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THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Jesus’ coming down to earth from heaven brought great joy: *“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:10-11). The great joy was that He would *“save his people from their sins”* (Matt. 1:21) and so bring them life.

While Jesus’ coming brought great joy, it is His death on the cross that makes that joy a possibility: *“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). *“Lifting up”* means crucified.

He will draw all men unto Him when they are resurrected from the grave: *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues, O grave, I will be thy destruction”* (Hosea 13:14), *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time”* (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

God’s only begotten Son

The wonder of Jesus’ coming to earth and His death on the Cross is magnified when it is realised that He was God’s only Son: *“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”* (John 3:16-17).

Down from heaven

Another feature of His coming to earth that magnifies His sacrifice is that He was God’s agent in creation: *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom*

also he made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1-2). Thus He left a high and lofty station to come to earth.

Lower than the angels

The significance of Him leaving heaven and coming to earth cannot be fully realized by any man because no man has yet ascended to heaven: *“If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man”* (John 3:12-13).

Not only did He leave heaven but He was made lower than the angels: *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man”* (Heb. 2:9).

The cross

His humility and obedience to His father are emphasized by the fact that He not only came down to earth and adopted human form, but that He came to die, and that by the most demeaning method in His time: *“But made himself of no reputation, and took*

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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” (Phil. 2:7-8). The qualities expressed in those verses are worthy of consideration: He made Himself of no reputation; He became as a servant; was made in the same fashion as a human being; was obedient to endure death by crucifixion. No other creature has demonstrated such loyalty to God and humility within themselves.

Without hope

Christians today are accustomed to the idea of there being life after death and so it is difficult to imagine what it was like to live when there was not any idea of life after one died; that there was nothing to follow. It meant there was no purpose in life other than to enjoy the present, as Solomon concluded: *“Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun” (Eccl. 8:15).* Eating, drinking and being merry abide only for the days of one’s life.

Solomon also said: *“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Prov. 29:18).* In the same vein Jeremiah also recorded the importance of hope: *“Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border” (Jer. 31:15-17).* The only pacification for Rahel was the hope that her children would be restored to her.

Gave them life

Thus the significance of Jesus’ coming to earth and His death on the cross are evident. As John recorded, He came so that mankind could have life. The prospect of blessing mankind after He had suffered the cross and been raised again with His father was a powerful factor in sustaining Jesus throughout His life on earth: *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who 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. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Heb. 12:2-3).* His followers are exhorted to keep the same vision in their minds.

Life more abundantly

The effect of Jesus’ life is not just to restore mankind to life as they have known it, but to enjoy *“more abundant life”*. Dr. Strong defines *“abundant”* as *“superabundant in quantity or superior in quality”*. The life that mankind will enjoy because of the sacrifice of Jesus in giving His life will abound in both respects: **quantity** in that it will be everlasting (in contrast to the duration of the present life), and in **quality** in that there will not be any sickness or death: *“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert... And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa. 35:5, 6, 10).*

See Him like He is

There is yet *“a more excellent”* hope for the Christian: *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).* The promise of being with Him includes the promise of reigning with Him: *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified (together)” (Rom. 8:16-17).* *“... they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev. 20.6).* They will be with their Lord, seeing Him as He is and reigning with Him—they will have life in abundance!■

Our Lord’s Sacrifice

**CHRIST gave His life for me
His precious blood He shed
That I might ransomed be
And quickened from the dead
He gave, He gave His life for me
How grateful I should be.**

**He now has brought to me
Down from His throne above
Salvation full and free
Pardon and life and love
He brings, He brings rich gifts to me
Lord, I give all to thee.**

THE CHRISTIAN'S GOAL

It has been said that life is a means to an end, not an end in itself. That statement reflects the words of Solomon, who is commonly regarded as the wisest man who has ever lived. Nevertheless Solomon's wisdom did not provide him with a satisfying answer regarding the purpose of life. He wrote: "*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh... 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. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit*" (Eccl. 1:1-14).

Solomon's conclusion that "*all is vanity and vexation of spirit*" led him to conclude that God must have given this "*sore travail*" to mankind for a purpose, but he could not identify precisely what that purpose is, so he described it as "*to be exercised therewith*".

The Apostle Paul agreed with Solomon: "*For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now*" (Rom. 8:20-22). Paul wrote that God subjected—that is, deliberately subjected—mankind to a life of "vanity".

And so it continues unto this day: a human being's life is soon ended, and all that he has striven for during his life will pass away. Thus it is a great blessing to realize the truth of the conclusions of both Solomon and Paul: that God deliberately gave Man his present plight. However Paul adds that God has subjected it "*in hope*", that hope being that the creation will be delivered from this present "*bondage of corruption*" into something much better: "*the glorious liberty of the children of God*".

The Christian's goal

Jesus understood the temporary nature of Man's present existence, and told His disciples of a much better reward for their labours: "*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where*

thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19-20). Jesus contrasted the temporary nature of earthly riches to those in heaven.

John records Jesus telling His disciples how this was to be brought about: "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*" (John 14:1-6).

However Jesus' words were all a bit of a mystery to the disciples: just what did Jesus mean? Hence Thomas asked him for clarification; since he did not know where Jesus was going he did not know the way. Likewise Philip asked for clarification in that he asked Jesus to show them the Father: "*Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake*" (John 14:8-11).

Jesus' explanation of the Father did not refer to the form in which God exists, and could not, because "*God is a Spirit*" and "*a spirit hath not flesh and bones*" (John 4:24; Luke 24:39). Since Jesus was not able to give His disciples a visual picture of God that they could physically see, the hope He was holding out to them was abstract—mystical, something outside their physical world. Hence Jesus told them that they had to believe Him, that is to have faith that what He was telling them was true, faith being "*the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1). Not seen! And that also continues unto this day: "*they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*". As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "*we walk by faith and not by sight*" (2 Cor. 5:7).

The Christian's sojourn

The Christian's goal is a spiritual goal—a heavenly

goal that is invisible to the human eye: their goal is “spiritual”. It is a goal to which they have been called: “*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling*” (Eph. 4:4). At the present time that goal is only a hope, and the Christian’s principal goal in life is to make that hope a reality.

Guidance

The Christian is not left without guidance regarding the principles to be practised during their sojourn on earth in order for them to achieve their spiritual goal. To the Romans Paul wrote: “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*” (Rom. 12:1-2). The Christian’s mind—that is, their objectives or goals in life—has to be changed from striving for temporal (or earthly) goods to a reliance on God to provide their needs: “*Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*” (Matt. 6:31-34).

However that is more easily said than done—the Christian must earn their living: “*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*” (1 Tim. 5:8). Earning one’s living requires some dedication and expenditure of earthly resources, however the Christian must balance that with running the race for their heavenly goal.

Humility

Pride (self esteem) is one obstacle that has to be overcome for the Christian to achieve their goal. Paul exhorted the Philippians to strive to overcome pride by focussing on the virtues of others, and not on themselves or their own achievements: “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. 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” (Phil. 2:3-7). It has been well said that, just as the centre letter in the word “pride” is “I” so also focusing on self—“I”—is the main obstacle to overcoming pride.

There are several components of Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians, but perhaps the most powerful is his reference to Jesus. He was God’s agent in the creation of the worlds: “*Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds*” (Heb. 1:2), yet He considered Himself a servant and suffered a humiliating death on the cross. The development of humility is one of the Christian’s main goals during their sojourn here on earth, and remembering Jesus’ example is a powerful weapon for the Christian to employ.

A sympathetic disposition

The Scriptures testify to Jesus’ compassionate nature: “*And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it*” (Luke 19:41). Jesus knew what was going to befall Jerusalem in 70 A.D.—that there would be much agony and heartbreak by those living there—and He wept. Weeping is an outward manifestation of a sorrowing heart, which in turn arises from consideration of others and not of self.

Jesus also wept just before the resurrection of Lazarus: “*Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept*” (John 11:32-35).

One of the Christian’s goals during their present sojourn should be to develop that same sympathetic attitude: “*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*” (Rom. 12:15). The development of a sympathetic attitude goes hand in hand with a spirit of humility; there is an important place for both in the Christian’s character if they are running for their prize in heaven.

On the other hand the Christian must not ignore their responsibility as lights in the world: “*Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world*” (Phil. 2:14-15). They must not condone unrighteousness, just as Jesus did not tolerate the sinfulness in the temple: “*And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money*

sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2:14-17).

The wilderness

Another exhortation to the Christian to help them obtain their goal is to remember that Jesus was not accepted by "the establishment", and neither will the Christian be popular in the present era: *"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name"* (Heb. 13:10-15). Drawing on the example of the practices that were required under the Law Covenant, including the sacrifices Israel was required to perform, the Christian is to be prepared to also suffer *"without the gate"* as did Jesus. The wilderness experience might be difficult to accept, especially when the wonderful hope of the gospel is the only hope for the world and is so precious to the Christian. The Christian must remember that it is a privilege to have been called to run for this glorious future, as John wrote: *"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure"* (1 John 3:1-3). The ultimate goal of the Christian is to be like their Lord Jesus and see Him as He is; their sojourn here in this life is preparation for their role in God's kingdom.

Patience

Focusing on their heavenly goal helps the Christian to develop the patience that is so necessary for them to endure the present trials. One aid to that end is to continually remember that God is working out all things according to His will: *"Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath*

purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him" (Eph. 1:8-10). Thus the Christian should be encouraged by the prophecy God has given through the prophet Zephaniah: *"Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent"* (Zeph. 3:8-9). God is working out His plan—in His time!

The Divine nature

Another exhortation available to the Christian is the words of Peter: *"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"* (2 Pet. 1:4). There are several issues that must be examined before a firm decision can be made regarding the precise details of what Peter meant by "the divine nature": whether he was referring to the Christian's ultimate goal in heaven or whether he was exhorting them to develop divine characteristics during their earthly life time. Both understandings have the same ultimate goal and provide much encouragement in this present life.

May God's grace enable each and everyone of those whom He has called to *"glory and virtue"* enable them to achieve their goal: *"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue"* (2 Pet. 1:2-3).■

CONVENTION NOTES

We apologize that the internet link printed in the January-March 2017 issue of the *Peoples Paper* for the broadcast of the Bible students' convention in January 2017 was incorrect. The correct link was: <https://biblestudents.adobeconnect.com/Australia>.

Queensland Convention

Friday 6—Sunday 8 October, 2017; Alexandra Park Conference Centre, 13 Mari Street, Alexandra Headlands, Qld 4572.

Contact: Darryn Greenhalgh, 164 Steys Road, CURRA Qld 4570; darryngreenhalgh@hotmail.com

2018 Convention

From 5 p.m. Thursday 25 until 2 p.m. Sunday 28 January, 2018. Camp Wilkin, 57 Noble Street, Anglesea, Victoria 3230.

Contact: EnquiryBBI@gmail.com; www.bbi.org.au/contact

RUNNING THE RACE

"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, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who 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" (Hebrews 12:1)

The objective of Hebrews 12:1 is to encourage the Christian during their pilgrimage by relating their pilgrimage to running a race.

There are several aspects of competing in physical races that may be compared with the race set before the Christian. The aspects to which reference is made in Hebrews 12:1 relate to the Christian who has begun the race, however there are some steps that need to be taken before one decides to enter the race, which, when pondered, provide encouragement to enter.

Entry qualifications

Many events in secular competitions require would-be competitors to meet specified criteria before they are entitled to nominate for entry. Two of those criteria are age (not too young nor too old), and a requirement to have previously met certain performance standards. Additionally, in some cases, they might need to be selected from amongst other applicants.

Neither of the first two criteria apply to entering the Christian's race; the only requirement is to be selected: *"And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein"* (Luke 18:15-17). Hence no one is barred from entering the race because they are too young. Indeed a child-like disposition is to be developed as the race progresses: *"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 18:3).

On the other hand, one is never too old to be invited to enter the race: *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* (John 3:3-6). The only requirement to run the race is to be begotten of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit can be received at any

age: *"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit"* (1 Thess. 4:7-8). Jesus did not specify any age requirement to Nicodemus.

Another example of the Spirit being received by a fully grown man is Jesus giving sight to the blind man: *"But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself"* (John 9:18-21). When Jesus explained His identity to the blind man the blind man responded: *"... Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him"* (John 9:36-38). The blind man first believed when he was old enough to speak for himself.

Background

One's background is not a barrier to being selected to enter the race. Saul was called by God even though he had committed atrocities against Christians: *"Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities"* (Acts 26:10-11).

At the other extreme neither do prosperity and social standing in the world of mankind grant any privileges regarding being selected to enter the race: *"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that*

are: *That no flesh should glory in his presence*" (1 Cor. 1:26-29). God has deliberately reserved to Himself the privilege of choosing those who may run the race. As Paul reminded the Ephesians: *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"* (Eph. 2:8-9).

Temporal considerations

Three fundamental elements of any race that a human being should consider before deciding to enter any contest are the nature of the activity, its duration and the cost of taking part.

Of these three, duration is the only certain factor regarding the Christian's race: the precise nature of what one will be required to do, and the personal cost, are not known before one begins the race.

Duration

Regarding duration, the Christian's race lasts for the rest of their earthly life: *"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10). The charge to the Christians at Smyrna was to be faithful until they died.

Another consideration regarding the duration of the race is that no one gains their prize until they have finished the course God has mapped out for them. As Paul wrote to Timothy: *"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 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. 4:6-8).

Cost

Running the race incurs a cost; the cost is losing popularity with one's fellow men: *"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved"* (Matt. 10:22).

In that vein Jesus counselled them to be wary of popularity: *"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets"* (Luke 6:26). Popularity should be a signal to the Christian to *"examine themselves, whether they are in the faith"* (2 Cor. 13:5).

Objective

One factor that contributes to the Christian not being popular is that their objective in life is different from the non-Christian. Jesus said: *"Lay not up for*

yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21). Consequently, Paul declared to the elders at Ephesus: *"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel"* (Acts 20:33). Focusing on earthly treasures will distract one from concentrating on their course and hence will reduce the chance of them receiving their reward (or prize).

Encouragement

Since there is no precise detail available before one enters the race regarding what one will be required to do along the way, it is important to know that God will sustain the Christian; He will provide their every need: *"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you"* (1 Pet. 5:10). God will strengthen every one whom He calls: *"... God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"* (1 Cor. 10:13), and *"... he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me"* (Heb. 13:5-6).

The importance of being assured that God will provide unfailing support to everyone whom He has invited to run the race is emphasized by the fact that not every one runs the same course. Paul explained to the Galatians that Peter was called to be the minister to the Jews while he was called to be the minister to the Gentiles: *"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles)"* (Gal. 2:7-8).

Paul was confirming what Peter had already told the Jews: *"And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe"* (Acts 15:7). Peter was the first to preach to the Gentiles but later that work was given to Paul: *"Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches"* (2 Cor. 11:28). As Paul confirmed to the church in Rome: *"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, That I should be the*

minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:15-16).

The cloud of witnesses

In addition to the personal assurances one receives along the way, the Christian may gain encouragement from the examples of those who have gone before.

There are several examples recorded in the Old Testament of persons who demonstrated great faith that God would provide for them throughout their earthly sojourn, the greatest of whom is Abraham: “... *who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith*” (Rom. 4:12-13). Abraham believed God even though there was no visible evidence that He would keep His promise; in other words, Abraham “*walked by faith*”. Likewise the Christian’s walk is “*by faith and not by sight*” (2 Cor. 5:7).

Another factor that should strengthen the Christian is that Abraham (and all those who lived in Old Testament times) did not have the Holy Spirit to guide them, the Holy Spirit not being given until Jesus was glorified after His resurrection: “...*the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified*” (John 7:39). Hence it may be held that the Christian has greater support than those who lived in those times: “*Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God*” (Rom. 8:14).

Their leader

Some temporal races are team events in which case there is one who is appointed as the leader or captain. The leader sets an example for the other participants to follow. The Christian’s leader has set the example: “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings*” (Heb. 2:9-10). Hence the Christian should always be strengthened by “*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who 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). The Christian’s leader has already completed His course and is now “*set down at the right hand of God*”. So also can the Christian be assured of their reward: “*Blessed is the man that*

endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12).

Fellowship of the brethren

While the previous examples refer to those who have already finished their course, it must be remembered that another source of encouragement along the way is the fellowship of one’s contemporaries: “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together... but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*” (Heb. 10:25).

Lightening the load

Progress is easier if no excess baggage is carried. The Christian should cast off those burdens that do not contribute to making progress or which indeed hinder progress: “*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier*” (2 Tim. 2:4). As Paul wrote to the Romans: “*The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*” (Rom. 13:12-14).

Patience

The task of running the race becomes more onerous if one begins to believe that the task is more demanding than is necessary. It is necessary to remember “*that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*” (Rom. 8:28). All the obstacles God places in one’s way are there because He knows they need to experience those trials to prepare them for the task He has allotted them in the kingdom. As James exhorted: “*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing*” (James 1:2-4).

The concept of patience “*having her perfect work*”—that is, her complete work—confirms there is a benefit to be derived from experiencing hardship. As Paul explains: “*And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us*” (Rom. 5:3-5). The greater the difficulty of their course, the greater will be their yearning for its end and the fulfillment of their hope, that is receipt of their reward.

The prize

Keeping the value of the reward in mind throughout the race is also a source of strength. For some athletes, winning a gold medal at an Olympic games is the pinnacle of their ambitions, and they devote several years' training to achieve that objective. It is in that vein that Paul reminded the Corinthians of the prize for which they were running: *"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore run not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air"* (1 Cor. 9:24-26). In the ultimate sense even a gold medal is a corruptible reward, whereas everlasting life is just that—everlasting—that is, never ending: *"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed"* (John 6:27).

The faithful of old

A final source of strength and encouragement for the Christian is to remember that the opportunity to run in the race for *"the prize of the high calling"* was not offered to those who lived in Old Testament times: *"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect"* (Heb. 11:39-40). Hence Paul's exhortation to the Christians at Philadelphia is powerful: *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you"* (Phil. 3:13-15). May all whom God has called to run the race appreciate their privilege and let nothing hinder them along the way. ■

GOD'S PLAN: AN OVERALL VIEW

The article below is reprinted with the kind permission of *Christian Friends of Israeli Communities* (www.cfoic.com). It was written in December 2016 but was received too late to be included in the January 2017 issue of the *Peoples Paper*. The emphasis (**bold type**) has been added by the *Peoples Paper*.

* * *

One of my favorite Christmas carols is Silent Night, Holy Night. It evokes images of a pastoral peaceful scene of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. Unfortunately, today Bethlehem is far from that vision of peace and goodwill. When I really think about it though, Bethlehem in Judea wasn't all that peaceful 2,000 years ago either. The nation of Israel was under savage Roman rulers who were determined to break the Jewish spirit and destroy their devotion to God.

Sadly, not much has changed in 2,000 years. There are still evil forces in every nation working to destroy faith in God, and annihilate mankind's ability to worship God. This is seen in many "Christian" nations through a blatant disregard for the Bible, not valuing the sanctity of human life, and the general idolization of many unholy and ungodly men and women, their lifestyles and ideas. Yet, how different is today's society from that of Rome? Rome didn't have the media, Internet, Facebook, YouTube or Twitter, so they built the Coliseum that seated 50,000 people. Here early Christians and Jews were fed to

the lions as sport, along with grueling horrific fights to the death. How different is that from what we bring into our homes via the media every day?

"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us. 'He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill'" (Psalm 2:1-6).

No matter how desperate the situation today seems, King David wrote about it 1,000 years before Rome ruled Jerusalem. He said "He who sits in the heavens laughs". No matter how bad our current world system may seem, God is still on the throne, He is sitting in heaven and laughing at the vain plots of the enemy. He knows who will sit as King on Zion. I love the last line of Psalm 2, *"Blessed are all who take refuge in Him"*. **God has a plan, He has had a plan from the very beginning. His plan began with Abraham in the Land of Israel, and it ends in Zion, Jerusalem, Israel! These are exciting times as we witness God's plan in motion. We are seeing the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy coming to pass every day. Truly we are a blessed generation; everyone who takes refuge in God today is blessed.**

Kimberly Troup, Director, US Office ■

WHO OWNS THE LAND OF ISRAEL?

This article is the second in this issue that is based on a view from Israel. The *Peoples Paper* unashamedly gives such prominence to Israel because of Israel's prominence in the Bible: there are more than 2570 references to Israel in the Scriptures, compared with 983 references to Jesus, 848 to Moses and 311 to Abram (plus 250 to Abraham). Thus to ignore what the Bible has to say about Israel is to ignore a substantial proportion of God's Word.

Once again the following article is written by Kimberly Troup, Director, US Office of *Christian Friends of Israeli Communities*, an organization that has a keen interest in the developments in the Middle East, and in Israel in particular, relating them to the prophecies in the Bible. It is printed here with their kind permission.

* * *

Recently, someone posted the following comment on our Facebook page: *"They may be God's chosen people, but that does not give them the right to deprive others of their land and their homes and their livelihoods. God loves those who seek JUSTICE, not land."*

And that got me thinking -- whose land is it anyway? Since I've worked most of my adult life to support Jews living in the land of Israel, specifically, those living in the Biblical heartland, Judea and Samaria, I've come to realize this is a critical question that every Christian who loves Israel should answer with Scripture: **Psalm 24:1-2 The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.**

King David says it so clearly in this verse: the Earth, the entire world belongs to the creator. When you think of a creative masterpiece, who initially owns that piece of art? The people who have created it. They are the only people who truly own it; they see its full potential, they see it with a vision for its ultimate destiny. They are trying to express an idea or a vision, to capture the inexpressible and share it with others. Then they choose who and how they will give their masterpiece to someone else. This is what God did when He created the world. He built paradise and shared it with mankind. So it truly is His to give to whomever He chooses. As we look further into Scripture we can see that He has made it very clear who is the rightful recipient of the Land of Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:8-9 When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples

according to the number of the Children of Israel. But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

From this verse, we learn that the Most High gave each nation their inheritance; He divided mankind, and fixed the borders. Moreover, he fixed the borders of the nations, based on what the Children of Israel would require! God's borders, then, are not set by governments or political parties. When I think about all of the borders that have been drawn and re-drawn in my short lifetime, I find it amazing that the borders of Israel cause so much angst for almost every nation on earth! When you look at it with a purely natural eye, the situation in Israel today with regard to borders is beyond ludicrous! If someone remodels their kitchen, or adds a porch to their house in Judea or Samaria, it causes consternation from the White House to the Kremlin, to parliaments across the world, and of course in The Hague. National borders changed and entire countries were created between the two world wars and no one made a fuss. So why is Israel different? Could it be because there is a spiritual element involved? **Genesis 12:1-8: Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the Oak of Moreh (Alon Moreh). And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

This one Scripture has two very important themes: 1) God's commandment to Abram, first *"Go to the land that I will show you"*, and secondly His initial

promise, *“To your descendants, I will give this land.*

2) There are four very distinct city names mentioned, **Shechem, Alon Moreh, Bethel and Ai**. Look closely at a map to see where all four of these named cities are located. All four are found in the area that today the world calls the “West Bank”. This is the area that our friend on facebook says doesn’t belong to the Jewish people. Where Jews are “land-grabbing” and forcing Palestinians out of house and home. When we look at this map with our Bible open and we read God’s commandment, *“Go to the land that I will show you”*, and then His promise, *“To your descendants I will give this land”*, it paints a very powerful picture. I think we can begin to see why world leaders get heartburn when a Jew builds a house in Judea or Samaria. He is fulfilling God’s commandment and partaking of God’s promise. The devil never likes to see anyone obey God or walking in the blessing of God.

Genesis 17:19-21: Then God said: “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to

you at this set time next year.”

God knew what was going to happen in the twentieth century, when He fulfilled His promise to return the descendants of Abraham to the Land of Israel. He knew that the modern State of Israel would be established in 1948, and the Arab world would dispute Israel’s legitimacy. God states very clearly to Abraham, your descendants, your heirs to the promise, those that I will establish My covenant with will come through Isaac. Ishmael is your son, and he will also receive an inheritance, but My covenant people will be the sons of Abraham and Isaac.”■

• * *

And now a word about Abraham

The title “Abram” is composed of two Hebrew words “Av” and “Ram”, and means “the father is lofty”. On the other hand the name “Abraham” contains the words “Av” and “Hamon”, which is a reference to the phrase *“I have made you ancestor of a multitude of nations”* (Gen. 17:5). While the change is minor—the only difference being one Hebrew letter: ה (pronounced hey)—this one letter changes the meaning of the word “ram” from “lofty” to “multitude”. The emphasis is no longer on the individual distinction of one leader, but on the collective greatness of the entire multitude. Hence it is to the nation of Israel, Abraham’s descendants—the whole twelve tribes of Judah and Jacob (Israel)—that God has given the land of Israel.■

JERUSALEM INSPIRATION

“Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall come trembling unto the LORD and to His goodness in the end of days” (Hosea 3:5)

This article is printed with the permission of “Israel365” (www.israel365.com). It was published in February 2016 and reflects the conviction of former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin that God would fulfill His promises to Israel. Begin was born in 1913, was the sixth prime minister of Israel—1977-83—and died in 1992. He witnessed the Second World War, the Six Day War in 1967, and in 1978-79 he negotiated and signed the Camp David Peace Accords.

* * *

The prophet Hosea promises that despite the period of punishment and separation, ultimately, 'b'akharit ha'yamim', Israel will return and seek the Lord their God. Contrary to the often translated 'end of days', Prime Minister Menachem Begin is quoted as saying, "'Acharit hayamim' does not mean 'the last days' or 'the end of days.' On the contrary! The key word, 'acharit,' is a synonym for a

bright future. It means 'hatikva,' - hope, as we find in Jeremiah 29:11: 'latet lachem acharit v'tikva' - 'to give to you a future and a hope,' or, 'to give you a hopeful future.' Hence, 'b'acharit hayamim' really means the days of redemption, when mankind shall enjoy the full blessings of eternal peace for all generations to come." No matter how difficult the present may be, one must continue to persevere in his or her relationship with God, confident that there is a bright future on the horizon. Gain insight into the Bible and its eternal messages for Israel and the world with your own complete set of The Israel Bible.

* *

Comment: Prime Minister Begin believed God’s promise recorded in the book of Hosea. In view of peace not being accomplished during his term as Prime Minister, one may wonder about his belief in the promises in Jeremiah 31:27-37 and 32:37-44.■

PREACHING THE WORD: INSTANT IN SEASON

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2)

Paul left Timothy in Ephesus and charged him with the responsibility of correcting some who were straying from the gospel: *"Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith... As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine... Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Tim. 1:2-7).*

1 Timothy 1:6 contains the only occurrence of the term *"vain jangling"*, and so it is difficult to be assertive regarding the subjects the vain talkers were propounding. However the statement that they were desirous of teaching the Law might indicate that they were matters relating to the Law. Such a conclusion might be justified to some extent by comparing the Christians at Ephesus with those at Galatia and Crete. To the Galatians Paul wrote: *"This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:2-3).* It seems the practices that were required under the Law Covenant were proving difficult for some Galatians to discard.

Regarding those in Crete, Paul wrote: *"To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting... For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (Titus 1:4-11).*

If the assumptions above are correct, the situations that confronted both Timothy and Titus involved correcting those who were going astray because they were failing to leave the traditions they had received from their fathers. Additionally their adherence to past doctrines and practices was misleading others, hence there was a need for them to take action.

Instant

Regarding taking action, Paul told Timothy that he had to be *"instant in season"*. There are at least three

aspects to be considered regarding being *"instant in season"*. Just as it is important to note what Paul told Timothy what to do, it is also important to note when and how Paul told him to preach the Word.

Firstly, Timothy was to be ever ready to preach to others just as Peter exhorted those who were scattered throughout Asia Minor: *"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).* Thus it is incumbent on all God's people to be always ready and prepared to share the gospel with others, and particularly when one is asked for a reason for one's hope.

Secondly, the servant must be ready to address the enquirer's question, that is, whatever they are asked, not necessarily what one might like to talk about at that time. Such a response requires one to listen to the questioner. Paul exercised this wisdom in his preaching to the Corinthians: *"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able" (1 Cor. 3:1-2).* Paul withheld some aspects of the gospel because he realized they were unable to understand them at their stage of growth. Thus he continued: *"I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6).* It is as Jesus told His disciples: *"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12).*

Thirdly, Peter added that their preaching was to be *"with meekness and fear"*. The principle to be observed at all times is as Paul wrote to the Romans: *"Be not wise in your own conceits" (Rom. 12:16).* The objective must always be to *"let all things be done unto edifying" (1 Cor. 14:26).* ■

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