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WHEN YE SEE ALL THESE THINGS

A desire for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth is the second element of the model prayer Jesus gave to His disciples. The petition is preceded only by their address to their Heavenly Father: *“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).

Matthew 24:14 records Jesus’ reference to the preaching of the kingdom as the gospel: *“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come”*. Consequently it is understandable that the disciples wished to know when the kingdom would be established.

Jesus’ statement that the preaching of the kingdom comprised the gospel was part of His response to His disciples’ other questions recorded in verse 3: when the temple would be destroyed; what would be the sign of His coming (Greek: *parousia*—presence); and of the end of the world (Greek: *aion*—age).

They did not understand

However at least two of the disciples did not understand that a period of time would elapse before the kingdom would be established: *“And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus... And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, ‘What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?’ And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, ‘Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?’ And he said unto them, ‘What things?’ And they said unto him, ‘Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers*

delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done” (Luke 24:13-21). The disciples had previously thought that Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel—they did not know of His sacrifice.

A fundamental element of the gospel

The establishment of the kingdom of God is such a fundamental element of the gospel that after His resurrection it was Jesus’ principal theme: *“To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God”* (Acts 1:3).

Consequently it is understandable that, after His resurrection, His disciples wished to know if He would establish the kingdom at that time. However the time for them to know had not yet come: *“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not*

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for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:6-8). Jesus introduced them to the idea that there was a work to be accomplished—and the work would require time to accomplish—before the kingdom would be established.

Their failure to understand these events from the beginning is testimony to the truth recorded in Mark 9:31-32: “For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But **they understood not** that saying, and were afraid to ask him”. And so it is that Christians today should not assume that they understand every facet of God’s plan—it is possible that there are stages and developments which have not yet been revealed, to them in spite of their diligent Bible study.

Signs of the times

However Jesus told His disciples that there would be signs which would indicate to them when the establishment of the kingdom was near: “So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors” (Matt. 24:33),

According to the traditional texts, the events which He listed can be classified into three groups:

- Those which would transpire before the kingdom would be established (“**the end is not yet**”). These events include the destruction of the temple, the rising up of false Christs and wars and rumours of wars (Matt. 24:2-5; Luke 21:6-9);
- Those which would constitute (or indicate) “**the beginning of sorrows**”. These events include nation rising against nation, famines, pestilences and earthquakes (Matt. 24:7-8; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11);
- Other events which included them being hated of all nations, many would be offended, many would be betrayed, false prophets would arise and deceive many, iniquity would abound, the love of many would wax cold. They would continue until the gospel of the kingdom had been preached in all the world for a witness to all nations—“**then shall the end come**” (Matt. 24:9-14).

Not all the events which Jesus listed were new, in fact all of them, except the rising of false Christs, the disciples’ persecution and the preaching of the gospel in all the world, had occurred in the past. And so the question may be asked, which details that Jesus gave answered the disciples’ questions?

Destruction of the temple

One event which had occurred previously was the destruction of the temple—it was destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar took Judah captive to Babylon: “At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged...And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king’s house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said...And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king’s house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man’s house burnt he with fire...And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that was in the house of the LORD, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon” (2 Kings 24:10-25:13).

However the temple had been rebuilt and was such a magnificent building that, in common parlance, His disciples wanted to “show Him around”: *And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down*” (Matt. 24:1-2).

False Christs

Another sign Jesus told His disciples was the rising of false Christs. The word “Christ” means “anointed”, that is, anointed with the Holy Spirit. The likelihood of anyone claiming to be anointed with the Spirit before Pentecost is small because there was doubt whether there was such a thing as the Spirit: “He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost (Greek: *pneuma*—a current of air; breath; Spirit) since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost” (Acts 19:2). The Holy Spirit was not given until after Jesus’ resurrection: “...for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39).

However there were false prophets in Old Testament times, the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:17-40) and the prophets in the days of Jeremiah (Jer. 14:14-15) being two examples.

Wars and rumours of wars

Wars have been part of the curse placed on mankind since very early times—the first war recorded is in Genesis 14:1-2: “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”.

Likewise, after their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites were faced with wars (Judges 1:1-4), and rumours were used to frighten enemies (2 Kings 19:6-7).

Hand in hand with war is the “*rising of nation against nation*”.

Famines and pestilences

Famines also have been the lot of mankind from early times; one of the earliest of those recorded resulted in Abraham going to Egypt (Gen. 12:10).

There is some doubt whether the word “pestilence” appears in the original text of Matthew 24:7. It is omitted by Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott, the American Standard Version, the Revised Version, the Contemporary English Version, the English Standard Version and the New International Version. The Revised Version and the New King James Version also omit it from Luke 21:11, but it is retained in Luke 21:11 by the other versions listed above.

Pestilence means a plague—“a troublesome or destructive person, animal or thing” (Strong’s Concordance). God has used pestilences to humble mankind, for example Pharaoh: “*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*” (Exodus 9:13-15). “*And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me*” (Exodus 10:3). One of the reasons why God brought plagues upon Egypt was to humble Pharaoh.

Earthquakes

There are only three earthquakes recorded in the Old Testament: in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-12), Ariel (Isa. 29:6) and Uzziah (Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5).

In the Scriptures, earthquakes also symbolise unrest or confusion—the Hebrew “*raah*” is translated as “commotion” (Jer. 10:22), “rushing” (Jer. 47:3; Ezek. 3:12-13), “quaking” (Ezek. 12:18), “shaking” (Ezek. 37:7; 38:19) and “rattling” (Nahum 3:2).

In divers places

In the King James Version, Matthew 24:7 reads: “*For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places*”.

The expression “*in divers places*” raises the question whether there is a difference between the occurrence of the phenomena that Jesus said would occur in the latter days compared with their occurrence in earlier times. As mentioned above, there are only three earthquakes mentioned in the Old Testament, but there have been numerous earthquakes in recent times. The significance of their occurrence is increased by them being in various (divers) parts of the world. Some of the most devastating ones in the last year have been in the Philippines, Indonesia, Haiti and China. The increased number of earthquakes might well indicate that the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth is near.

When ye see these things

Sceptics have suggested that, since the phenomena Jesus mentioned had occurred previously, the prophecy is insignificant; the only difference between historical times and “today” is that modern technology now publicises them. There is no doubt that, in the past, many events in the world went unnoticed because there was no communication media. However it is possible that there is some significance in Jesus’ words “*when ye see these things*”. In other words, the modern means of communication go hand in hand with the fulfilment of the prophecy—that it is the improved communications that are facilitating the people to “see” these things.

The improved communications media are themselves an indication that the kingdom is near, being one component of the fulfilment of the prophecy given to Daniel: “*But thou O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased*” (Dan. 12:4).

Then the end

The events listed in the remaining verses of Matthew 24—the rise of false prophets, the abounding of iniquity, preaching of the gospel on a world-wide scale, the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place and the fig tree putting forth leaves—are events all of which have occurred simultaneously during the last few decades. Consequently there might be some significance in Jesus’ statement that it will be when His followers see **all these things** that they are to know that the kingdom “*is near, even at the doors*” (Matt. 24:33).■

HOLD FAST WHAT YOU HAVE

The church at Philadelphia was exhorted to hold fast what they had: *"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"* (Rev. 3:11). In return for their diligence they were promised: *"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world..."* (Rev. 3:10).

The words of Psalm 91:9-10 give a similar assurance to those who do not stray from the Lord; the assurance is expressed in terms of making Him their dwelling place: *"Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling"*.

Jesus also reminded His disciples of the need for continual watch-care to ensure that they would receive their reward: *"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man"* (Luke 21:36).

Laodicea

The condition of the church at Laodicea was a stark contrast to the church at Philadelphia: *"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; 'These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent'"* (Rev. 3:14-19).

The language used in those verses categorizes a person's "Christianity" into one of three groups:

- "Cold", which denotes the state where there is no pretense of religion; everything is utterly lifeless and dead. Even the love that should exist between the members is cold; they have a cold or icy heart lacking interest in the needs of fellow members;
- "Hot", which denotes a warm and zealous heart, open and honest in its appreciation of Christ and what He has done for them. Consequently it is devoted in love to the service of their Master, and therefore with

warm-hearted and honest love towards each of their brethren. The disciples, after hearing Jesus speak on the road to Emmaus said: *"And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'"* (Luke 24:32).

- "Lukewarm", which denotes a tepid temperature (neither cold nor hot). The pictorial language used by the Lord to John is graphic, and may be somewhat distasteful, but it accurately conveys the message—drinking tepid water tends to cause nausea and so the expression *"I will spew you out of my mouth"*, although distasteful, is appropriate.

Safeguard or remedy

The members of the church were advised how to overcome their luke-warmness and become faithful followers of Christ, rich in spiritual things: *"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see"* (Rev. 3:18).

Buy from Me

Firstly they had to come to the source, Christ, to buy pure gold, that which had been subjected to the heat of the furnace to purify it from dross. Christ was comparing faith to gold, the most precious of metals, highly valued by mankind. The Apostle Peter reminded the brethren: *"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 1:7).

White garments

The Church of Laodicea was naked in the sense that it was relying on its own righteousness and not on the righteousness of Christ. Writing to the Philippians, Paul wrote: *"...And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith"* (Phil. 3:9-10). In similar vein the Psalmist wrote: *"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile"* (Psa. 32:1-2). Only the white raiment which Christ provides is able to "clothe" the human frame and cover their iniquity.

Eye salve

The Church of Laodicea was spiritually blind: they indulged themselves with worldly wealth—riches—

and consequently considered themselves to have “need of nothing” when they were *wretched and poor and blind...*” (Rev. 3:17). Christ counsels them to buy of him eye-salve, so that they might see (recognise) their undone condition.

Revelation 3:18 is the only place where the Greek word translated “eye-salve” (“*kollourion*” - Strong #2854) occurs in the New Testament. In the physical world it was a poultice or small cake which was placed on the eye; it remained on the eye for some time to allow its healing power to be absorbed.

However the eye salve referred to by Christ was the Holy Spirit, which opens spiritual eyes: “*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things*” (1 John 2:20).

The Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of spiritual vision in his letter to the Church at Ephesus: “*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power*” (Eph. 1:17-19).

Chastening

The Lord further instructed the angel to the Laodiceans to write: “*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent*” (Rev. 3:19). The words to the Laodiceans endorse those in Proverbs 3:12: “*For whom the LORD loves He corrects...*”. God’s intention is not to discourage, but to correct and guide those whom He loves, just as an earthly father chastens his children: “*Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?... Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby*” (Heb. 12:9-11). God’s correction of the Christian must be considered in the same light so that the believer will benefit from these experiences and become more zealous.

The Christian Today

The exhortation given to the Christians at Philadelphia, and the admonition given to the Laodiceans, are timely reminders for Christians in the twenty-first century. All of the threats which confronted the Christians in those times confront the Christian today, and thus the challenge today is the

same as it was then—to “*Hold fast what you have, that no one take your crown*”.

Material wealth

Many Christians today, especially those who live in the Western world, in general terms are more materially wealthy than at any previous time. Thus the temptations of which John spoke—“*the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life*” (1 John 2:16)—are particularly powerful, and therefore Christians should continually remember that they have “*little strength*” of their own. Such material prosperity has the potential to entice one to become lukewarm, and accordingly it is necessary to remember that the Lord’s chastening is for one’s ultimate welfare: “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him*” (James 1:12.). The true wealth is the “*gold tried in the fire*” (spiritual truth derived from the hearth of zealous study and faithful self-denial), and not the socially attractive and flamboyant lifestyles which tend to annul the development of humility.

Eye salve

It is necessary to constantly “*examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves...*” (2 Cor. 13:5). The spiritual eye must be focused on self: “*Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward*” (2 John 8).

Endurance

The Christian must constantly remind themselves that the race is to the end. Towards the end of his life the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing*” (2 Tim. 4:7-8). The crown to which Paul referred was not of withering leaves as was awarded to athletes in his day, but it was crown of righteousness which would never fade away, and which therefore implies eternal life. Additionally it will not be awarded by human judges but by the Righteous Judge who will “*execute judgment and justice in the earth*” (Jer. 23:5) to all who will enjoy the blessings of living in a restored earth.

Singleness of purpose

As Paul wrote: “*Brethren...this one thing I do...I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us...as many as be perfect, be thus minded...*” (Phil. 3:13-15).■

EPHRAIM AND JUDAH

“...the envy of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim” (Isaiah 11:13 NKJV).

Isaiah chapter 11 is one of the chapters upon which the hope of a future peaceful world is based. The first twelve verses speak of a time of harmony—animals which today are antagonistic towards each other (lambs, wolves, leopards, calves and lions) living in harmony and being led by a little child. Such a situation is so vastly different from what mankind has experienced for the last several thousand years that it is an exercise of faith to believe that such conditions will ever exist on this earth.

Verse 13 continues with the statement that *“the envy of Ephraim shall depart... and Judah shall not harass Ephraim”*. While such a statement is consistent with the peaceful order described in the earlier verses, its inclusion in the chapter implies that prior to the time described in Isaiah 11 there was antagonism between Ephraim and Judah, and that the antagonism was of such significance that the promise of its removal warranted inclusion in Isaiah 11.

Family relationship

In order to appreciate the source and duration of the antagonism it is necessary to review the relationship of Judah and Ephraim.

Judah was the fourth son of Jacob, by his first wife Leah (Gen. 29:35). Little is recorded of Judah's life, however it is recorded that he saved his brother Joseph's life when his other brothers wanted to kill him because of Jacob's special love for Joseph: *“... Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh’”* (Gen. 37:26-27).

Joseph was Jacob's eleventh son; the first by Rachel (his first ten sons were by Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah).

Ephraim was Joseph's second son, born of Asenath in Egypt: *“And to Joseph were born two sons ... whom Asenath... bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: ‘For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house’. And the name of the second he called Ephraim: ‘For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction’”* (Gen. 41:50-52). Thus Ephraim was Judah's nephew.

Antagonism between Ephraim and his (uncle) Judah developed over a period of time. The antagonism

might have been caused, at least in part, by their separate promotion by their ancestors. It is unclear whether either of them strove for supremacy; both had power endowed upon them.

Judah

Judah rose to prominence above his elder brothers because of their failure to uphold God's standards. The record is in Genesis 49. Verses 3 and 4 record Reuben's (Jacob's first-born) committal of incest with Bilhah, and verses 5 to 7 record Simeon and Levi's cruelty in slaying a man. Consequently Jacob pronounced: *“I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel”* (verse 7).

In stark contrast to the misdemeanours of Reuben, Simeon and Levi, Jacob pronounced: *“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes”* (verses 8-10). Thus Jacob prophesied that the tribe of Judah was destined to rule over all his sons who were to become the nation of Israel.

Ephraim

Ephraim's rise to prominence resulted from many steps along the way. The main events were:

- Jacob accepted Ephraim as one of his own sons, even though he was his grandson (Gen. 48:5);
- Jacob knowingly blessed Ephraim ahead of Joseph's first-born Manasseh (Gen. 48:18-20).

Thus, with Ephraim promoted above Manasseh, and Judah promoted above Reuben, Simeon and Levi, Ephraim and Judah were positioned to become prominent in Israel.

In the wilderness

Ephraim's and Judah's emergence as the two principal tribes started to emerge when they sojourned in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt, and before they entered the promised land.

Moses and Aaron were given instructions regarding where and how the tribes were to camp around the tabernacle:

- The tribe of Judah was to camp on the east side with three other tribes. However all four tribes

camped under the standard of the tribe of Judah—**Judah was the pre-eminent tribe** of this group (Num. 2:1-9);

- The tribe of Ephraim was to camp on the west side with Manasseh and Benjamin, under Ephraim's standard—**Ephraim was the pre-eminent tribe** of this group (Num. 2:18-24).

Inheritance in the land

When the Israelites entered the promised land, the tribe of Judah was properly given a portion because Judah was one of Jacob's sons. The boundaries of Judah's portion are defined in Joshua 15.

Levi was also one of Jacob's sons, however the tribe of Levi was not given any inheritance in the land because their commission was to serve in the tabernacle (Num. 18:21-23).

The allocation of the land which would "normally" have been Levi's is not clearly stated; however Ephraim was given his own portion, which was consistent with Jacob regarding him as one of his sons: *"So the children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance..."* (Joshua 16:4-9).

The kingdom divided

For some 450 years after the Israelites took possession of the promised land they were governed by judges (Acts 13:18-22), after which, in accordance with the wishes of the people, Samuel appointed Saul as their first king (1 Sam. 11:15-12:1).

Saul was followed by David (1 Sam. 16). David was a descendant of Judah (1 Chron. 2:3-15), and so, when the kingdom divided, one kingdom was known as either Judah or David.

David was succeeded by his son Solomon (1 Kings 1:13), however Solomon did evil and God pronounced that He would take the kingdom from him and give it to his servant Jeroboam, but He would leave one tribe with David's line (1 Kings 11:11-13).

Jeroboam was of the tribe of Ephraim and rebelled against Solomon (1 Kings 11:26), nevertheless Jeroboam was informed by the prophet Ahijah that God would *"rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give it unto him, even ten tribes"* (1 Kings 11:31-35).

Rehoboam's rule

However when Solomon died *"Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead"* (1 Kings 11:43). The record of Rehoboam's early reign is in 1 Kings 12:1-19. In summary, Rehoboam rejected the advice of Israel's

elders, accepted the advice of his contemporaries and increased the severity of the punishment meted out to the people. (One aside to his action is that he did not act alone but was directed by the Lord: *"So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was from the LORD, that He might fulfill His word, which the LORD had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat"*—verse 15).

Rehoboam's decision led to the division of the two camps: *"Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: 'What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!'"* So Israel departed to their tents...***So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day***".

The matter of names

Thus Israel became two kingdoms—one known as *"the house of Judah"* under the rule of Rehoboam and comprising the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the remaining ten tribes under Jeroboam being known as Israel (1 Kings 12:21-24).

However, due to the prominence of Ephraim amongst the ten tribes of Israel, the ten tribes are also referred to as Ephraim: *"But a man of God came to him, saying, 'O king, do not let the army of Israel go with*



you, for the LORD is not with Israel—not with any of the children of Ephraim” (2 Chron. 25:7)—the expression “the children of Ephraim” implies that the tribe of Ephraim was the dominant tribe of the ten tribe kingdom.

Conflict perpetuated

As mentioned above, 1 Kings 12:19 records that there has been antagonism between the ten tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judah since the division of the kingdom “unto this day”—a period exceeding 2800 years. There have been several battles between the house of Israel and the house of Judah, one of which is recorded in 2 Chronicles 13:1-20.

Another record of the antagonism between the two camps is in Isaiah 7:1-9: “Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, **king of Israel**, went up to **Jerusalem to make war against it**, but could not prevail against it. And it was told to the house of David, saying, ‘Syria’s forces are deployed in Ephraim’... So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind. Then the LORD said to Isaiah, ‘Go out now to meet Ahaz... and say to him: ‘Take heed, and be quiet’; do not fear or be fainthearted...Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying, ‘Let us go up against Judah and trouble it...thus says the Lord GOD: ‘It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass...Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, so that it will not be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, And the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established’”.

The promise of reconciliation

Having traced the history of the two houses of Israel—Ephraim and Judah—and the antagonism that has existed between them, Isaiah 11:13 gives a glorious hope. When the peace and harmony described in the earlier verses of the chapter—that animals which today are antagonistic towards each other will exist in harmony and be led by a little child—the picture would not be complete without an assurance that (“even”) Ephraim and Judah will be reconciled: “Also the envy of Ephraim shall depart, And the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, And Judah shall not harass Ephraim” (Isa. 11:13).

The new covenant

The precise terminology used in Jeremiah 31:1-37 is significant and adds weight to the prophecy of Isaiah:

- Verse 1: “At the same time,” says the LORD, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and

they shall be My people”—“All the families of Israel” are mentioned; not just some of the tribes;

- Verse 6: “For there shall be a day when the watchmen will cry on Mount Ephraim, ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God’”. Ephraim will seek to go to Zion (which is Jerusalem) and not be in conflict with her;
- Verse 9: “They shall come with weeping, And with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, In a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn”. The specific mention of Ephraim as His firstborn gives unqualified assurance that His dealings of old were not without purpose—as quoted above “... this thing was from the Lord” (1 Kings 12:15);
- Verse 18: “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained bull; Restore me, and I will return, For You are the LORD my God’”. Ephraim will repent and therefore be able to accept the blessings which God will pour out at that time;
- Verse 20: “Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD”. God will accept Ephraim back into His fold;
- Verse 27: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast...”. Both houses will be blessed;
- Verse 31: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...”. Again assurance is given that both houses will be blessed;
- Verses 35-37: “Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name): ‘If those ordinances depart from before Me’, says the LORD, Then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever. Thus says 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’, says the LORD”. The promise is sure—only if God’s initial work of creation can be fathomed by mankind will His promise fail.

Ezekiel the prophet

The prophet Ezekiel was also given assurance that Ephraim and Judah would be reconciled. The

promise is recorded in Ezekiel 37:12-25: *“Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel’... Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: ‘For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions’. Then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions’. Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand. And when the children of your people speak to you, saying, ‘Will you not show us what you mean by these?’— say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Surely I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand’... Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again.... David My servant shall be king over them... Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your*

fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever’”.

Promise repeated

The promise of a new covenant with both the house of Israel (Ephraim) and the house of Judah given to Ezekiel is repeated by the writer to the Hebrews, showing that the promise is yet to be fulfilled: *“For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord”* (Heb. 8:8-9).

Thus the reconciliation of Ephraim and Judah, which is somewhat inconspicuously referred to in Isaiah 11:13, precisely articulates one facet of God’s plan, exemplifies that His ways are above man’s ways, and confirms His mercy and goodness towards Israel. The fact that He will reconcile enemies of such long standing as Ephraim and Judah gives added confidence that He will also reconcile all the families of the earth. Indeed, the reconciliation of Ephraim and Judah may be regarded as more significant than the reconciliation of the animals described in Isaiah 11 because of mankind’s tendency to transgress.■

MODERN ISRAEL

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- Israel is one of the smallest countries in the world, having an area of 20,770 square kilometres, which is less than the USA state of New Jersey and less than one third of Australia’s smallest state (the island of Tasmania—68,401 square kilometres).
- Israel’s population (as at the end of 2008) was approximately 7,200,000, which was approximately 0.1% (1/1000) of the world’s population.
- Population density is approximately 300 persons per square kilometre (compared to India 336, UK 246, China 137, Syria 87, USA 31 and Australia 2.6) (not all data has been verified by the United Nations).
- Modern Israel is approaching 62 years of existence; Rome is thought to have existed for 2760 years.
- Israel is the largest immigrant absorbing country per capita in the world—an average of 350% p.a..
- It is the only country in history to have revived an unspoken language.
- Israelis have won more Nobel prizes per capita than any other country.
- There are more laureates in real numbers than China, Mexico and Spain.
- Israel has the eighth longest life expectancy (80.7 years), which is greater than the United Kingdom, USA and Germany.
- Israel is the only country to enter the twenty-first century with a net gain in the number of trees and in an area that is mainly desert.
- 93% of homes in Israel use solar energy which is the highest proportion in the world.
- Israel is the only country to have its indigenous population to return after 2000 years in exile.
- There are 26 declared Muslim states in the world; 18 professing Christian countries and one Jewish state.
- 76% of its population is Jewish, 20% Arab and the remaining 4% is a combination of several cultures.

BY REASON OF HIM

Romans 8:20 is a verse of Scripture which warrants close examination: “*For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but **by reason of him** who hath subjected the same in hope*” (KJV). What does it mean, “*He subjected creation to vanity?*” How was it “*not willingly*”, and what is His “*reason?*” Did mankind have any option? Does the verse have any bearing on the idea that Man has a “free will”?

The creature

The “*creature*” referred to in the verse is the whole of mankind. Strong's Concordance gives the meaning of the Greek word as “#2937- ktisis - original formation. It occurs 19 times and in the KJV it is translated “creature” or “creation” 17 times; “building” once (Heb. 9:11) and “ordinance” once (1 Pet. 2:13). In Romans 8:20 “ktisis” is translated “creation” in the NKJV, Revised Version, Diaglott, NIV and the Concordant Version.

Vanity

The word “vanity” is translated from the Greek “mataiotēs” (Strong #3153) which means “*inutility*”; figuratively “*transientness*”. It is translated “*futility*” in the NKJV, “*frailty*” in the Diaglott, and “*frustration*” in the NIV. All of the words amount to the same thing and are summarised by the figurative meaning “*transientness*”—that is, it is temporary and therefore not of lasting value. Solomon is regarded as one of the wise men who have lived on Earth and so it is not surprising that he tried to fathom God's purposes. After pondering numerous aspects of life he concluded: “*Vanity of vanities... all is vanity*” (Eccl. 12:8).

Solomon also concluded that God had a purpose in subjecting mankind to “vanity”. He wrote: “*I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: **this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith***” (Eccl. 1:12-13). Solomon concluded that God has given this “*sore travail*” to the sons of men for a purpose, that purpose being that man would be “*exercised therewith*”. Solomon's conclusion was based on his observations that: “*one generation passeth away and another cometh*”; the repetitive pattern of the sun rising and setting; the seeming purposeless winds; and the rivers failing to fill the ocean (a phenomenon now commonly called “the water cycle”). After observing these cycles he goes on to record how he observed the characteristics of human behaviour and how mankind sought meaning from joyfulness (laughter and mirth), wine,

material prosperity, servants and wealth (“*silver and gold*”). After all his deliberations Solomon repeats his conclusion in chapter 3 verses 10-11: “*I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it...*”.

The primary meaning of the Hebrew word from which “*exercised*” is translated is “to depress”; it also means “to humble”, and hence Solomon's conclusion is that God gave to mankind the present experience with vanity to humble Him.

Not willingly

Romans 8:20 states that the creation “*was made subject to vanity, **not willingly***”. The statement is significant—the word “not” is translated from the Greek “ou” (Strong #3756) which Dr. Strong says is “the **absolutely negative** adverb”; hence the statement is definite that mankind did **not** subject themselves to the vanity of the present experience.

Having reached that point in the argument the depth of truth contained in Romans 8:20 begins to become apparent—the creation did not willingly subject itself to vanity but **it was subjected by God**: “*by reason of Him who subjected the same in hope*”.

Several other translations endorse that understanding:

- “*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but **because of Him** who subjected it in hope*” (NKJV).
- “*For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but **by reason of him** who subjected it, in hope*” (RV).
- “*For the creation was made subject to frailty (not voluntarily, but **by him who placed it under**)*” (Diaglott).
- “*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but **by the will of the one** who subjected it*” (NIV).
- “*For to vanity was the creation subjected, not voluntarily, but **because of Him** who subjects it*” (Concordant).

God's reason

The Apostle's next statement in Romans 8:20, that it was subjected “*by reason of Him*”, means that the arrangement was engineered by God. It is indeed as Solomon expressed: “***hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith***” (Eccl. 1:13). The next step in trying to understand God's reason for subjecting mankind to vanity (the present experience of mortal life), is to understand and acknowledge that God is superior to mankind.

Regardless of whatever other attributes God possesses, He is a jealous God, so jealous in fact that He told Israel: *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God...”* (Exodus 20:3-5).

As creator and ruler of the universe it is God’s prerogative to use whatever means He chooses to accomplish His purposes. During Israel’s exodus from Egypt He used deprivation to keep them humble: *“All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply... And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to **humble** thee... to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or not. And he **humbled** thee... Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God ... Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were... drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint... **that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end...**”* (Deut. 8:1-16). In human terms, God’s actions were a pre-emptive measure to off-set the likelihood of them becoming proud and self-sufficient when they later became prosperous.

God’s reason needs to be fully grasped here. Israel had been in bondage in Egypt for more than 400 years and yet in His wisdom God subjected them to further deprivation in the wilderness to humble them. As well as that, His purpose was that He might do them *“good **at the latter end**”*, that is, that it would be to their ultimate benefit rather than necessarily being for their immediate benefit. The same principle applies to His dealing with the world of mankind and their subjection to vanity at this time.

The larger scale

God’s plan is to deliver all mankind from *“the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”* (Rom. 8:21). Thus it is apparent that His dealing with Israel during their exodus is one example that has been *“written aforetime for our learning”* (Rom. 15:4) and it illustrates how He uses adverse experiences to accomplish His purpose. In Israel’s case He imposed deprivation in the wilderness to humble them so that they would not

“lift up their hearts and forget the Lord thy God” in their later prosperity. In the same way mankind today is experiencing a lifetime of suffering so that they will not lift up their hearts in the times of their prosperity which are yet future. It is the same strategy as He used with Israel but on a much larger scale—indeed it is on a world-wide scale. God’s purpose in giving this sore travail to mankind for such a long period is so that, when *“the times of restitution of all things”* comes (Acts 3:21), when *“the inhabitant shall not say I am sick”* (Isa. 33:24), when *“the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, and the lame man shall leap as an hart, when streams shall break out in the desert”*, when all mankind shall *“come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads”* (Isa. 35:5-10), when there will be *“no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain”* (Rev. 21:3-4), they will **not** lift up their hearts with pride, but will say, *“... Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths”* (Isa. 2:3).

It is at that time that the *“sore travail”* will have accomplished its purpose. The lesson is so powerful that they will say *“this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation”* (Isa. 25:9).

The Apostle Paul’s statement in Romans 8:20 that *“... the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but **by reason of him** who hath subjected the same in hope”* expresses in a few words a profound part of God’s plan.■

Suffer me first

Luke 9:59-60: *“And he said unto another, ‘Follow me’. But he said, ‘Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father’. Jesus said unto him, ‘Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God’”*.

It is not the attendance to physical funeral arrangements that present the Christian with the challenge Jesus presented to his would-be follower, but the matter of priorities.

The temptations presented by earthly cares and responsibilities are so powerful that one can easily put them ahead of the principal task of preaching the Gospel, in whatever form of service God has given us: *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Matt. 6:33).■

LOVE HOPES ALL THINGS

The Apostle Paul's purpose in writing what is commonly referred to as "1 Corinthians 13", was not to explain the meaning of each of the aspects of love, but rather to remind the Corinthian Christians that by striving for the prominent and spectacular gifts of the Spirit they were missing the essence of their sanctification. Thus in verse 7 he simply states that "*love hopeth all things*"; with no expansion of what that requirement involved—the believers at Corinth were expected to know what hope was and how it was a part of the quality of love. Nevertheless, in order to appreciate the relationship between love and hope it is necessary firstly to have a clear concept of the nature of hope.

Nature of hope

There are at least three characteristics of hope.

Hope relates to things yet future. Romans 8:24-25 reads: "*For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it*". Consequently the exercise of hope as an aspect of love requires a vision of things yet future—things which the loving one desires will transpire in the life of the loved one. In the words of another, "hope is a forward reaching concept".

Secondly, hope implies a desire for change. If one has all one wishes—expressed by Paul above as "*things seen*"—there is no place for hope. However hope is essential to the Christian because it is the basis of faith: "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1). The hope of the Christian is for something better than the present, both for those they love and for all mankind, and that hope is essential to enable them to love everyone, even their enemies.

It is important to realise that hope for something different in the future does not mean that hope is unsure or uncertain—that there is some doubt that the desired condition will be fulfilled. The Christian's hope is not uncertain but is "*an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast*" (Heb. 6:19).

Thirdly, hope acknowledges that another power or agency is involved in bringing about the change. If that were not the case, the person who loves another would implement the change themselves and there would not be any need for hope. Thus implicit in hope is belief in a higher power, and for the Christian it is that God will work out all things for good.

The highest desire that any person can have for another in this life is that the other will be given spiritual insight and will consequently enjoy all that the Spirit imparts. The only influence which can change a person into the likeness of Jesus Christ is the Holy Spirit, and that transformation is the highest that anyone can hope for another.

That is not to say that the Christian expects everyone to develop "*Christ likeness*" in the present life, but "*Christ likeness*" is the only standard which, when adopted by every individual, will enable peace and harmony to permeate the earth.

Death

The ultimate experience in the exercise of hope for a loved one is at their death. Those who have been available to a dying loved one as they draw their last breath realise that the only source of comfort at that time is the hope that, at some time in the future, the loved one will be restored to life. The hope of the resurrection was the basis of the Apostle Paul's faith as he testified before Felix: "*And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust*" (Acts 24:15). In his letter to Titus he wrote: "*Paul, a servant of God, and 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, that cannot lie, promised before the world began*" (Titus 1:1-2). Indeed, as Paul also wrote: "*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*" (1 Cor. 15:19). In the ultimate sense, love for another implies the hope of their resurrection to eternal life.

Immediate events

Nevertheless, in the immediate sense, the Christian is to have hope for all with whom they come into contact; hope that the other will have experiences which will give them comfort now as well as ultimate joy in the future. ■

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