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THE FULNESS OF TIME

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Galatians 4:4)

Time is an abstract quantity, that is, it cannot be detected by the human senses of touch, taste, sight, hearing or smell. Nevertheless humans do have a sense of time in that they can sense how long ago an event occurred—was it a minute ago, an hour ago or a year ago?

On the other hand God is the master of time. He works to a precise schedule, one of the first evidences of which is His promise to Noah regarding the rain which resulted in the flood: “*For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights...*” (Gen. 7:4). “*And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth*” (Gen. 7:10). It started to rain precisely at the time God declared—seven days later—even though it had not previously rained on the earth (Gen. 2:5-6).

Seven days is only one week and so it may be contended it was easy for God to predict when the rain would start to fall. However God also works to a much longer time span, an example of which is His statement to Abraham regarding the birth of Isaac: “*But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year*” (Gen. 17:21). God set a time 12 months hence. Sarah laughed at the suggestion that she could bear a child in her old age, and so God confirmed His promise: “*Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son*” (Gen. 18:11-14). God’s promise was fulfilled at precisely the time He had nominated: “*And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare*

Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him” (Gen. 21:1-2).

Captivity

God’s plans span even greater periods. His plan for Israel was that they would be in captivity in Babylon for seventy years: “*And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon...*” (Jer. 25:11-12). “*For thus saith the LORD, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place*” (Jer. 29:10).

So great was the faith of the patriarchs in God’s ability to carry out His plans and promises at the time He had nominated that Daniel believed Jeremiah’s prophecy: “*In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem*” (Dan. 9:2).

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Centuries

While seventy years was the accepted life-span of human beings (Psa. 90:10), God's plans extend over even greater periods—indeed centuries—as was the case of Israel's slavery in Egypt: “*And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years*” (Gen. 15:13).

So remarkable was the fulfilment of that prophecy that several centuries later Stephen recounted it as a testimony of God's omnipotence: “*Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he (Stephen) said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran.... And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years*” (Acts 7:1-2, 6).

God's Omnipotence

All of the previous events testify to God's ability, power and authority to orchestrate world events and it is impossible for mankind to change His schedule. One example of mankind's failed attempt to change God's schedule is that of the “*king of the north*” and “*the king of the south*”: “*And both these kings' hearts shall be to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at one table; but it shall not prosper: for yet the end shall be at the time appointed... And some of them of understanding shall fall... because it is yet for a time appointed*” (Dan. 11:9, 13, 27, 35). Nothing the kings could do would alter God's time frame: it would be at the “*time appointed*”.

The Messiah

Earlier in his book Daniel records his vision with the angel Gabriel: “*Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning... And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding... for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself..: And he shall confirm the*

covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate” (Dan. 9:21-27).

Thus Daniel was given precise details regarding when God would send the Messiah—69 weeks after the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem. In view of this prophecy, and the time scale of a day for a year (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6), it is not surprising that, when John the Baptist came preaching the prophecy of Isaiah and urging the people to repent (Luke 3:2-6), they wondered if he were the Messiah: “*And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not*” (Luke 3:15). For those to whom God revealed Him, subsequent events left no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah: “*Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them*” (Matt. 11:2-5). Likewise Peter referred to the miracles Jesus had performed to convince the Israelites that Jesus was indeed the Messiah: “*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know*” (Acts 2:22).

Since then those who believe that Jesus was the Son of God have rejoiced in the hope of salvation from death which His death and resurrection have facilitated: “*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind... according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (2 Tim. 1:7-10).

Paul's testimony

It was in that context and with that understanding of God's time frame that the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians: “*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law*” (Gal. 4:4). Paul confirms that God had a predetermined time at which He would send His Son to Earth. He did not do so until that predetermined time had come, and it is in that event that Christians now rejoice: “*And Joseph*

also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 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 2:4-11). Jesus’ birth was reason for much rejoicing—the long-promised Messiah had come!

Star in the east

One of the phenomena that accompanied Jesus’ birth was the star in the east which directed the wise men to Jerusalem and then to Jesus’ birthplace in Bethlehem: “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him... And when he (Herod) had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet... When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was” (Matt. 2:1-9).

Such a star may be regarded as a miracle, that is, that God created it at that time specifically to fulfil His purpose. However some astronomers believe that it was an even greater miracle than what a spontaneous creation might imply, and its existence at that very time was further testimony that the fulness of time had come for the Messiah’s advent.

The suggestion is that the star of Bethlehem might have been caused by the movement of planet Jupiter. Using historical records and computer simulations that allow the position of the stars and planets to be charted back to around the time when Jesus is believed to have been born, some astronomers claim there was an unusual astronomical event: between September 3BC and May 2BC there were three “conjunctions” where the planet Jupiter and a star called Regulus passed close to each other in the night sky. The planet passed Regulus travelling first in its

usual easterly movement, before then appearing to reverse and pass it again in a westerly direction and then changing direction once more to resume its normal direction to the east to pass the star for a third time. En route for Bethlehem the miraculous star which they had seen in the far east appeared to them again, apparently as a ball of light or of fire travelling near the earth, and serving as a guide until they reached the very place where Jesus lay.

Another explanation offered by astronomers is based on the “second retrograde conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn and at the point where the planets reached the opposition of the sun”. The “opposition” was at its height and directly south in the skies for the elected **moment of birth**. In other words the Star of Bethlehem stood directly above the place where Jesus was born at the moment of His birth.

Such explanations do not denigrate the Biblical account but rather they accentuate it. The heavenly bodies were created and set in their paths at least 4000 years previously (Job 9:1-9). And now, at the moment of Jesus’ birth, they are in a rare and spectacular orientation. Is it possible God pre-planned their alignment centuries ago, and He sent forth His Son at precisely His pre-arranged “instant” of time when that rare orientation would occur? It is a remarkable coincidence, especially given the speed at which the heavenly bodies are considered to be moving. Thus it was indeed in the fulness of time that God sent forth His Son!

Into the future

Consequently the Christian can look forward fully assured that God’s promises relating to the future are sure and steadfast. The ransom sacrifice of Jesus will be “*testified in due time*” (1 Tim. 2:6), that is, when all the world will be resurrected, both “*the just and the unjust*” (Acts 24:15).

Meanwhile the Christian can but wait for God’s predetermined time to bless all the families of the earth: “*And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry*” (Hab. 2:2-3). “*And he shall send Jesus Christ... Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began*” (Acts 3:20-21). “*Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*” (Heb. 6:19-20).■

OUR FATHER ABRAHAM

"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" (Romans 4:16).

Abraham's importance in God's plan is evident from the references to him in the New Testament. Of particular significance is his faith. So significant was his faith that it is to those who, not being of the law, exemplify a similar faith that "*the promise is sure*".

Initially Abraham's name was Abram. Later God changed it to Abraham: "*And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran*" (Gen. 11:26). "*Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee*" (Gen. 17:5).

Get thee out of thy father's house

Abram married Sarai after which he left the land of his birth, Ur of the Chaldees, with his father Terah. The text states that Terah set out for the land of Canaan but he died *en route* at Haran: "*And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran*" (Gen. 11:31-32).

Genesis 11:31 may be understood to say that Terah was the initiator of the expedition and Abram merely went along with his father. However Genesis 12:1 reveals that, while that might appear to be the case, it was God who was directing their affairs: "*Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee*". And so it was that, regardless of whether he realised it, Terah was fulfilling God's plan. Further, the fact that Terah was not aware of God's direction of their affairs was consistent with his worship of false gods: "*And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time (that is, before they left Ur of the Chaldees—"the flood" means the river Euphrates), even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods*" (Joshua 24:2).

Not knowing whither He went

Genesis 11:31 may also be interpreted to say that Terah knew, before he set out, that his destination was the land of Canaan: "... *they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of*

Canaan..." However Hebrews 11:8 reads: "*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went*". Consequently, at first glance, Hebrews 11:8 might appear to be at variance with the record in Genesis 11. The seeming contradiction illustrates the perspective with which the Scriptures are written: Moses wrote Genesis 11:31 several centuries after Terah left Ur of the Chaldees and hence Genesis 11:31 is a retrospective and large scale view.

Regardless of how Genesis 11:31 is interpreted, after Terah died at Haran Abram was the decision maker, and he did not know his destination other than it was a land which God would later give him.

Separation

The way in which God exercised His hand in Abram's departure from Ur of the Chaldees has lessons for the Christian. In some respects Abram's position was similar to that of the Christian while in others it was very different.

One of the similarities is the instruction to Abram to leave his family and his father's house. One may imagine that it would have been a wrench for Abram to leave that environment. The Christian may relate that requirement to the pilgrimage upon which they are required to embark. They must look for the Lord's hand in all their doings and respond to His command without question, as exemplified by Jesus' disciples: "*And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him*" (Matt. 4:18-22).

Likewise Barnabas and Saul left their homeland environment to serve the Lord: "*Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy*

Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus" (Acts 13:1-4). The Christian must also be prepared to leave all they have, including family, to follow Him if He so requires.

Emotional separation

Not every Christian is called upon to leave their home environment. However they might be called upon to separate themselves emotionally from those dear to them, as Jesus said: "*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*" (Matt. 10:37): "*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple... So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple*" (Luke 14:26-33).

The expression "*hate not his father, and mother...*" has to be interpreted in the wider context of the Scriptures. In some instances "hatred" means vitriolic feelings as was the animosity towards Jesus which ultimately led to His crucifixion: "...*they hated me without a cause*" (John 15:25). However the over-riding principle for the Christian is not to hate anyone, not even their enemies: "*Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you*" (Matt. 5:43-44). Thus the expression relating to hating one's parents illustrates the supreme position the Master must occupy in the mind of every Christian—the Christian's love for Him must exceed that for his temporal family.

Such a priority of affection might lead to the family divorcing themselves from the Christian and thus it might be necessary for the Christian to emotionally separate themselves from their family. Such standing apart should not be a surprise to the Christian because Jesus foretold such situations will occur, and the Christian must be prepared to pay the price: "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*" (Matt. 10:34-37).

In all of life's experiences the Christian must be ever mindful of the exhortation: "*And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*" (2 Cor. 6:16-18). While the Christian might not be called upon to separate themselves physically from their earthly family they might need to "stand apart" from those around them.

Destination

In one sense the Christian's destination is the opposite of Abram's in that the Christian's destination is defined and assured before they set out: "*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). A crown of life is also promised to the faithful in the church of Smyrna: "...*be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*" (Rev. 2:10).

The Apostle Paul termed his reward a "*crown of righteousness*" which he was assured was set aside for him: "*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. 4:8).

The terms crown of life and crown of righteousness are synonymous: eternal will be offered only to the righteous: "*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal*" (Matt. 25:46).

The promise of eternal life should be an inspiration to every Christian: "*And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise... Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath... Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*" (Heb. 6:11-20). The example of

Abraham's faith is held up for the Christian to emulate. Moreover the Christian has a forerunner—"even Jesus"—which Abraham did not have, and therefore the Christian can be doubly confident their reward is sure and stedfast. Such an assured hope is to be an anchor of the "Christian's soul".

The Christian should be feel doubly assured of their reward because God has shed forth His Holy Spirit. It is testimony to the success of Jesus' sacrifice upon which all of God's promises are based: "*This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses... Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost (Spirit), he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2:32-36).

The only uncertainty regarding the Christian's reward is their future nature: "*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*" (1 John 3:2). The Scriptures do not reveal the minute details of the spirit nature which the over-comers will inherit, but that does not detract from the surety of the reward.

The way

While the Christian's destination is known and assured, the obstacles along the way are not known. However that should not be an insuperable obstacle—neither Abraham nor Paul knew what lay ahead of them: "*And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there*" (Acts 20:22). Just as Paul did not know what awaited him in Jerusalem, neither does the Christian know precisely what lies ahead of them. Consequently their resolve must be the same as Paul declared: "... *What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Acts 21:13).

In terms of facing and overcoming the obstacles which will be encountered along the way the Christian should take great comfort from the promise recorded in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but 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*". God will provide the strength necessary for every believer "to overcome".

Justification

Another inspiration which the Christian should glean

from the example of Abraham is that his standing before God was God's prerogative. It is likewise for the Christian: "*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth*" (Rom. 8:33). It was God and God alone who deemed Abraham to be just. And so it is with the Christian: "*To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*" (Rom. 3:26).

God deemed Abram to be righteous before Abram had performed any ritual, that is, specifically, before he was given the sign of circumcision: "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but 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. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect*" (Rom. 4:8-14).

Circumcision was given to Abraham as a seal (a sign or assurance) that God had deemed him righteous. Likewise the antitypical circumcision of the Christian is also a seal or assurance of their standing before God: "*Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart...*" (Jer. 4:4). The Christian must cast away their pride—the foreskin of their heart—and realise that their standing before God is due to His grace: "*For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God*" (Rom. 2:28-29). "*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 3:24).

Further, Abraham's justification might shed some light on the sequence of events as they are listed by the Apostle Paul: "*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also*

justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29-30). If the verses are interpreted to reflect the sequence of the Christian's pilgrimage, the sequence begins with God's foreknowledge of them, followed by Him choosing them to be a joint-heir with His Son, which is then followed by God justifying them. In other words, the verses confirm that the Christian's justification is not a result of their works but is a gift of God, just as it was with Abraham, and the Christian's works are a testimony to their faith and justification: "*Seest thou how faith wrought with his (Abraham's) works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only*" (James 2:22-24).

Father of the church

Paul attributed the ancestry of the church to Abraham stating that the believers of his day were the children of Abraham: "*Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham... That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ... Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made... And*

if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:6-29). The verses state that the blessing which Gentile believers receive today (that is, the gift of the holy spirit and justification) are part of the blessing which God gave to Abraham, and it is in that context that Abraham is held up as the father of the church: "*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... in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings... For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham*" (Heb. 2:9-16). The ancestry of Christians, both Jew and Gentile, could have been described in a number of ways—for example, as the descendants of Noah—but the writer to the Hebrews refers to them as **the seed of Abraham** (which confirms that Christian belief is part of the blessing given to Abraham—Gal. 4:28).

There are several other aspects of Abraham's life which can be held up as examples for the Christian to follow, but maybe it will not be until the prophecy of Isaiah 40:4-5 is fulfilled that the full value of his life and witness will be apparent to the Church and to all mankind: "*Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it*" (Isa. 40:5). ■

TISHA B'AV

Tisha B'Av, also known as "The Ninth of Av," is a fast day in Israel that commemorates the destruction of the two Temples. It falls on the ninth day of the Hebrew month of *Av*, which usually coincides with late July or mid-August on the secular calendar. It is regarded by the Jews as a tragic day in Jewish history.

The First Temple was built by King Solomon and was the most important place in ancient Judaism. It was destroyed when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. The Second Temple was built on the site of the First Temple and was completed in 516 B.C.E. Sadly, the Second Temple was also destroyed, this time during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

The destruction of the two Temples took place on the same day – the ninth of *Av* – about 656 years apart. These two events were so tragic that the ancient rabbis declared the anniversary of the Temples' destruction a day of mourning. This is the origin of *Tisha B'Av*. On the 17th of *Tammuz* in 70 C.E. the

Romans breached the walls of Jerusalem, then spent the next three weeks ransacking the city until the Second Temple was burned on the ninth of *Av*. In remembrance of this event Jews fast on the 17th of *Tammuz* and observe a time of mourning during the three weeks leading up to *Tisha B'Av*. No weddings are permitted during this period.

During the evening service in the synagogue a sombre text from the book of Lamentations is read regarding the destruction of the First Temple and the siege of Jerusalem. Because people are in mourning, they don't greet each other at the synagogue and they sometimes sit on the floor instead of in seats.

On July 27, 2011, Arutz Sheva (Israel National News) reported that more than 100,000 Jews flooded the Kotel (Western Wall) on July 25 and 26 to say traditional *Tisha B'Av* lamentations for the loss of the First and Second Temples. Also thousands encircled the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem to mark the day of mourning. ■

SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

God has sprinkled promises throughout the Scriptures. Matthew 6:33 contains one of them, although it might be veiled a little by the exhortation that accompanies it: “*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you*”.

The verse gives rise to at least five questions:

- What does it **mean** to seek the Kingdom of God?
- Why did Jesus say, “*seek ye first the Kingdom of God*”?
- **How** does one seek the Kingdom?
- What does it mean to “*seek His righteousness*”?
- What are “*these things*” that will be added?

Meaning

From early times people have been exhorted to seek the Lord God. One example is when Moses instructed the nation of Israel during their exodus from Egypt before they entered the Promised Land: “*Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you... When thou shalt... corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image... and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God... The Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen... but if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God... if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul... and shalt be obedient unto his voice... he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them*” (Deut. 4:1, 25, 27, 29, 30-31). In Israel’s case, seeking the kingdom meant doing all that God had commanded them, including not making any graven image. They had to be totally devoted to God’s ordinances—to seek Him with all their heart.

The same requirement applies to the Christian today. The Apostle Paul wrote: “*Brethren... 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). Paul’s focus was on one thing and one thing only—the prize of the high calling—and so must it be for all Christians.

The kingdom

Matthew 6:33 also stipulates seeking the **kingdom** of God. Jesus was making a distinction between the future for mankind in general (which is to be citizens

of the kingdom on earth), and the hope held out to His followers of the current era (which is to be joint heirs with Him).

The prophet Isaiah wrote of the hope for all mankind to be citizens of the kingdom on the earth: “*And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*” (Isa. 2:3). In that day the people on the earth will happily—willingly—go to the house of Jacob (that is, Israel) to learn of God’s ways.

On the other hand the Apostle Paul wrote of the superior hope for Jesus’ followers: “*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*” (Rom. 8:17). Their heirship involves reigning with Christ, not just being a citizen in the kingdom: “*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years*” (Rev. 20:4). Those who will reign with Christ will have fulfilled the same requirements as was imposed on the Israelites of old—they will not have worshipped any false god but, on the contrary, will have devoted their whole lives to His service—they will have been “*beheaded for the witness of Jesus*”. It is to this group who will reign with Him that Jesus was referring when He told His disciples to seek the kingdom—He was telling them to seek to be joint-heirs with Him.

The offer of being heirs in the kingdom was first offered to the Jews and it was only because they failed to realise Jesus was the Messiah that the offer was extended to the Gentiles: “*Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles*” (Acts 13:46).

However the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as the Messiah did not mean God’s plan had failed. As Paul explains, He planned the grafting in of the Gentiles from the beginning of time: “*As he saith also in Osee (Hosea 2:23), I will call them my people, which were*

not my people... And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God" (Rom. 9:25-26). Through the prophet Hosea God recorded that it was His plan to graft in the Gentiles, those who initially were "*not His people*", to become the children of God. The Apostle Paul explained it to the Galatians in these terms: "*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham*" (Gal. 3:8-9). It was in God's plan—He "foresaw"—that He would justify the heathen (the Gentiles) which implies He knew (planned) the Jews would reject Jesus as the Messiah.

John the Baptist

Jesus used the same concept of membership of the kingdom being a lower honour than being an heir of the kingdom when He spoke of John the Baptist: "*For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he*" (Luke 7:28). John also knew he was not a joint-heir: "*John answered and said... I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled*" (John 3:27-29). John the Baptist was a friend of the bridegroom but not a member of His bride, even though, as Jesus said, John was the greatest prophet that ever lived. It was not John's province to be a joint-heir—John the Baptist will be in the kingdom but not as a joint-heir.

How to seek the kingdom

In Matthew 6:33 Jesus was also exhorting His disciples to put aside every other pursuit in their life and follow in His footsteps, to live a life of dedication, a life of devotion to service and sacrifice. That is what Paul also said in his letter to the Romans: "*Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*" (Rom. 12:1). The meaning of "service" is worship (Strong's Concordance #2999), and so the Christian's worship to God comprises complete dedication to His commands, forsaking all other aims and ambitions—presenting their very bodies to Him for use as He wishes.

Thus seeking the kingdom does not mean merely "dressing up" and attending meetings of fellow believers (although fellowship is important—Heb. 10:25), nor does it mean merely learning doctrinal facts and participating in discussion of spiritual

knowledge, even though that is very enjoyable. Seeking the kingdom means to live one's consecration, demonstrating by works that one is consecrated to their Lord: "*For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God*" (Rom. 2:28-29).

Reasoning

For some the decision to seek the kingdom is an intellectual one and not an emotional one. Although he was not striving for a position in the church (the door not yet being open), Solomon was one who used his intellect to "reason things out": "*I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven...*" (Eccl. 1:12-13). Ecclesiastes 12:13 records his conclusion: "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man*".

The Christian must also "reason". Reasoning was one of the bases from which Paul preached to the Jews: "*And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures*" (Acts 17:2). "*For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ*" (Acts 18:28).

Likewise the Christian is to have a reason for their belief and to be able to expound it to others: "*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).

Righteousness

Another exhortation Jesus gave to His disciples and therefore also to those who would follow afterwards, is that they seek God's righteousness.

The Christians' righteousness must be greater than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees: "*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5:20). The scribes and Pharisees esteemed themselves righteous because they mechanically observed the ordinances of the Law Covenant. However Jesus knew their heart: "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also*

outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt. 23:27-28). The Christians’ desire must be to have a clean heart, not filled with malice or hypocrisy: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me*” (Psa. 51:10).

The belief that God deems anyone righteous because of the faith they hold might be difficult to accept—the over-riding thought might be that one has to earn their righteousness. Nevertheless that is not the case as the Apostle Paul explains: “*For they (the Jews) being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise... The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*” (Rom. 10:3-10). Those verses do not mean that there is no place for works. On the contrary, one must demonstrate their faith by their works, but it is their faith which instigates their works and not the other way around: “*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?... faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works*” (Jas. 2:14-18).

These things

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7), Jesus taught the multitude that they should not be concerned about their food and raiment because God knows they have need of those things (Matt. 6:31-32). That might seem to teach that His followers will never go hungry or be without clothes. However, Jesus also taught the people about priorities, that those considerations were less important than life itself: “... *Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*” (Matt. 6:25). The Christian’s goal should be the attainment of the kingdom of God—that is, as heirs in that kingdom—and not the attainment of food or raiment in this present life. God will provide whatever is needed to enable the Christian to fulfil His plans.

Notwithstanding God will provide, the Christian is not to be reckless or careless with the earthly

necessities that God has provided for them, but they must always acknowledge that they represent the grace of God: “*For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises*” (Heb. 6:10-12).

All these admonitions give some direction for life, and it’s good to see people moving in a good direction, but there’s no cause on earth, no other pursuit in the history of mankind, no direction for one’s life, that can bring as much joy, as much life experience, as much personal development and fulfilment, as much inward blessing and contentment, as much thankfulness, as much genuine happiness, as much direction, as much strength, as much love, as the promise of being one of those who will inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:10), and share the opportunity of blessing all the families of earth. There is no better direction than seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.■

GRACE SUFFICIENT

Bear the burden of the present,
Let the morrow bear it’s own;
If the morning sky be pleasant,
Why the passing night bemoan?

If the darkened heavens lower,
Wrap thy cloak around thy form;
Though the tempest rise in power,
God is Mightier than the storm.

Steadfast faith and hope unshaken
Animate the trusting breast;
Step by step the journey’s taken
Nearer to the land of rest.

All unseen, the Master walketh,
By the toiling servant’s side;
Comfortable, soothing words He talketh,
While His Hands uphold and guide.

Grief, nor pain, nor any sorrow
Rends thy heart to Him unknown;
He today and He tomorrow
Grace sufficient gives his own.

Then bear thy burden with good cheer,
Take promptly up thy daily cross;
Nor hesitate to shed a tear
Nor reckon o’er thy present loss.■

THE INSTITUTE AND ITS WORK

The Berean Bible Institute Inc. (the publisher of this magazine) is an independent organisation incorporated in the State of Victoria, Australia. It was established in Melbourne, Victoria, in 1918.

The Institute is a “not-for-profit organisation”. There are no paid staff; the work is undertaken by volunteers who are sympathetic to the Institute’s mission.

The Institute is managed by a committee of five who are elected by its members at the Annual General Meeting which now is held in January each year.

Membership

Membership is open to anyone who wishes to be associated with the work and the doctrines which the Institute promulgates. The Institute is forbidden by its Rules to solicit members and so the initiative for membership lies with the applicant. All applications have to be made on the official application form which has been approved by *Corporate Affairs Victoria*. The committee has sole discretion regarding the acceptance of applications.

Persons do not need to be members to help with the work; anyone who wishes to assist in the promulgation of the truths of the Bible as understood by the Institute may volunteer their services.

Doctrine

Anyone who is contemplating membership is advised to obtain a copy of the Doctrinal Policy of the Institute (provided free upon request) which sets out the doctrines the Institute promulgates and those which it is not prepared to promulgate.

The Policy does not mean the Institute believes it is the sole custodian of the truths of the Bible, nor does it mean it promulgates all of the truths contained in its pages. The Institute contends salvation is an individual matter and the Institute’s role is merely to provide material which recipients might find helpful in their personal Christian walk.

No specific ecclesia

The Berean Bible Institute is not tied to any particular group. It is not a church in the traditional sense of the word. Its ministry stands alone, nevertheless it cooperates with all individuals and groups of Bible students anywhere in the world who are endeavouring to ascertain the truth of the 66 books of the Bible. Individual Bible study and proving all things for themselves are strongly encouraged: all individuals

are encouraged “*to search the Scriptures daily whether these things be so*” (Acts 17:11), until they are “*fully persuaded in their own mind*” (Rom. 14:5).

Its work

The Institute’s work embraces five main areas:

- **Distribution of printed material and DVD.** These publications are sent in response to requests arising from advertisements in the print media and the Institute’s internet site. The booklets are published by organisations overseas and are ones which the Institute believes convey an accurate understanding of Biblical truth. The number of items distributed ranges between approximately 650 and 1150 per year.
- **Sponsoring a web site** (www.bbi.org.au). The Institute’s web site is attracting an average of 70 visits per month. It provides a summary of the Institute’s position regarding several issues. It also contains the addresses to which requests for printed items and DVD may be sent.
- **Publishing a quarterly magazine** (this magazine) in January, April, July and October each year. The current distribution is approximately 240 per issue to persons in eight countries.
- **Sponsoring a four day residential convention** once a year; currently in January at Camp Wilkin, Anglesea, Victoria. In January 2011 there were 87 full time attendees.
- **Assistance to brethren.** As resources permit, associates in Australia visit people who are sympathetic to the work of the Institute but who are isolated. Visits are made to people in Australia as well as overseas, and such visits are becoming an increasingly important part of the Institute’s ministry, even though the majority of the costs involved are borne by the individuals who undertake the visit. As well as visiting those in need of fellowship, the Institute provides some financial support to those in material need. This aspect of the work requires prayerful guidance as it can easily consume a significant portion of the Institute’s funds.

Finance

The Institute is financed by bequests, interest earned thereon and voluntary contributions.■

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).■

WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE TRUE

In his letter to the Philippians the Apostle Paul addresses several aspects of Christian living. In chapter 1:27-29 he exhorts them to “*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*”. The exhortation was a reminder that they needed to support each other in the narrow way—they needed to “*strive together*”.

On the other hand, in chapter 2:12 he exhorted them “*to work out their own salvation*”. The exhortation was applicable in both an individual sense and a collective sense. In an individual sense it was consistent with his exhortation to the saints in Rome: “*... Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*” (Rom. 14:5). In the collective sense the exhortation was relevant because he had left them, having sailed to Troas (Acts 20:4-6). As an ecclesia they had to sustain themselves.

Chapter 3 begins with the exhortation to “rejoice in the Lord”. Rejoicing in the Lord necessitates counting one’s blessings. However that does not mean that “everything in the garden is lovely”. On the contrary they were to be aware of the dangers that surrounded them: he exhorts them to beware of “dogs”. No verse specifically identifies who the “dogs” were; Jesus also used the term (Matt. 7:6) but He did not provide any clue as to whom He meant.

Paul further warned the Philippians to “*beware of evil workers*”. These were they who were aggressive opponents, acting in ways which were both deceitful and destructive. Paul describes them in his letter to the Corinthians: “*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ*” (2 Cor. 11:13).

Paul further warned the Philippians to “*beware of the circumcision*” (chapter 3:1). The circumcision were self-righteous Jews who not only rejected Jesus as the Messiah but who also opposed all those who did recognise Him as their Saviour: “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness*” (Matt. 23:27).

The mind and heart

The mind determines the nature of a man: “*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...*” (Prov. 23:7). Likewise Jesus said to the Pharisees: “*O generation of vipers... out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil*

things...” (Matt. 12:34-35). Proverbs 4:23 contains the exhortation: “*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*”.

And so it is that Paul concludes his letter to the Philippians with some exhortations regarding the protection of their mind. He lists several things and exhorts them to “*think on these things*” (Phil. 4:8).

Things that are true

Paul writes that the first safe-guard of the mind is to think on “*whatsoever things are true*”.

“Truth” is wide ranging—the root meaning of the Greek is “not concealing”, that is, not deceitful, not frivolous, and not fictitious.

Fiction and deceit go hand in hand in that both strive to lead one to believe things to be true when they are not true. Both conceal the truth; they distort one’s vision. They present something that is not factual as though it were fact. Once fiction enters one’s intellect, the mind becomes clouded and it becomes difficult to distinguish truth from error—how does one know where the fiction ends and the truth begin? The difference between the effects of truth and fiction is illustrated by Peter’s experience when the angel released him from prison: “*And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision*” (Acts 12:7-9). The incident illustrates the confusion and uncertainty which a vision (or fiction—something which is not real) causes in the mind.

As Paul exhorted, the only safe way for the Christian is to eradicate all falsehood from their minds and think only on those things which are true.■

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