. It might also be encouraging to reflect on the challenge that faced the brethren in 1944, and to note the similarity with 2014.

* * * * *

Churchill promised the British race "blood and tears", and what followed was such that it was necessary to adopt all sorts of expedients to try to maintain the people's morale.

I was one of those who used to count the days until October 1914. It is now 30 years since then. As we begin to wonder how long things will last, there is some excuse for a topic like Christian Constancy. We are not under any illusions, regarding the future, no matter how long the present things continue—our consecration is not until any date we have derived or concluded from our Bible Study, but until death.

Constancy is not to be demonstrated only in places that are in the public eye—to be seen of men—but also in lonely outposts; some places unseen. It is helpful to remember it is not public witness, nor demonstration, nor show that will win us the prize, but the development of character.

The challenge

Hebrews 3:6 reads: *"But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end"*. Holding fast is constancy. And the Christian must hold their confidence fast unto the end—until their warfare is over.

The challenge is more pronounced when it is recalled that the number of the elect is 144,000. Spread over 2000 years, it is not many, which means a severe test of character is justified. The severity is justified by the privilege of being one of a small number, by the glorious work to be accomplished, and by the magnitude of the task of changing the character of every human being.

The magnitude of the task to be accomplished during the 1000 years is brought into focus by pondering the

range of dispositions, habits, preferences, perversities, weaknesses, ignorance and superstitions that permeate the world of mankind. Consequently, those who are going to be instrumental in blessing all the members of the fallen race—the groaning creation—have to be tried to the utmost.

The architect of the Federal Capital said the data he was supplied for the construction of the city was perfect in every detail, but was lacking in two most important things. One was the beauty of the gum trees and the other was the rarity of the atmosphere at that altitude. I quote that to prove the point that familiarity breeds contempt; the compilers of the data did not mention those two facts because they were so familiar with them that they had lost their impact. The same principle applies to the weaknesses of the human race—we are so familiar with them that we do not always appreciate the size of the task it will be to change them.

The task is made more daunting by the attitude of many. We see a great deal of misery and suffering around us and want of respect for law. Even the children want to please themselves. Such an attitude can affect us and that is why we must be on the alert to preserve our loyalty, our constancy and our firmness of mind.

Faithfulness to the Lord

A well known expression is: “I will be faithful to the Lord, to the truth, to the brethren and with all with whom I have to do”.

Faithfulness to the Lord requires one to love the Lord with ALL their heart and mind (Matt. 22:37-39). Constancy may be added to the list. Just as God is unwavering in His love towards mankind, so also human beings must be unwavering in their love and loyalty to Him: “*Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*” (James 1:16-17).

The truth

The challenge of faithfulness to the truth is not only in the fundamental doctrines, but also in the small things. Just as a small leakage will empty a vessel, so also will our loyalty to the truth be emptied if we allow elements of the truth to escape.

The fundamentals of the truth are simple, and are frequently summed up in the three “Rs”: Ransom, Resurrection, Restitution. To them may be added the secret of the high calling, which, to the uninitiated, is a mystery. One argument that is used against God calling out a few for His Name is that such

“favouritism” would be unfair. However Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “*For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him*” (2 Cor. 11:2-4). Being regarded as a virgin bride implies favouritism; the privilege of being called to be part of the “chaste virgin” must not be over-looked.

Loyalty to the truth requires unwavering adherence to the doctrines each one has established as truth. Paul was aware of the challenge Timothy faced, and he exhorted him to constancy: “*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee*” (1 Tim. 4:16). Timothy was to take heed unto himself and continue in the doctrine—continue to preach a consistent message.

Later, Paul reinforced his exhortation to Timothy to hold to the truths he had learnt, and particularly in view of the changes that would eventuate. Paul encouraged him to not deviate from what he had learnt: “*But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim. 3:13-15). Timothy was to continue in the things he had learned; Paul exhorted Timothy to constancy.

Timothy was not only to remain constant within himself but he was also to ensure constancy in his ministry to others: “*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ... Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry*” (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Increasing light

There is always a temptation to investigate other ideas and doctrines. It is a dubious undertaking;

curiosity might get the better of us. Paul wrote: “*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*” (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Paul kept the simplicity that is in Christ. However the spirit searches all things and that aspect of God’s dealing with His chosen ones—those to whom He has given His Holy Spirit—has not changed: “*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*” (1 Cor. 2:9-10). Thus faithfulness to the truth requires each one to search the Scriptures daily and to be fully persuaded in their own mind (Rom. 14:5).

Additionally the Lord has revealed more of His plan as time has progressed: “*But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*” (Proverbs 4:18). The thrust of the verse is not that Christians should increase the light, but that they should walk in the increased light that God has provided. Luke 21:31 reads: “*So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand*”. It was not until they saw the things about which the Lord told them that they would know the kingdom was nigh.

The matter of increasing light is particularly relevant today. Were it not for increased light regarding the meaning of many Greek and Hebrew words, many today would be laboring under fears of hell fire and eternal torment. Consequently it is helpful to remember the example of the Bereans of old: “*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11). Bearing in mind that God has given different gifts to various ones, it is imperative that every disciple—every student of God’s word—be fully persuaded in their own mind regarding what they believe is truth, and more so as the complexity of the philosophies in the world continues to increase, with less and less faith in God or that the Bible is His Word.

Faithfulness to the brethren

The Christian is to be faithful to the brethren. One aspect of being faithful to the brethren is to abide by

the exhortation in Hebrews 10:25: “*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together... exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*” (Heb. 10:23-25)

Exhorting one another involves, firstly, meeting together, communicating one with the other, because it is impossible to encourage one another without communicating with them.

Another aspect of faithfulness to the brethren is to accommodate their weaknesses: “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*” (Eph. 4:1-2). Being ever ready to point out another’s faults is not edifying and is not being faithful to a recognition that they are also striving against the weaknesses of the flesh. Faithfulness to the brethren requires encouragement, not discouragement—forbearing one another in love. However “agreeing with everything” is not always the most beneficial course.

Faithfulness to the brethren requires honesty and honesty might involve acknowledging differences: “*Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another*” (Eph. 4:25). However being “brutally frank” might be discouraging and so the Christian is to be tactful, one of the first principles of which is to “*tell him his fault between he and thee alone*” (Matt. 18:15). As Paul exhorted Timothy, be first pure then peaceable, but the Christian should always aim to create peace consistent with holding the truth high: “*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace*” (James 3:17-18).

And now I want to conclude by reminding you of the words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians: “*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Cor. 15:57-58). May God help us all to remain constant to our Lord, to His truth, and to the brethren with whom He has blessed us.■

God makes a promise; faith believes it, hope anticipates it, and patience quietly awaits it.■

SINCE WORLD WAR 1

The establishment of God's kingdom on earth is the last act of God's plan that has been revealed to mankind so far. He has revealed little about what awaits mankind after that time. The Apostle Paul made only passing comments regarding that time—to the Romans he wrote: *"Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life"* (Rom. 2:6-7); and to the Ephesians he wrote: *"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2:7). Neither statement gives any details regarding what will transpire in the ages to come.

However the prophet Daniel testified that the kingdom will be everlasting: *"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever"* (Dan. 2:44).

The fact that, at this time, there is little detail regarding the situation after the kingdom is established, is consistent with God's revelations all down the ages: *"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints"* (Col. 1:26-27). The mystery was hidden for ages and for generations, and while He has now made it manifest to His saints, it is still a mystery to all who have not been called and given the insight of the Holy Spirit, that is, to those who are "without": *"And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables"* (Mark 4:11).

However the conditions that will exist at that time will be such that Jesus told His disciples to pray for it—*"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."* (Matt. 6:9-10). Also Jesus gave them signs that would indicate when the establishment of the kingdom was near: *"So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near..."* (Matt. 24:33).

The twentieth century

For almost 1900 years after Jesus told His disciples about the kingdom, little was revealed to mankind about God's plans, and consequently there was little overall change in how the nations conducted their business. Indeed little is revealed even until now, however not all mankind is oblivious to the changes that have occurred in the world during the last 100

years. The following excerpt is from the *U.S. News & World Report* of July 6, 1964. It looks back at the previous 50 years, that is, to the outbreak of World War 1, and looks forward to what they expected might occur during the next 50 years—to 2014—which is the current year.

* * *

What 50 Years Have Brought And What Another 50 Years May Bring

There has never been anything like it in history—the half century that started with the first World War. The whole world is unrecognizable now. Life, values, power balance, everything has undergone a complete change. **And the next half century can be just as amazing.** It was just 50 years ago, on June 29, 1914, when a young Serbian nationalist emptied his revolver at Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in the Bosnian town of Sarajevo. Out of that incident flowed actions that produced World War 1; on August 1, 1914, Germany declared war on Russia.

Now it is half a century and two World Wars later. Look back over those 50 years, and the world of today appears to bear little resemblance to that of the half century earlier—a half century that has seemed to speed by. Raised is a question whether the 50 years ahead of us is of vital importance to young people of today. It will bring revolutionary changes to compare with those of the past 50 years.

Only half a-century ago, the world was one of great empires. The empire of Britain was greatest of them all. France, the Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, Belgium, Italy: all were imperial powers. Almost all of Africa, much of the Middle East, and much of Asia were colonial areas. Kings and emperors and czars ruled the really great nations. Communism was not even heard of as a threat. **Nobody in 1914 could have dreamed of the world of 1964.**

The kings and emperors of 50 years ago, along with their empires, are all gone. Where kings and queens remain, their titles are empty. The British Empire is gone. The French Empire is gone, and France is struggling to try to regain a semblance of glory. Germany, defeated in two wars, is divided, yet West Germany now is the strongest power on the continent of Europe other than Soviet Russia. There no longer is a great Dutch Empire, or a Belgian Empire or an Ottoman Empire, or an Italian Empire. Instead, nations of Europe are striving to work toward some kind of common market and some over-all political co-operation.

On the move

Those were the days of the horse and buggy. Autos

were few, highways nonexistent, traffic problems undreamed of; electricity was new. Gas lights brightened homes and streets. Paved streets were few in towns; roads were tracks in the countryside. Only the adventurous thought of driving from coast to coast along unmarked roads. Auto travel was a leisurely adventure back in 1914, with few paved roads and no traffic problems. No one dreamed of the bumper-to-bumper conditions that face U. S. motorists today.

National defence now rests upon atomic weapons that were unknown 20 years ago, let alone a half century ago. In that same 50 year span, a League of Nations was born and died. Then a United Nations was born and transformed into something its founders would not recognize. Africa, a continent recently made up of colonies, today has become a continent of more than 40 new “nations”, each struggling to survive. The Middle East, another colonial area of the past, is living from vast oil riches that 50 years ago were unknown and of relatively little importance. Asia is an area of vast populations now living in independent nations torn usually by political division and great unrest. It is in Asia that war is the greatest threat to today’s world.

The airplane—usually a biplane—was a novelty at county fairs. There was no such thing as an airline. The military mind was only beginning to comprehend what an airplane could do in war.

A vote for women was just beginning to be agitated seriously. Nobody so much as dreamed of a Social Security system.

Finance

The U.S. national debt had been stabilized at around 1.2 billion dollars ever since just before the turn of the century: Now it is in excess of 300 billion dollars; how things have changed in half a century. If the record of the past is repeated, the dollar of 2014 will be an 11 cent dollar in terms of 1914.

Now try to look 50 years into the future to the year 2014, and what do you find?

A half century ago, war pitted men against men in trench fighting. Warfare of tomorrow will find several nations equipped with hydrogen weapons that destroy whole cities. Instead of troops, ballistic missiles now can span the oceans.

Population

In another half century there will be 395 million Americans, nearly twice as many as there are now. A population crowded into great strips of cities will be struggling to enjoy driving 200 million automobiles

(there are 66 million now). China will be pushing 1.5 billion people. Supersonic transports will be able to carry passengers across the American continent or to Europe in an hour and a half.

Space will have become an environment supporting defense platforms, communications satellites, maybe launching platforms for ventures not yet dreamed of. Hydrogen weapons will have proliferated among many nations of the world. China is sure to have them. France will, too. So will Germany. Israel and Egypt may. American officials place at 15 or 20 the nations that will have nuclear weapons before the end of this century.

* * *

When such a secular body is aware of the dramatic changes that have occurred since 1914 (and 2014 is the centenary of the outbreak of World War 1) it is surprising that many who profess to be aware of Bible prophecy are unaware of the significance of the changes, and that the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth is nigh.

Nevertheless that is the way it is, and such global ignorance of the significance of the time at hand is testimony to the truth of Jesus’ statement that there shall continue to be wars and rumours of wars, and to Peter’s statement that many at that time will refuse to acknowledge the changes that have occurred and are occurring: *“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men... Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”* (2 Pet. 3:3-13).

May each and everyone who has been blessed with a knowledge of God’s plan, and who yearns for the outworking of that plan in terms of the establishment of God’s kingdom, continue to watch the developments in the world that indicate that the day of the establishment of the kingdom, and of their redemption, is near at hand.■

HATH GOD CAST AWAY HIS PEOPLE?

“I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew...” (Romans 11:1-2).

At the time of this issue going to press there is a lull in hostilities in the Middle East. The relationships between the nations in the Middle East are complex and it is not the purpose of this article to unravel them, but rather to focus on whether God is continuing to deal directly with Israel or whether He has abandoned them.

There are more than 2500 references to Israel by name in the Bible, plus a number in which they are referred to under another title; for example, “my people”, of which there are more than 200 instances. By comparison, there are approximately 980 occurrences of “Jesus”, plus approximately 30 instances in which Jesus is referred to as “Saviour” (several references to “saviour” refer to God Himself). Consequently, on a purely numerical basis, it may be regarded as contemptuous to ignore the Scriptures that relate to God’s plan for the nation of Israel.

Classification

The references to Israel may be classified into at least three groups:

- New Testament assertions relating to the part Israel has played, since Jesus’ first advent, in the outworking of God’s plan;
- Prophetic statements, mainly in the Old Testament;
- God’s direct instructions to them.

New Testament assertions

One passage of New Testament Scripture which asserts Israel’s importance in God’s plan is Romans 11, quoted above. Paul’s argument in those verses is simple and emphatic: “*For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin*”. Paul was an Israelite, and he attributed his knowledge of God’s plan to God’s personal dealing with him: “*For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)*” (Eph. 3:1-4). If God had cast Israel off Paul would have been an imposter—a phoney—and not a true disciple of the Lord. However on numerous occasions Paul asserted that he was indeed a true apostle: “*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...*” (2 Cor. 1:1). Thus at that time, God was continuing to deal with Israel.

Old Testament prophecies

There are numerous prophecies in the Old Testament that testify that God will never cast away Israel. One prophecy is recorded in Jeremiah 31:35-37: “*Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD*”. The credence one gives to the assurance that God will not cast off Israel is dependent on whether one believes God created the sun and moon: if God did not create them the basis of the verses is untrue and the assurance is worthless. However if one believes it was God who gave the sun for a light by day, His statement is trustworthy, and therefore the seed of Israel will not cease from being a nation before Him until the sun and moon cease to exist. Further, it is only if heaven can be measured that He will cast off Israel. In the twenty first century there is much boasting regarding mankind’s knowledge of the extent of the universe; suffice it to say the speculation continues. The prophecy is that it will not be until the heavens have been measured that there is any possibility of God casting off Israel.

God’s direct instruction to Israel

The book of Leviticus records many of God’s direct instructions to Moses and through him to the nation of Israel. They are too numerous to detail here but chapter 26 details how God was to deal with them regarding several aspects. Verses 1 and 2 prohibit worshipping idols. Verses 3 to 9 contain God’s promise that if they were obedient they would be materially prosperous: “*I am the LORD. If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land... For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you*”.

However from verse 14 onwards the promise was that they would be punished if they were disobedient: *“But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments... I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you”* (Lev. 26:14-17). The punishments with which God threatened Israel were gruesome—personal discomfort as well as subserviency to their enemies. One could well imagine such punishments would rapidly cause Israel to repent and become obedient, but alas, God also declared there was more to follow.

Verses 18 to 22 declare: *“And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then **I will punish you seven times more for your sins.** And I will break the pride of your power... And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins. I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate”* (Lev. 26:18-22). The punishments they would receive if they were disobedient were directly opposite the blessings they would receive if they were faithful and obedient, and corrected their ways.

Worse to come

If the accentuated punishments did not cause them to reform, God promised to punish them even further: *“And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins...”* (Lev. 26:23-24).

Failure to reform would bring more severe punishments: *“Then **I will walk contrary unto you also in fury;** and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat... And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste”* (Lev. 26:28-33). Continuing disobedience would result in God punishing them in His fury, and they would be caused to eat the flesh of their children. And if that was not

enough, God would make their land desolate (in stark contrast to the prosperity promised if they obedient), and **they would be scattered among the heathen.**

True to His word God did precisely as He declared: *“And the LORD saith, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; But have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim, which their fathers taught them: Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. **I will scatter them also among the heathen,** whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them”* (Jer. 9:13-16).

All is not lost

However God also promised that if Israel repented He would remember His covenant with them: *“If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land”* (Lev. 26:40-42). The condition on which God would repent was that Israel would repent. That has not yet happened, at least at a national level, and so it may be contended that the hope of them receiving the blessings previously promised are lost.

But all is not yet lost: *“And yet for all that, **when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away,** neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD. These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the LORD made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses”* (Lev. 26:44-46). God promised that even when they were still in the land of their enemies—a punishment which He directly brought upon them—He would not cast them off. In view of all the previous threats to punish them, it might be difficult to accept that God would not cast away His people that He foreknew. The only way such a seeming contradiction of action by God—that is, still retaining them as His chosen people even though He is punishing them repeatedly for their transgressions—

can be rationalized is to understand He is indeed the God of all, that His ways are higher than Man's ways, and that His purpose for Israel is not yet complete. God is yet to use Israel as one of the agents that will be used to educate the heathen world: *"And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore"* (Ezek. 37:28). *"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you"* (Zech. 8:23).

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25). *"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"* (Rom. 11:32-34). Yes, indeed, who has known the mind of the Lord? His ways are far above mankind's ways and He is working out His plan, and Israel is in it!■

THE RANSOM TESTIFIED

The sole purpose of Jesus' coming to earth was to rescue the human race from death. God sentenced the human race to death because their father Adam disobeyed His commandment not to eat one particular fruit in the Garden of Eden: *"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"* (Gen. 2:16-17).

The action required to redeem mankind was for Jesus to give His life: *"For even the Son of man came... to give his life a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45). Jesus assured His disciples His mission would be successful, and it would be vindicated (shown to be effective) by the resurrection of all mankind from the grave. He declared: *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (Greek: krisis) (John 5:28-29).*

However Jesus died approximately 2000 years ago, and to this day there is no evidence, visible to the people at large, of any widespread resurrection of those who have died, and thus there is much skepticism that His life and death have any bearing on the future of mankind. The skepticism should not surprise the Christian because Peter knew in his day that such a situation would develop: *"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"* (2 Pet. 3:3-4). Peter went on to explain that God has set various time periods in His plan. From a secular viewpoint, one factor which might be contributing to the loss of faith in the

effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice is a failure to understand the time periods that comprise God's plan. Hence Paul's statement to Timothy that the resurrection will occur in God's due time is a vital clue in understanding how Jesus' sacrifice will be vindicated: *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; **Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time**"* (1 Tim. 2:5-6). One test of faith for the Christian is to believe in the future resurrection!■

JAMES STRONG LL.B, DD

James Strong (August 14, 1822 – August 7, 1894) was an American Methodist biblical scholar and educator, and the creator of Strong's Concordance.

Strong was born in New York City and graduated, in 1844, as valedictorian from Wesleyan University. Subsequently, he was mayor of his home town on Long Island. Later, having settled in Flushing, New York, he pursued biblical studies, held various local offices, and organized, built, and was the president of the Flushing railroad. In 1856 Wesleyan University granted him the degree of Doctor of Divinity (D.D.). From 1858 until 1861, Strong was both Acting President and Professor of Biblical Literature at Troy University (New York). In 1868 he became Professor of Exegetical Theology at Drew Theological Seminary, where he remained for twenty-seven years. In 1881 Wesleyan honored Strong with the degree of Doctor of Laws (LL.D.). He died at Round Lake, New York in 1894.

"Strong's Exhaustive Concordance is without doubt the most thorough word index ever to be published on any version of the English Bible. It was first published in 1894, the year of his death".

—The Publishers.■

THROUGH THE EYES OF JOSHUA (PART 4)

The story so far: The Israelites have left Egypt and are experiencing the trials of the wilderness.

We moved on, to a place called Rephidim. However there was a shortage of fresh water. The Lord told Moses to walk on ahead of the people and to take some of the elders of Israel and his staff with him, and He would stand before him by a rock at Horeb. Moses was to strike the rock with his staff and water will come out of it. Moses did that, in the sight of all the elders of Israel, and a stream of fresh water came pouring out of the rock! Another miracle!

God performed several other miracles for us during our journey including giving us the ascendancy during a battle with the Amalekites when Moses kept his arms up over his head. If he let his arms down they gained the ascendancy. Amazing!

When we reached Mount Sinai Moses chose me to go up the mountain with him to receive stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were engraved. Moses was on top of the mountain for forty days and nights. The people concluded Moses and I were dead; so they gave Aaron their golden ear-rings, from which he made a golden calf, which they worshipped instead of God. Moses was livid, and he hurled down the tablets, breaking them to pieces. He took the calf and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it! Moses went up the mountain again received a second set of tablets, engraved just like the first set.

We left the Sinai Plain and traveled onwards to the Wilderness of Paran, God told Moses to send scouts out—one leader from each of the Twelve Tribes—to explore Canaan. I was chosen to represent the tribe of Ephraim. I was convinced we could overcome the Canaanites and take over the Promised Land, and so was Caleb, who represented the tribe of Judah, however the other ten scouts lacked confidence and they gave a bad report. Consequently no one who was twenty years old or more was allowed to enter the promised land except Caleb and me. Even Moses wasn't permitted to enter the Promised Land because he had disobeyed God and struck the rock at Horeb twice. However he was allowed to climb Mount Nebo and see the Promised Land from a distance, before God took him away—we never knew what happened to Moses, but certainly his body was never found. Aaron died and was buried at Mount Hor.

Then God spoke to me and told me I was to succeed Moses. He told me to be strong and courageous, because I was to lead the people into the land He had promised to Abraham.

The first step was to cross the Jordan river. God instructed me to tell the priests to carry the ark of the covenant ahead. As soon as the priests' feet touched the water's edge, the water stopped flowing so the people crossed over on dry ground. Once the last person had crossed over the Jordan, the priests carried the ark out onto dry land, and instantly the waters started flowing. It was truly wonderful; a near-repetition of what had happened at the Sea of Reeds.

Our task now was to occupy the Land of Canaan, and to drive out or destroy the pagan inhabitants. In our own strength, it would have been far too daunting, but part of my job was to demonstrate to the Israelites that God was on our side. At Gibeon, for example, God hurled large hailstones down on the Amorites killing more of them than were killed by our swords. I prayed to the Lord: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon". And the sun did stand still, and the moon did stop, until we had destroyed our enemies. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and delayed going down for about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man. Surely the Lord was fighting for us!

I feel that I've only partly fulfilled the rather daunting commission that God gave to me, which was to establish His people in His Promised Land, but I am perfectly sure that One is coming who is greater than me, or Moses, or Aaron, and He will complete all the work that God sends Him to do. In one sense He will be a greater Joshua as the later writer to the Hebrews implies when he wrote: "*For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day*" (Heb. 4:8). Of course he used that expression because my name in Aramaic is Jesus!

But now, I am 110 years old and I sense that the time for my departure is near and I am ready for Him.

God is good. God bless you all. Amen.■

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