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EXAMINING ONESELF

“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 Corinthians 13:5)

The beginning of a New Year is an appropriate time for the Christian to review the *status quo*, not just the situation in the world but also their personal circumstances.

A review of one’s circumstances provides the opportunity to reflect on the achievements and failures of the last 12 months, that is, to “*examine oneself*”, and consequently to resolve to be more zealous in the future and to pray more earnestly for forgiveness for those things wherein one has failed.

Standard

The purpose of an examination is to compare the specimen being examined with a standard. In the material world, if the object is new, the standard is the specifications prescribed for its manufacture, and the purpose of the examination is to check that the product meets the specifications.

If the object is not new the purpose of the examination might be to ascertain whether the object is safe to continue in service. In such cases the standard used might include the results of a previous examination in an effort to gauge the rate of change and hence whether the object is likely to remain functional until the next regular examination.

Both of those principles apply to the examination of the Christian. In the first instance there is an ultimate standard—“a specification”—to which every Christian must aspire, and that is the standard set by Jesus Christ. While no other human being can meet that standard, human failure must not discourage anyone from attempting to attain it.

Several aspects of the standard are listed in Matthew chapter 5. The standards specified in that chapter are higher than were prescribed by the Law Covenant. One example of the higher standard is articulated in verses 21 and 22: “*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever*

shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...”. The higher standard is that merely being angry is equated with killing.

For the Christian, the second standard—comparing the present condition with a previous one—may be applied when considering Peter’s exhortation in 2 Peter 3:17-18: “*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*”. Comparing one’s present standing with that of earlier times may indicate progress or regression.

Specifically, one may ask themselves whether there has been any nurturing of the fruits of the spirit. Development of the fruits of the Spirit also entails “*putting off the old man*” (Eph. 4:22) because one cannot “*serve God and mammon*” (Matt. 6:24).

With material objects the present condition is normally worse than it was previously due to even normal usage causing “wear and tear”. However with the Christian the latest condition should be better than previously due to Christian growth. If no progress has been made, or the condition is worse than

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previously, the Christian should realise that increased diligence is required to improve their lack of progress or halt their back-sliding, bearing in mind that the Devil is ever alert to lead the Christian astray: *“Ye therefore, beloved... beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness”* (2 Pet. 3:17). The remedy is *“to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard...”* (Heb. 2:1).

Object being examined

In the physical world every examination pertains to only one specimen (although it might be comprised of several parts). It is the same for the Christian. The exhortation is to examine *“yourselves”*, that is self, not to examine another: *“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way”* (Rom. 14:10-13). As Jesus said: *“Judge not, that ye be not judged”* (Matt. 7:1).

Paul exhorted the Romans not to *“put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way”*. Christians must examine themselves to ensure they do not cause another *“to stumble or be offended or made weak”* (Rom. 14:21). One trait that can stumble another is a failure to *“esteem another better than oneself”* (Phil. 2:3). Such failure can discourage the other by making them feel inferior or inadequate. Every Christian's examination of themselves should include asking themselves whether all of their actions have been motivated by the desire to positively edify and not demise another (Rom. 14:19).

Conduct

The Apostle Peter reminded his readers that they were being observed by others, and so every Christian must examine their conduct, not just when among their brethren but also in the world: *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation”* (1 Pet. 2:11-12). Participation in activities that *“war against the soul”* are to be avoided, not just because of their potential to cause back sliding in oneself, but also because of their effect on others, including the Lord's ministry: *“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain... Giving no offence in any thing, that the*

ministry be not blamed” (that is, discredited) (2 Cor. 6:1-3). When one is confronted with such situations the proper thing to do is to *“come out from among them”*—without passing judgment—and *“touch not the unclean thing”* (2 Cor. 6:17).

Knowledge

The Apostle Peter also exhorted the brethren to grow in knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18), and Christians are to examine themselves whether their knowledge has grown, not with the intent of *“puffing oneself up”* (1 Cor. 8:1), but that their appreciation of the Lord's leading has increased, and that they have benefited from the increase in the light that God has graciously shone on their path: *“But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day”* (Prov. 4:18).

Pride is one of the weapons of the Devil (1 John 2:16) and it is easy to be proud of one's knowledge. Hence it is appropriate that every examination include a review whether one's actions have always been in accord with the realization that it is by God's grace, and God's grace alone, that anyone can know God as the creator of all things, that all events in the world are in accord with His plan and that He has provided the means by which all mankind will be restored to an everlasting life of health, peace and happiness: *“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor. 4:6).

The temptation to be proud of one's knowledge is so powerful that Paul reminded all churches that their knowledge was a gift of God. To the Corinthians Paul wrote: *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence”* (1 Cor. 1:26-29); and to those in Ephesus he wrote: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast”* (Eph. 2:8-9).

As Hebrews 13:20-21 reads: *“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus... make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”*. May every Christian realise this privilege as they examine themselves.■

PRESENT TRUTH

"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12)

The truth about God and His plan for mankind may be divided into two parts: one that has been known by His faithful ones since very early times and one that God has revealed gradually over time.

Truth known from early times

One item of truth that God has revealed to His chosen ones since early times is the creation of mankind. Moses knew that God created mankind: *"For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth..."* (Deut. 4:32). The Psalmist, who also lived in Old Testament times, knew that God created the universe: *"The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them. The north and the south thou hast created them..."* (Psa. 89:11-12). And again: *"I said, O my God... Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands"* (Psa. 102:24-25).

The verses quoted above relate to works that were already finished when the words were spoken. However God's revelation of truth was not limited to what He had already accomplished. He revealed to Abraham that He would bless all the families of the earth through Abraham's seed, something that, at Abraham's time, was future: *"And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD... in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice"* (Gen 22:15-18). It is not clear if Abraham knew the details of how God would fulfil His promise, but nevertheless he believed God, as the Apostle Paul explains: *"... Abraham; who is the father of us all... staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform"* (Rom. 4:16-21). The fact that Abraham might not have known how God was going to fulfil His promise does not negate the fact that God revealed to him at least one component of His plan; the blessing of all nations.

Truth revealed in First Century A.D.

However Paul explains that it was not until after Jesus' sacrifice and the giving of the Holy Spirit that one part of God's promise to Abraham was fulfilled: *"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the*

children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham... That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:6-14). The giving of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles is one part of the gospel that God *"preached to Abraham"* which was not revealed until "later".

Present truth

The gradual revelation of God's plan has continued to this very day. One example is present day conditions: they fulfil, at least in part, what the prophet Daniel wrote more than 2000 years ago. Concerning Daniel's prophecy being fulfilled today the historian Rollins wrote: *"Can any reasonable man who makes use of his understanding ascribe such a prediction either to mere chance or to the conjectures of human prudence and sagacity? Can any light but that which proceeds from God Himself penetrate, in this manner, into the darkness of futurity and point out the events of it in so exact and circumstantial a manner? The state of the world to-day reflects the days of Lot in Sodom, and the days of Noah before the flood, and there can be no doubt that a great calamity on the human race is pending: 'And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed' (Luke 17:26-30)." Mr. Rollins deemed the present conditions so amazing that *"no reasonable man"* can contribute them to anything other than the fulfilment of the prophecies contained in God's Word, that is, that present day conditions are *"present truth"*.*

As well as the decline in moral standards, there are numerous technological developments that are fulfilling aspects of God's plan, and which were not understood in times past. One such development is the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy of *"many running to and fro and knowledge being increased"* (Dan. 12:4). The increase in the amount of travel by

common people and the speed at which they travel are phenomena that exceed the expectations of many who lived as recently as the twentieth century. Likewise the increase in medical technology and electronic communication techniques surpasses many of the expectations, even of those who worked in and were regarded as experts in those fields, as recently as forty years ago. Consequently "*knowing the present truth*" may justifiably be understood to mean, at least in part, being aware of such developments and attributing them to be part of the fulfilment of Bible prophecy.

Peter's exhortation

Nevertheless the question may be asked: to which truths was Peter referring in 2 Peter 1:12?

Peter's objective was not to teach them anything new but to "*put them in remembrance*" of the things they already knew. Consequently it follows that Peter was not referring to the developments of the last 100 years or so, nor to the technological developments that may be inferred to be fulfilments of Daniel's prophecy, nor to the decline in moral standards prophesied by Jesus, nor to any political development of our time.

In trying to identify to what Peter was referring it is pertinent to remember that Peter wrote that they had already been given "*all things that pertain to life and godliness*". That statement was a reminder because he had told them in his first letter, that "*they had been begotten to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you*" (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

Hence, in the context of Peter's letter, the means by which they could attain eternal life was "present truth", it not being "available" nor revealed until after Jesus came to earth: "*I am come that they might have life*" (John 10:10). That the hope of eternal life was "new" and as such was "present truth" is reflected by it being a centre point of Paul's preaching: "*Paul... an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God... promised before the world began; But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour*" (Titus 1:1-3).

The hope of eternal life was so "new" that, in his letter to Titus, Paul repeated it: "*That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life*" (Titus 3:7). (As an aside the details of the hope of eternal life being new in Paul's day is reflected in the fact that the expression "*eternal life*" does not occur in the Old Testament.)

The hope of eternal life was not an addition to God's plan but was part of it from the beginning, having been "*promised before the world began*", but the details regarding how it was to be accomplished were not revealed to mankind until God's due time. In other words, Peter was reminding them of the change of dispensation and the consequent benefits to them.

Paul's words agree with those of the Apostle John who wrote in his epistles that the hope of eternal life was not manifest until after Jesus came to earth: "*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*" (1 John 5:11-13). Truly, at the time when Peter wrote, the hope of eternal life was "*present truth*".

Godliness

Peter also reminded them that they had been given "*all things that pertained unto godliness*" (2 Pet. 1:3). Godliness is reverence for God and Peter reminded his readers that it is through their knowledge of their calling (2 Pet. 1:10) that they were able to revere God.

Peter considered it necessary to remind them they had been called to godliness because Israel of old discarded their knowledge of God, and hence their reverence for Him, and suffered the consequences: "*Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land... Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away... Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God...*" (Hosea 4:1-6).

In similar vein Paul wrote to the Romans reminding them of the need to retain God in their knowledge: "*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness...*" (Rom. 1:28-32).

Paul also lamented that some of the Philippians failed to retain God in their knowledge—that is, retain

reverence for God—substituting their material welfare (their “belly”) for Him: *“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)”* (Phil. 3:17-19).

Thus it is apparent why Peter declared he would not be negligent to put them in remembrance of those things and that it was by His divine power that God had revealed these things to them.

Their calling

Peter also reminds them that they had been called: *“Him that hath called us to glory and virtue”*. God’s calling was present truth at that time but it had not been in previous times: *“Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit”* (Eph. 3:5). It could not be made known in earlier times because the Spirit could not be given until after Jesus was glorified (John 7:39).

Further, those to whom Peter was writing were “strangers”: *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”* (1 Pet. 1:1). Paul explains the sense of the term “strangers” in his letter to the Ephesians: *“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ”* (Eph. 2:11-13).

Precious promises

Consequently Peter reminded them that they had received *“exceeding great and precious promises”* and particularly because it was by them that they might be *“partakers of the divine nature”*.

The Divine Nature

There is more than one meaning that may be ascribed to the term “divine nature”.

One understanding is that it refers to the status of the glorified saints during Jesus’ reign: *“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the*

beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4).

An alternate understanding is that it refers to the standard to which Christians are to aspire during their life on earth. There is no thought that they will achieve it because that would mean they become perfect while in the flesh, but it is the standard to be kept in view. However that understanding depends on the meaning of the word “partakers”. The Greek word translated “partakers” (Strong #2844) occurs only 10 times and in some verses it may be interpreted to refer to the present life and not a future life:

- *“And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been **partakers** with them in the blood of the prophets”* (Matt. 23:30);
- *“And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were **partners** (with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men”* (Luke 5:10);
- *“Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices **partakers** of the altar?”* (1 Cor. 10:18);
- *“But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have **fellowship** with devils”* (1 Cor. 10:20);
- *“And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are **partakers** of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation”* (2 Cor. 1:7);
- *“Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my **partner** and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ”* (2 Cor. 8:23);
- *“If thou count me therefore a **partner**, receive him as myself”* (Philemon 17);
- *“Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became **companions** of them that were so used”* (Heb. 10:33).

While it might be unclear whether to apply the term “divine nature” in 2 Peter 1:4 to this life, both understandings should motivate the Christian to strive to put off the characteristics of the natural man: *“If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”*. (Eph 4:21-24). The call to do so is indeed known today—it is present truth. ■

ISRAEL AND AMMON

“And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon” (Judges 10:7).

One of the secrets of God’s dealings with the human race, and which is known only by those whom He has enlightened, is that, as Daniel testified, He uses whomsoever He pleases to accomplish His purposes: *“Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him” (Dan. 2:20-22).*

One example of God utilizing human agencies is His use of Pharaoh at the time of Israel’s exodus from Egypt: *“And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; **that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth.** For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed **for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth**” (Exod. 9:13-16).* God’s purpose was not to bring blessing on Egypt, but to show Pharaoh, and ultimately the whole world, His power. Such a motive or purpose might seem to be a trivial purpose compared to the drama of the forthcoming plagues, nevertheless that was God’s purpose, and the principle of God using comparatively extensive procedures to achieve what to the human might seem a side issue, is one characteristic that pervades several features of God’s plan.

Another example of God utilizing human agencies to accomplish His purposes is that of His use of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon: *“In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying Thus saith the LORD to me; Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck, And send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah; And command them to say unto their masters, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say unto your masters; I have*

made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son’s son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him. And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand” (Jer. 27:1-8).

God’s use of Nebuchadnezzar to carry out such significant actions is testimony to the fact that God uses whom He pleases without reference to their standing among the nations. Some of the recorded aspects that testify that Nebuchadnezzar was God’s agent or “servant” are:

- God identified Himself as the One who made the earth, and mankind, and the beasts. Thus Nebuchadnezzar was an agent of creator God;
- It was God who gave the land to Nebuchadnezzar;
- Nebuchadnezzar’s supremacy would last until the “very time of his land”;
- God declared that He would claim He was the One who accomplished the subjection of these five kings, even though it was Nebuchadnezzar who would carry it out.

Israel as God’s agent

God has used not only kings to carry out His plans but indeed whole nations, the nation of Israel being one: *“But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend... Thou art my servant... Fear thou not; for I am with thee... I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel... That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it” (Isa. 41:8-20).* The nation of Israel was to perform a disciplining work among the nations, not for their

own glory, but that the nations may know that God is the supreme and Almighty Power.

God also uses the transgressions of nations, as well as accomplishments, to effect His purposes. As His servant, God is going to use Israel's waywardness as one of His means of educating the heathen of the consequences of disobedience: *"And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant... 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. 9:11-16). Ultimately Israel's scattering—a punishment for their waywardness—will be an instrument of instruction to themselves, and to the other nations, of the consequences of disobedience: *"So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies..."* (Eze. 39:22-23).

Forgiveness

Consistent with His utilization of their transgressions as His means of correcting Israel, God will forgive their trespasses: *"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward".* But then follows: *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool"* (Isa 1:3-4; 18). The meaning of "reason" in verse 18 is not one of Israel bargaining with God but of "being right" (Strong's H3198). The verse therefore challenges Israel to realise that, in spite of their previous transgressions, God will forgive them; that is, He will "wipe the slate clean" and their sins "shall be as white as snow".

God's forgiveness of previous transgressions is an essential part of God's plan because it is the means by which the nations will acknowledge God as a merciful God. It is also the means by which the nations will learn from their experience with sin and

death because they will be granted a "fresh start". Thus Paul declares: *"I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid... God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew... (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day... I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles..."* (Rom. 11:1-11). It is because God will forgive Israel of their previous transgressions that He is able to "not cast them off".

Further, the wonders of God's plan is illustrated by the fact that Israel will not only be forgiven of their previous errors but they will be leaders among the nations: *"Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. 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. 8:22-23). The nations will recognise that Israel is one of the agents God has used to carry out His plans and that God alone is indeed the Omnipotent One.

Ammon

Israel is not the only people whom God has used to accomplish His purposes and whose dealings are recorded in the Old Testament, Ammon is another. Judges 3:12-13 records God using Ammon, in combination with the Moabites, to punish Israel: *"And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees"* (Judges 3:12-13).

On another occasion God used Ammon to punish Israel for their worship of heathen gods: *"And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and... the gods of the children of Ammon... and forsook the LORD, and served not him. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed"* (Judges 10:6-9).

God's predetermined plan

God's dealings with the Ammonites were not random events determined in hindsight, but were part of a predetermined plan: *"Concerning the Ammonites, thus saith the LORD... I will cause an alarm of war to be heard in Rabbah of the Ammonites; and it shall be a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire: then shall Israel be heir unto them that were his heirs, saith the LORD"* (Jer. 49:1-2).

Zephaniah confirmed that God's punishment of Ammon was predetermined: *"I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified themselves against their border. Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them. This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the LORD of hosts. The LORD will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen"* (Zeph. 2:8-11). It was because of Ammon's "reproach" of God's people, Israel, that Ammon will be "as Gomorrah". However it is important to remember that Ammon was merely an instrument in God's hand which He used to humble Israel when they were deviant.

Neighbours

God has used several other nations also as instruments in His hand, but Ammon is of particular interest because they were neighbours of Israel, being on the eastern side of the Jordan River, the area now known as Jordan. According to the OECD/World Bank statistics issued in 2008, about half of the current population of Jordan are descendants of the Palestinians, and hence it is possible some of the characteristics of the nation of Jordan today are consequences of them being descendants of the people of Ammon.

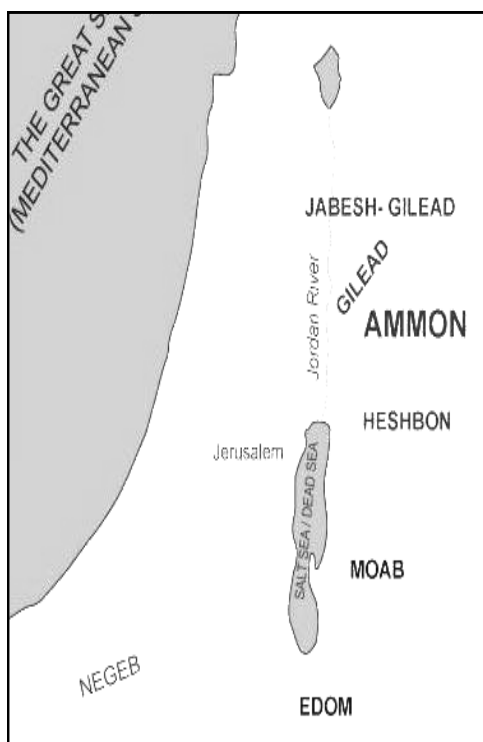
The present dispute over the occupation of the area known as the West Bank might relate to the situation that existed in Old Testament times. The Ammonites

were a warlike people: *"And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel"* (Judges 11:4), and as mentioned above, at one time *"the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim..."* (Judges 10:9). If the following excerpt from *The Jordan Times*, published on November 28, 2015, accurately reflects the current attitude of Jordan towards Israel, it seems the current attitude is similar to that held during the times of the Judges: *"Israel alone is responsible for the current wave of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories. And while one is not sure whether the events there are the spark of another Intifada, it is certain that the tragic events that are unfolding in front of our eyes are the direct result of Palestinian desperation and of Israel's*

continued provocation, oppression and colonisation of Palestinians. Israel is making it impossible for the Palestinians to stay put. The Israeli government is building more settlements and expanding existing ones. This requires more land, which Israel is usurping from Palestinian inhabitants. It is also demolishing houses, imprisoning people for the most trivial reasons, disrupting daily life in mean ways through its numerous checkpoints, and provoking and killing motorists and pedestrians in cold blood. Its lawless settlers are burning houses and murdering peaceful Palestinian children, men and women. And its religious extremists are transgressing and endangering the holiest Islamic site in

Palestine, Al Aqsa Mosque, under the very eyes and protection of Israeli politicians and police. Beyond this, Israel has deliberately sabotaged the peace process in an attempt to destroy the Oslo Accords, the idea of a two-state solution and the various UN resolutions which guarantee Palestinians their right to liberty and full statehood". It is only when one understands that all events, in the Middle East and elsewhere, are under God's control, and that when His time comes, all will be resolved according to His plan, that such animosity can be explained.

Further, just as God will disregard Israel's transgressions and has promised to gather them again in their own land, God will do likewise with the people of Ammon: *"afterward I will bring again the captivity of the children of Ammon, saith the LORD"* (Jer. 49:6). (As an aside, it is important to



note that, when the Lord is the captor, an expression of “captivity” signifies a time of blessing and not of punishment: *“Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad”* (Psa. 14:7).) Just as Israel will rejoice when God is their captor—brings them back to their land—so too will Ammon.

Additionally, along with all nations, Ammon will be subservient to Israel: *“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... from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim... they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them”* (Isa 11:11-14).

God’s ways past finding out

It is the exercise of such autocratic power—at one time using a nation to punish another but then later punishing the nation that was His instrument—that, in part at least, makes God’s plans mysterious to mankind and which “justifies” cynicism, because, to the secular mind, it may be considered inconsistent and contrary to God being a “God of love”. In order to rationalize all events it is necessary to keep in mind that ALL events in the world are part of God’s overall global plan, that that plan encompasses all mankind and was “conceived” before He created the universe: *“For the creature was made subject to*

vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20-21).

Just as God’s plan has been in effect since the beginning of time, so it will not be fully accomplished until the times of restitution are fulfilled, when all mankind will enjoy prosperity and peace on a scale never before experienced: *“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (Isa. 11:1-9).■

OUR RATIONAL WORLD

The following is the text of a prayer given recently by Minister Joe Wright when opening a session of the Kansas Senate. When he was asked to open the new session everyone expected the usual generalities, but this is what they heard.

* * *

“Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, ‘Woe to those who call evil good’, but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem. We have abused power and called it politics. We have

coveted our neighbor’s possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression. We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, Oh, God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Amen!”

* * *

The response was immediate. A number of legislators walked out during the prayer in protest. In 6 short weeks, Central Christian Church, where Rev. Wright is pastor, logged more than 5,000 phone calls with only 47 of those calls responding negatively. The church is now receiving international requests for copies of this prayer from India, Africa and Korea. The question arises are there yet 7000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18; Rom. 11:4)?■

SANCTIFYING THE LORD

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

In his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul told them that there were no grounds for them to be proud of their knowledge of God's secrets, nor of their faith, because it was by God's grace (or favour) that they had their understanding of His plan and purpose for them: *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)... That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"* (Eph. 2:4-10).

Paul reminded the Philippians also that it was God's work and favour that enlightened them: *"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you... Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"* (Phil. 1:3-6).

And to the Corinthians also Paul wrote: *"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption"* (1 Cor. 1:30). Paul declared that their wisdom was *"of him"*, that is it was God's work. Later in his letter he emphasised that their understanding was due to God dealing preferentially with them in that He has not given His Holy Spirit to everyone: *"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 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. 2:7-10). It was only because God had revealed His secrets to them by His spirit that they knew anything.

Sanctification

Paul told the Corinthians that God had *"made Christ Jesus... sanctification"*, and the Thessalonians that sanctification was God's will for them: *"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification..."* (1 Thess. 4:3).

Sanctification has been part of God's arrangement since creation: *"And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made"* (Gen. 2:3). One provision that sanctified (separated) the seventh day was that no servile work was permitted to be carried out on that day: *"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it"* (Exod. 20:8-11). "Hallowed" means the same as "sanctified"; in the Old Testament both words are translated from the Hebrew word *"qâdash"* (Strong's #6942) which Dr. Strong defines as *"a primitive root; to be ... or pronounce or observe as clean (ceremonially or morally)".* Being "clean" implies holiness, and the word "holy" quoted in Exodus 20:8 above is translated from the same Hebrew word *"qâdash"*.

Sanctification applied not only to the Sabbath, but also to the altar in the tabernacle, and the priests involved in temple service: *"And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office"* (Exod. 29:44). They were set apart for exclusive use in those services.

Another aspect of sanctification as it applied to the tabernacle was that sanctification did not alter the qualities of the inanimate objects. Jesus reiterated this principle when He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees regarding the temple services: *"Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?"* (Matt. 23:17, 19). The point is that inanimate things could not make themselves holy; they were holy because of the function for which they were used. Likewise in the tabernacle and the temple there was a place called the holy of holies, which simply means that it was a place that was set apart and reserved for particular services.

However the sanctification of personnel was different, they were to be changed inwardly: *"For I*

am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44-45). The people were to sanctify themselves and keep themselves holy (or pure). Thus they bore some of the responsibility. The same principles apply to the Christian: their sanctification is to be a consequence of God giving them His Holy Spirit and therefore giving them insight into the secrets of His plan. The Christian is to make every effort to sanctify themselves.

Sanctified by the truth

Jesus also asked God to sanctify His followers *"through the truth"* (John 17:17). It is the truth that sanctifies, that is, that enables one to stand apart from the evil in the world. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: *"...take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth..."* (Eph. 6:13-14). The truth provides the conviction that is necessary to resist the Evil One.

Paul told the Thessalonians that abstinence from evil would lead to them being sanctified in the fullest sense: *"Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thess. 5:22-23).

Peter's exhortation

In view of the Christian's standing being initiated by God, and being dependent on a knowledge of His truth, which in turn is only made possible by Him having given them of His Holy Spirit, it might seem an anomaly that Peter wrote that the believer must sanctify God.

The seeming contradiction is resolved when it is realised that Peter's exhortation was not that the Christian would in any way alter or affect God's character, but that the Christian is to sanctify God in their heart; that is, the change is to occur within the Christian. The exhortation is reflected in Jesus' model prayer to His disciples: *"Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thine name"* (Matt. 6:9). The Christian is to hallow, or set apart, God's name from all else.

Indeed such a disposition was part of the Law given to Moses: *"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain... Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy"* (Exod. 20:7-8). God's name was to be revered as

was the Sabbath day. Sanctifying or hallowing God's name implies recognition that God is almighty, that He is above and separate from all others. A sanctified Christian's desire is to show forth His praises in every aspect of their life. As Peter later wrote: *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light"* (1 Pet. 2:9).

In practice

Paul instructed Timothy regarding one aspect of how he was to sanctify God: *"As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm"* (1 Tim. 1:3-7). Paul's instruction contains several separate exhortations:

- He was to teach no other doctrine. Any doctrine other than that which was taught by the apostles would not bring honour and glory to God because it would not set Him apart from every other god;
- In that vein Timothy was not to engage in erroneous disputes about the nature of life and the future of the world. Likewise the Christian today is to recognise and sanctify the truth of the gospel and must not enter into debates involving man's philosophies;
- Timothy was to ensure he maintained a clear conscience, an admonition applicable to the Christian today: *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron"* (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

Sanctification requires a Christian to be careful about their activities: *"And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty"* (2 Cor. 6:15-18).

May everyone whom God has blessed with a gift of the Holy Spirit strive to ensure they sanctify God wholly within their heart.■

HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED: COUNSELLOR

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

The role of a counsellor is to advise and guide another.

However there have been some mischievous counsellors in Jerusalem: *"Then said he unto me, Son of man, these are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city" (Eze. 11:1-2).* But it was not always so, nor will it continue to be so in the future. Isaiah 1:26 reads: *"I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city".* The counsellor to whom Isaiah's prophecy refers is the glorified Jesus Christ: *"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD... with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and... righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins..." (Isa. 11:1-5).*

In that day the people will rejoice in the counsel they receive: *"O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?" (Isa. 40:13-14).*

The Lord has not needed a counsellor because He was the creator: *"For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited... I declare things that are right... there is none beside me" (Isa. 45:18-21).*

A teacher is also a counsellor; they guide and give advice to their students. The Lord will provide truthful teaching and guidance: *"Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" (Psa. 25:8-9).*

The time is coming when mankind will seek Him as their righteous teacher: *"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills;*

and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Micah 4:1-2).

The teacher they will seek is Jesus Christ: *"... Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (1 Pet. 3:21-22).*

Those whom God has blessed in this present time by giving them of His Holy Spirit are privileged to enjoy His counsel now: *"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psa. 32:8).*

One of the secrets of God's guidance is that He has blinded the eyes of the nation of Israel so that they will be an instrument by which He will instruct (counsel) the rest of mankind in the time prophesied by Micah and quoted above. The blindness of Israel in the present time does not mean His plan has failed, on the contrary, it will, in due time, be a testimony to the nations that God is overall and He has done things wisely. Paul explained the Lord's strategy: *"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? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:32-36).* *"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isa. 25:9).*■

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Email: EnquiryBBI@gmail.com

Internet: www.bbi.org.au

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