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IF I BE LIFTED UP

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die" (John 12:32-33).

It is probable that Jesus' statement quoted above was more profound than His listeners realised—the words reveal that He knew it was His Father's plan for Him to be crucified.

Signifying what death He should die

A realisation that Jesus knew beforehand that He was to be crucified adds significantly to an understanding of His devotion to His Father, and the love He had for mankind. He would have known what crucifixion involved, yet He did not consider withdrawing from His commitment. On the contrary, at the final hour, He renewed that commitment and prayed to His Father: *"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour"* (John 12:27). He knew He had completed His work on earth and all that remained for Him to do was to endure the cross.

One historian has written that crucifixion often began with a flogging, after which the victim was required to carry his own cross to the execution site. At the crucifixion site the victim was laid on the cross while it was horizontal on the ground and metal spikes driven through his wrists. After being hoisted to a vertical position, "the cross" was tied to a previously erected post and nails driven through the victim's feet. There is evidence that one spike penetrated an ankle bone, piercing the heel.

There have been several diagnoses of the ultimate cause of death, ranging from suffocation, accumulation of fluid in the lungs, nervous exhaustion, loss of blood and heart failure.

Such graphic language is distressing to read, nevertheless merely reading such details provides some appreciation of the agony which Jesus suffered during the hours He hung on the cross, and such an appreciation helps the reader to better understand the depth of Jesus' love for mankind. As the Apostle

John wrote later: *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13); *"Hereby perceive we the love, because he laid down his life for us..."* (1 John 3:16)

No greater love than this

An understanding of His love for mankind is further increased when it is recalled that before He came to earth He enjoyed a glorious position with His Father in heaven: *"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was"* (John 17:5). In that glorious position He had made the worlds (John 1:3). He also made human kind whom He had now come to rescue from the grave: *"... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). He had come down from a celestial abode to an earthly abode: *"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me"* (John 6:38). But above all that, He had come to die, the just for the unjust: *"...For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:7-8). Jesus came to earth and died the most painful and ignominious death that mankind could conjure up.

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Even in His darkest hour, Jesus' first thought was not for His own welfare but that His Father's plan would be accomplished: "*Father, glorify thy name*" (John 12:28). God immediately assured Him that He had fulfilled His commission perfectly: "*Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes*" (John 12:28-30). His words to His disciples, that the voice came for their sakes, shows that they were His primary concern—He knew they would be dismayed, their confidence shattered, because they "*trusted that it was He who would redeem Israel*" (Luke 24:21). But now He would be dead. He knew also that they did not comprehend many of the words which He had spoken to them—it was not until after His resurrection that, "*...beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*" (Luke 24:27).

The judgement of the world

The record in John continues: "*Now is the judgment (Greek: *krisis*) of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out*" (John 12:31). "Now" was a crisis time for the world; now was the great turning point of the world's history. His sacrifice was crucial—if He successfully completed His work, the prince of this present evil world would be defeated. However if He failed, the whole world of mankind would continue to suffer the fruits of unrighteousness—there would not be any hope of them being restored to their original perfection on the earth which He and His Father had created for them.

For the joy set before Him

The record is that one of the factors which enabled Him to complete His sacrifice is the hope held out for Him: "*for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*" (Heb. 12:2).

It might be difficult to understand how any promise He had received could be an adequate reward for the sacrifice He made: leaving His heavenly home, being despised on earth and then being faced with the prospect of suffering the pain and ignominy of the cross. It might be difficult to understand how there was any joy set before Him which could adequately compensate Him for the sacrifice He would make. It is difficult to imagine how that prospect was joyful.

Additionally there is no explicit record in the Scriptures that God had promised Him anything, perhaps the most direct reference is Psalm 2:7-8: "*I*

will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession". From a human perspective, an inheritance of the heathen might not be very appealing, and certainly not one that could be deemed to adequately reward Him for the sacrifice He had made, and less so to qualify as a "joy". Such an assessment is supported by the fact that in the majority of occasions the reference to "heathen" means the Gentile nations, in contrast to the sons of Jacob who were Jehovah's own (Isa. 43:1). Nevertheless that was a promise that God had given Him and He did not shrink from declaring that decree; He rejoiced in it and had total confidence that God would honour it.

Thus is exemplified yet again the great love He had for mankind. It was the prospect of "inheriting them" (owning them; them being His possession)—wayward and sinners though they may be—that was a joy to Him. A principal feature of His inheritance was that He "*would draw all men unto Him*", not the sick and dying race that was now crucifying Him but the promise that He would draw them just as Moses' serpent, in earlier times, had drawn the Israelites: "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*" (John 3:14-19).

Moses and the serpent

The record of Moses lifting up the serpent is in Numbers 21:4-9: "*And they (the Israelites) journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the*

LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived”.

The Israelites had sinned and God punished them by sending deadly serpents amongst them. However when the people repented, God involved the serpent in the strategy by which He healed them. In this incident there are several parallels and several contrasts with the plight of mankind. One parallel is that God used a serpent as the agent by which mankind was caused to suffer pain and death, with which the disobedient human race has been plagued ever since: *“And... that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him”* (Rev. 12:9).

On the other hand one contrast between Moses’ serpent and the Devil is that Moses’ serpent was the agent by which God offered healing to the people—the Devil is not, and never will be, the agent by which God will heal the human race. In God’s due time, the devil will be destroyed: *“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are... And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death”* (Rev. 20:10, 14).

A concise summary

Consequently the lesson to be learned is that, because He was lifted up on the cross, Jesus will yet draw all men unto Him, and when they look upon Him they will be healed. The Apostle Paul summarised God’s plan for mankind in a few words: *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil. 2:5-11).

Paul’s concise summary lists Jesus’ coming down to earth, taking human form, dying on the cross, and the

promise that eventually every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will confess His lordship. Paul captured the scenario prophesied by Isaiah: *“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. 11:9).

This do in remembrance of me

Consistent with His devotion to His Father and denial of Himself, Jesus asked His followers to do no more than remember Him in a simple ceremony, the first of which was held on the anniversary of the Jewish Passover: *“And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined...”* (Luke 22:15-22).

The Apostle Paul, after chastising the Corinthian believers for not attributing due reverence to the occasion, wrote: *“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup”* (1 Cor. 11:23-28). One of the significant points to note in those verses is that the supper is to be eaten in remembrance of Him and not in remembrance of the Jewish Passover as was the original command (Exod. 12:14); Jesus’ sacrifice now supersedes the Passover (1 Cor. 5:7).

May all who love their Saviour, the Lord Jesus, *“... keep the feast... with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”* (1 Cor. 5:8) at this season of the year. It is a simple but solemn ceremony.■

HIS EXCEEDING ABUNDANCE

The Apostle Paul's objective always was to edify the saints: "...we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying" (2 Cor. 12:19). In his letters to the churches he referred to different aspects of God's plan, each aspect having a particular feature which he hoped would urge the saints to strive more earnestly for the faith that had been set before them.

The Ephesians

One of the aspects Paul used to encourage the Ephesians was God's all-conquering power: "*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man... that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen*" (Eph. 3:14-21).

The lesson for the Christian is that God's power is unlimited, and it is that same power which works in the Christian "*to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*".

Creation

In order to appreciate the power that is able to effect changes in, and protect, the Christian, it is necessary to review His power in other realms.

The first manifestation of God's power was the creation of the universe: "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*" (Gen. 1:1). The miraculous work of creation remains beyond the human mind to explain and the statement—"*created the heavens and the earth*"—may be considered to be somewhat nonchalant, that is, to not give due emphasis to the miraculous work.

However when considered in detail the work of creation exemplifies God's supremacy: "*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?*" (Psa. 8:3-4). The Psalmist likens the spectacle of the heavens to the work of a human being's fingers—fine needlework which adds detail and grandeur to a garment. It is an appropriate illustration.

Isaiah describes God's mastery over the universe from another perspective: "*Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in*" (Isa. 40:21-22). The prophet compares God's mastery with that of mankind over grasshoppers: the illustration deserves meditation.

Isaiah also describes God as sitting on the circle of the earth. That statement was made long before mankind understood that the earth was a globe and so illustrates God's power to enlighten His prophets without them understanding modern science. It is as Job declared: "*He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them*" (Job 26:7-8). Job was shown the nature of the planets and the mystery of them revolving in space, held in their places by something invisible to mankind. Again consideration of that fact aids the human mind to appreciate something of God's power.

Job also mentioned the water which the clouds can support without them "*being rent*". The mechanism by which the clouds can hold such weight of water—many thousands of tonnes—without being "rent", is something about which Man can only wonder. Certainly mankind now explains such a phenomenon in terms of convection and buoyancy, but the fact remains that mankind cannot even today engineer a structure which is able to uplift such a weight. Assuredly the power which God exercised in creation is far greater than what mankind can imagine.

Spiritual application

The Apostle Paul's reasoning in his letter to the Ephesians is that it is that same God who is working in those whom He has chosen, and therefore they should not doubt His ability to grant them all they require to "*comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge*".

Paul's words do not mean that everyone should comprehend every point of doctrine, or be able to develop every fruit of the Spirit, to the same degree as any other member. The members of the body are to understand that the body is comprised of different members, and just as the various members in the

physical human body have different abilities which enable them to perform their allocated tasks for the welfare of the whole body, so it is with the spiritual body: *“If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?”* (1 Cor. 12:17). Every member of His church has an attribute which they are to use for the welfare of the whole body, as Paul goes on to show: *“That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it”* (1 Cor. 12:25-26); *“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”* (Eph. 4:16). It is the contribution which every member makes that results in the complete functioning of the body—the unity of which should also result in every member sharing the trials and blessings of all others.

Change of motive

The power of God is such that it changes the motive of those whom He has called. Earlier in his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul concisely describes the change: *“And you (hath he quickened), who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 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)”* (Eph. 2:1-5).

There are several points in those verses that deserve consideration. Firstly the words *“hath he quickened”* are supplied by the translators and while overall they are in harmony with the passage, their insertion destroys some of the impact. If omitted, the verse reads: *“And you who were dead in trespasses and sins...”*—the focus is changed to emphasise the fact that, prior to their quickening, they were “dead in sins”. The omission makes the contrast more stark: their quickening has resulted in them changing from walking in harmony with the prince of darkness, fulfilling their fleshly desires to walking in light. Thus the power of God which was working in them is made more apparent. The work is not the work of the individual, but of God who had quickened them (made them alive) by His Holy Spirit.

The work of the Spirit is seen to be more remarkable when it is recalled that the members are not from the same background but are varied in origin. The task of unifying individuals from such diverse backgrounds into a unified body is one which world leaders today are finding impossible, regardless of how much consultation and debate is facilitated. Truly the work of the Spirit is something greater than that which any human mind can ask or think.

The Gentiles grafted in

The miracle of the unity of the body is emphasised by the grafting in of the Gentiles. They had no previous customs which even remotely resembled Israel’s ceremonies: *“... the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen”* (Rom. 9:4-5). Each of those practices and ceremonies were totally foreign to the Gentiles, and while the Gentiles were not to adopt them, their association with those who had practised them presented them with a challenge. Indeed, recognition of their differences is the main overall thrust of the Apostle Paul’s 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. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby”* (Eph. 2:11-16).

The Jewish practice of circumcision continued to be an issue in the early church (Acts 15). Likewise the Gentiles had no comprehension of the obligations and rituals of the Law Covenant. Indeed so great were the differences between them that the Apostle terms it a *“middle wall of partition”*.

Message complete

The Apostle concludes his message by exhorting them to remember that it was God’s power which was working in them, that all the glory of the transformation which they were undergoing was due to God, and that the glory would persist throughout the world—*“world without end”*. ■

KING DAVID ERA POTTERY

The following report was published on the internet web site, “*IsraelNationalNews.com*”, on January 8, 2010. It is reproduced with their permission.

A breakthrough in the research of the Hebrew Scriptures has shed new light on the period in which the Bible books of the Prophets were written.

Professor Gershon Galil of the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Haifa has deciphered an inscription dating from the 10th century BCE (the period of King David’s reign) and has proven the inscription to be ancient Hebrew, thus making it the earliest known example of Hebrew writing.

The significance of this breakthrough relates to the fact that at least some of the Biblical scriptures are now proven to have been composed hundreds of years before the dates presented today in research and that the Kingdom of Israel already existed at that time.

The inscription itself, which was written in ink on a 15 x 16.5 cm trapezoid pottery shard, was discovered a year and a half ago at excavations that were carried out by Professor Yosef Garfinkel near the Elah valley, south of Jerusalem, and west of Hebron.

The researchers dated the inscription back to the 10th century BCE, which was the period of King David’s reign, but the question of the language used in this inscription remained unanswered, making it impossible to prove whether it was in fact Hebrew or another Semitic language.

Professor Galil’s deciphering of the ancient writing testifies to it being authentic Hebrew based on its use of verbs particular to the Hebrew language and content specific to Hebrew culture not adopted by other regional cultures at the time.

“This text is a social statement, relating to slaves, widows and orphans. It uses verbs that were characteristic of Hebrew, such as “asah” (did) and “avad” (worked), which were rarely used in other regional languages. Particular words that appear in the text, such as “almana” (widow) are specific to Hebrew and are written differently in other local languages. The content itself was also unfamiliar to all the cultures in the region besides the Hebrew society. The present inscription provides social elements similar to those found in the Biblical prophecies and very different from prophecies written

by other cultures postulating glorification of the gods and taking care of their physical needs”.

Galil added that once this deciphering is received at research centers, the inscription will become the earliest Hebrew inscription to be found, testifying to Hebrew writing abilities as early as the 10th century BCE. This stands opposed to the dating of the composition of the Bible in much current academic research, which does not recognize the possibility that the Bible or parts of it could have been written during this ancient period.

Galil also noted that the inscription was discovered in a provincial Judean town, explaining that if there were scribes in the periphery, it can be assumed that those inhabiting the central region and Jerusalem were even more proficient writers. “It can now be maintained that it was highly reasonable that during the 10th century BCE, during the reign of King David, there were scribes in Israel who were able to write literary texts and complex historiographies such as the books of Judges and Samuel.” He added that the complexity of the text, along with the impressive fortifications revealed at the site, refute theories that attempt to deny the existence of the Kingdom of Israel at that time.

The contents of the text express social sensitivity to the fragile position of weaker members of society and the inscription testifies to the presence of strangers within the Israeli society as far back as this ancient period, calling on native Hebrews to provide support for these strangers. It advocates care for widows and orphans and encourages the king – who at that time had the responsibility of curbing social inequality – to be involved in improving Israeli society. This inscription is similar in its content to Biblical scriptures (Isaiah 1:17, Psalms 72:3, Exodus 23:3, and others), but according to Galil it is not copied from any Biblical text.”

The Scriptures contain more than 1130 references to David, the first is in Ruth 4:17: “*And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David...*” Testimonies of David’s life increase the Christian’s faith in the authenticity of the Bible, and thereby are another source of spiritual strength: “*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us...*” (Heb. 12:1). To God be the glory!■

GOD AND MOSES

The Apostle Paul wrote: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The “things written aforetime” are not limited to the promises of the times of restitution and the joyous condition of mankind in the new heavens and earth, but include His dealings with His people.

In the past God has exercised His power over many individuals. A knowledge of those events is a source of inspiration, comfort and confidence to the Christian because each instance is a manifestation of His care of the individual. One with whom God dealt was Moses.

His assignment

Moses was chosen by God to lead Israel out of Egypt. Moses lacked confidence that he would be able to accomplish the task. In the first instance he was apprehensive about approaching Pharaoh and so he suggested several reasons why he should be relieved of the task.

Moses’ first reason was that he lacked esteem amongst his fellow Israelites. He contended that they would disbelieve that he had come with God’s authority: “And Moses said unto God, ‘Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?’ And God said unto Moses, ‘I AM THAT I AM’: and he said, ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you’” (Exodus 3:13-14).

The same temptation might confront the Christian today—not the temptation to avoid delivering Israel from slavery but the temptation to feel inadequate because they are not prominent citizens amongst their fellow countrymen. The lack of recognition in the world should not deter the Christian from any mission God has given them—Paul exhorted Timothy: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Timothy was to act because of the commission he had received, regardless of his esteem amongst those to whom he was to preach.

Heritage

The record regarding Moses continues: “And God said moreover unto Moses, ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, ‘The LORD God of your

fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations’” (Exodus 3:15).

God strengthened Moses by reminding him that He was the God of Moses’ fathers. The same principle applies to the Christian today—calling into mind that the One with whom the Christian has to do is the One who created the universe, and that it is He Who has directed earth’s affairs since that time, may be a source of strengthen for the Christian. The Christian’s authority is derived from the One who is not merely flesh and blood.

The Christian must always be conscious of the fact that they are doing the work of the One who was before all things, He “...who commanded the light to shine out of darkness”—it is He who “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 Christians’ authority comes from the One who made heaven and earth.

The support of the brethren

The record of Moses continues: “Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt... unto a land flowing with milk and honey. And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt...” (Exodus 3:16-18). God told Moses to take the other elders with him when he confronted Pharaoh.

While all of Man’s strength ultimately comes from God, it should be remembered that He provides others to be a physical and visible support. The old saying that “a problem shared is a problem halved”, while primarily being a temporal and secular catchphrase, is part of God’s provisions for His people. The Apostle Paul was conscious of the strength he received from others; on one occasion he desired the support that Mark provided: “Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

It might be in that vein that the Hebrews were exhorted to fellowship with each other: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so

much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). The strength that stems from fellowship with the brethren is one of the channels through which God strengthens the Christian.

Apparent failure

Nevertheless, in spite of all that God did to strengthen Moses, Moses' first representation to Pharaoh was unsuccessful. However that was not because Moses had failed—God had told Moses beforehand that his first representation to Pharaoh would not result in Pharaoh releasing the Israelites: *"And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go"* (Exodus 3:19-20). God had planned that Pharaoh would not release Israel until He had smitten Egypt with *"all of His wonders"*.

The lesson for the Christian today is that God moves in ways which are superior to those of mankind, and an apparent failure or rejection should not be interpreted as a failure to carry out God's will. Just as with Pharaoh, God is assuredly accomplishing a feature (a detail) of His plan of which the Christian might be unaware.

Personal revelation

Exodus 4 continues the record of God's dealing with Moses and describes Moses contending that he did not have any evidence of God's dealing with him on a personal basis. Moses' argument was that Israel's elders would not believe that he was God's agent. God responded with the miracles of Moses' rod turning into a serpent and Moses' hand becoming leprous and then being healed (Exodus 4:1-7). The Christian today should not necessarily expect such miraculous manifestations of the Lord's power because in the present era He gives guidance through the Holy Spirit: *"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"* (Rom. 8:16)—that is, the assurance is "internal". The mechanisms by which the Spirit bears witness are just as varied now as they were in the days of the Apostles: *"God also bearing (them) witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will"* (Heb. 2:4). The manifestations to the apostles were varied (diverse), such as the healing of the lame man by the medium of Peter and John (Acts 3 and 4), the angel opening the prison doors (Acts 5:19) and the miracles wrought by Stephen (Acts 6:8).

Fluent speech

Nevertheless Moses still doubted that God would give him the power required to cause Pharaoh to

release the Israelites, and he told God that he was unable to speak fluently: *"And Moses said unto the LORD, 'O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue'. And the LORD said unto him, 'Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say'"* (Exodus 4:10-12). God reminded Moses that He (God) was the very creator of Man's mouth, and therefore He had complete control over it. What a response for the diffident Christian to ponder!

No reprimand

God did not reprimand Moses for his "excuses", but looked upon them as realisations of his weaknesses. The same applies to the Christian—the Christian should not hesitate to seek the Lord's guidance and assurance every moment of their lives. He does not grow weary of His chosen ones asking Him for strength and reassurance: *"Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth"* (John 9:31). *"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints"* (Eph. 6:18).

God exercises the same watch-care and diligence over the Christian today, and hence the Christian should cast all their care upon Him, because He does care for His children—past, present and future.

In the gray twilight of a dreary morn,
A prisoner stood, defenseless and forlorn,
While, to a Roman judge, with boisterous breath,
His fierce accusers clamored for His death.
It was the Christ, rejected and abused;
The King of kings, his sovereign claim refused;
The Son of God, abandoned and betrayed,
An outcast, in the world which he had made.
It was his chosen people whose demand
That timid judge was powerless to withstand;
And, while their baseless charges he denied,
He gave their victim to be crucified.
His chosen people! those he loved and blest;
Whose little ones he folded to his breast;
Who cried more fiercely, as unmoved he stood,
"On us, and on our children, be his blood!"
Oh, Holy Savior! may thy grace reverse
The dreadful import of that reckless curse;
And, on their children, thy atonement prove
"The blood of sprinkling," through Redeeming
Love!

Francis De Haes Fanvier

WITNESSING

Witnessing is a significant element of God's plan in the present era. After Jesus' resurrection the disciples asked Him: "*Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*". He replied: "... *It is not 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). The apostles' mission was to be witnesses, not foretellers. Jesus also told His disciples: "*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*" (Matt. 24:14), which implies that witnessing will continue until the end of the present era—until "*the end come*".

Further, Jesus told His disciples that they were to confess Him before all people: "*Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God*" (Luke 12:8-9). Jesus' statement implies that it is essential for the Christian to witness to others—to "*confess Him*". One may ask, how are they to witness? The question is pertinent because the members of the body have different aptitudes, each being appropriate for their work in the body.

Methods

One form of witnessing is preaching, that is verbal explanation. Of the various ways in which one may witness to another, preaching, either to an individual or to a group, is the most direct. However not every member of the body is gifted to preach, particularly to groups. For those so commissioned there are some principles to observe: "*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another... If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*" (1 Pet. 4:10-11). Let all preaching be done to the glory of God and not the glory of the preacher.

When He was teaching His disciples, Jesus was careful to not present information which His disciples were not ready nor able to assimilate at that time: "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now*" (John 16:12). Jesus was speaking to them before the Holy Spirit was given (John 7:39),

nevertheless the Christian today should note His strategy: care must be taken to realise that some might not be ready to absorb the deeper things of the Word: "*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*" (1 Cor. 2:10). The Christian is to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18), and those processes require time for their accomplishment.

Reading

Another way of witnessing to others, and which might be more appropriate for some, is to give them something to read. The Apostle Paul exhorted Timothy: "*Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine*" (1 Tim. 4:13). Timothy was to strengthen himself by reading and so it is for all. Reading allows one to consider issues at their own pace, thereby enabling them to assimilate the concepts. This method of witnessing facilitates Paul's exhortation to the Romans: "*Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*" (Rom. 14:5). That verse refers specifically to the observance of the Sabbath but the principle of being fully persuaded in one's own mind applies to all the gospel truths: "*And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform*" (Rom. 4:21).

Conduct

Witnessing is not confined to oral explanations or the distribution of literature—the most powerful witness of all is the witness of one's conduct. Jesus said: "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16). Jesus referred to their "*good works*", not to their preaching or distribution of literature. Although it might not be dramatic, the witness of one's conduct is evident to all with whom they meet, just as it was for the apostles: "*For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men*" (1 Cor. 4:9). Likewise Jesus said: "*Ye shall know them by their fruits*" (Matt. 7:15-20). The challenge for every Christian is to display exemplary conduct every moment of every day—to bring forth good fruit.

One's conduct includes their speech. Speech requires constant vigilance: "*If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body*" (James 3:2). As the apostle goes on to say: "*But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*" (James 3:7-10). Indeed one's speech may be the most powerful witness, and present the greatest challenge, of all one's gifts.■

THE MOABITES

Including the references to his descendants, there are more than 180 references to Moab in the Scriptures. Such a prevalence suggests that there is benefit to the Christian in knowing about Moab and his progeny, and how they fit into God's plan.

Moab, the founding father of the Moabites, was the result of an incestuous union between Lot and his eldest daughter, after the destruction of Sodom: *"Now the firstborn said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there is no man on the earth to come in to us as is the custom of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father'. So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose....Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day"* (Gen. 19:31-33; 36-37 NKJV). Moab means "of his father", and is therefore descriptive of his ancestry.

The Land

Moab, because of its proximity to Israel, was closely linked to the fortunes of the Hebrew people. Moab was situated along the eastern border of the Dead Sea, on the plateau between the Dead Sea and the Arabian Desert. It was about 57 kilometers (35 miles) long and 40 kilometers (25 miles) wide. Although it was primarily a high plateau, Moab also had mountainous areas and deep gorges. It was a fertile area for crops and herds. To the south and west of Moab was the nation of Edom, and to the north was Ammon. After the Israelites invaded the land, the tribe of Reuben displaced the Moabites from the northern part of their territory.



The People

The Moabites were of Semitic stock (descendants of Shem) and were kin to the Hebrews due to their descent from Lot, the nephew of Abraham. Their language was practically the same as the Hebrews. Probably the most well known Moabite is Ruth (Ruth 1:22), who was the great grandmother of King David: *"Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begat David the King"* (Matt. 1:5-6). Thus Ruth is a maternal progenitor of Jesus.

Moabites' connection with Israel

It was from Mt Nebo in the land of Moab that the Lord showed Moses the promised land: *"And the LORD spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession"* (Deut. 32:48-49).

Another connection which the people of Israel have with Moab is that Moses is buried in Moab: *"Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there'". So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day". Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended"* (Deut. 34:1-8).

Sihon's Amorite kingdom annexed much of Moab shortly before the Israelite conquest of Canaan (Num. 21:17-29). After the Israelites defeated Sihon, Balak, the king of the relatively weak Moabites, joined with the Midianites to hire the prophet-magician Balaam to curse Israel so that the Israelites could be defeated (Num. 22:1-20). Balaam's mission failed, but when the Israelites camped in Moab just before crossing the

Jordan River, the women of Moab enticed the Israelites into a form of idolatry that involved ritual sexual immorality. This resulted in God's judgment against Israel (Num. 25:1-9). Eventually the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, "right by Jericho" in the region of Acacia Grove, northwest of Moab (Josh. 3:1).

Military might

During the period of the judges the nation of Israel was relatively weak and sinned against God. God used Moab to inflict punishment on 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. So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years*" (Judges 3:12-14). However when Israel cried unto the Lord raised up Ehud to deliver them from the hand of the Moabites: "*And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years*" (Judges 3:28-30).

Saul also inflicted defeat on the Moabites (1 Sam. 14:47). King David had an early friendship with the Moabites (1 Sam. 22:3-4), but eventually he was required to smite them (2 Sam. 8:2) after which they remained subject to Israel until after Solomon's death. Omri, king of Israel, kept Moab under his control, as did his son Ahab until he was so occupied with wars against Syria and Assyria that Moab was able to brake free. The Assyrians conquered Moab about 735 BC and invading Arabs conquered it about 650 BC. The prophet Isaiah lamented over Moab's defeat (Isa. 15:16), and Jeremiah predicted Moab's death at the end of the seventh century B.C. (Jer. 48). When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC, some of the Jews fled to Moab to escape being taken into captivity (Jer. 40:11-12).

Their religion

The chief deity of Moab was Chemosh, (Judges 11:24), who featured in Solomon's idolatry: "*And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem...*" And the LORD was angry with

Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice" (1 Kings 11:6-9).

Consistent with their worship of false gods, Mesha, one king of Moab, offered his son as a sacrifice: "*And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took with him seven hundred men who drew swords, to break through to the king of Edom, but they could not. Then he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering upon the wall*" (2 Kings 3:26-27).

God's agent

God used the Moabites as one of His agents to destroy Judah: "*In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets*" (2 Kings 24:1-2).

However the Moabites became proud and Jeremiah prophesied their downfall: "*And Moab shall be destroyed from being a people, because he hath magnified himself against the LORD... Woe be unto thee, O Moab! the people of Chemosh perisheth: for thy sons are taken captives, and thy daughters captives.*" (Jer. 48:42-46). A lesson for all!

Moab in Prophecy

Nevertheless Moab is mentioned as a beneficiary of the Lord's blessing: "*And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea... And he shall... assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth... they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them*" (Isa. 11:11-14).

Jeremiah also prophesied of Moab's restoration: "*Yet I will bring back the captives of Moab in the latter days, says the LORD*" (Jer. 48:47). Their restoration will be part of God's comprehensive plan of salvation and redemption for all the human race in the latter days (that is, in the times of restitution—Acts 3:21).■

Those who leave everything in God's hand will eventually see God's hand in everything.

LOVE BELIEVES ALL

Except for Jesus Himself, the Apostle Paul's understanding of the Christian life was unsurpassed, and his statements in 1 Corinthians 13 regarding the characteristics of love exemplify that understanding. One of those statements is "*love believeth all things*" (verse 7, KJV).

Belief

There are two bases for belief. One basis is observation, that is, the information has been "seen", either directly by the person themselves or by someone else. That basis of belief is frequently described by the expression "seeing is believing".

The other basis for belief is faith: "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1). Thus belief based on faith is different from belief that is based on things seen: belief that is based on faith is based on things that have not been seen.

In 1 Corinthians 13:7 the Apostle Paul states that one characteristic of love is that it "*believes all things*" (KJV). However the term "all things" requires definition.

"Things"

The Greek text does not have a separate word for the English word "*things*". The insertion of the word "*things*" is significant because it admits the interpretation that Christians are to believe "*all things*", that is, everything.

The idea that a Christian is to believe all things is unrealistic. There is much false information promulgated as "fact" and the Christian is not expected to believe it. Indeed, belief of "all things" is contrary to Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians: "*Prove all things, hold fast that which is good*" (1 Thess. 5:21)—the implication is that there are some things which are "*not good*" and therefore should not be "held fast".

When the word "*things*" is omitted from 1 Corinthians 13:7, it is clear that the verse relates to loving persons, and the exhortation is that Christians are to love all persons.

Envy not love

Love for a person engenders belief in them whereas envy and hatred engender unbelief. The relationship also applies in the other direction, that is, belief engenders love and unbelief engenders envy. The Jews' did not believe Paul and their disbelief caused

them to envy him. One instance when unbelief engendered envy is recorded in Acts 17:4-5: "... *But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort...*".

Love your enemies

Jesus' instruction to His disciples was "*love your enemies*" (Matt. 5:43-44). If one loves their enemies, and love demands that they believe them, the conclusion is that love requires one to believe "all", that is, one is obliged to believe what their enemies tell them. However that understanding is contrary to other advice Jesus gave His disciples: "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves... Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*" (Matt. 7:15; 10:16). Jesus alerted His disciples to the existence of false prophets, their falsehood meaning they could not be believed. Jesus' advice was subsequently endorsed by John: "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world*" (1 John 4:1). The existence of false prophets makes the Christians' task difficult—on the one hand to be loving and believing, and on the other to be as wise as a serpent.

The challenge to the Christian is even more pointed. Jesus exhorted His disciples to "*love one another*" (John 13:34) and that requirement remains unto this day. However not all the words of another Christian are to be believed without scrutiny—Acts 17:11 reads: "*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*". The word was to be received readily but it was not to be believed until it had been verified from the Scriptures.

The exercise of love is summed up by Zechariah: "... *let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour...*" (Zech. 8:16-17).■

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