

Words Of Peace & Truth

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WORDS OF PEACE & TRUTH
(Esther 9:30; see also Zechariah 8:19)
NO. 86: MAY – AUGUST 2012
Editorial

Certainly we continue to live in turbulent times. In terms of weather, here in Britain we have had the wettest April and June since records began, while we hear that the U.S.A. is experiencing the worst drought in decades. Politically, Syria – where many Christians fled from Iraq – is in a state of upheaval and the aftermath of the so-called “Arab Spring” in several countries gives cause for concern. Socially, it is distressing that several world leaders favour the liberalisation of marriage; we may take this as an indicator of the rapidly deteriorating moral state of the western world. As to the economic situation, as this magazine goes to print fresh concerns are being raised as to the financial situation of Spain and Greece and the implications for the Eurozone.

On a more positive note, here in the U.K. the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has been an occasion for thanksgiving as we thank God for the Christian influence she has exerted over this country and the Commonwealth. Now that event has given way to the hubbub associated with the Olympic Games.

Among Christian believers, alongside much happy fellowship and devoted service to the Lord, and reports too of conversions, there are many trials and sorrows caused by persecution, sickness, bereavement, or other happenings. Neither can we shut our eyes to the confused and discredited state of Christendom as a whole.

In contrast to all this upheaval, how good it is that a hope is set before us, “which we have as anchor for the soul, both secure and firm, and entering into that within the veil, where Jesus is entered as forerunner for us” (Hebrews 6:19-20). May this issue of WPT help us to an increased appreciation of the superiority, reality and preciousness of all that we have in Him. G.S.B.

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THREE RIVERS OF GOD AND THEIR SOURCES

Genesis 2:10; Ezekiel 47:1-6; Revelation 22:1-2.

A river has a huge influence – drinking water, food supply, trade, transportation, irrigation as well as sport and pleasure. Some of these things have an impact on all of us.

These three great rivers of the Bible and their sources have a moral influence. They speak of the influence of God. What a thing it is to think of the blessed God Himself shedding divine influences so that persons like you and I may benefit and be blessed when we are caught up in the flow of them.

The world, as a system, has its rivers and they run counter to God's rivers; the world's rivers flow downward while the rivers of God flow upward.

The River Which Flows From Eden

Eden is the source of the river of God's pleasure. The influence and power of God's delight has caught up men and women of faith in every clime and century. It has four streams which speak of its universality; but like every great river, these streams have many tributaries. Some of these tributaries are great rivers in themselves. The river of God's pleasures, Psalm 36:8, is inexhaustible, yet in wisdom's ways God's pleasure has touched the sons of men, Proverbs 8:30-31. Paul refers to its blessed operations in Ephesians 1:5.

Have you come under the influence of this river? Are you a man or a woman of faith?

Enoch is an example of a man of faith. Enoch walked with God, Genesis 5:22. Enoch was translated; he did not see death, because he had a testimony. The testimony that he had is that he had pleased God, he walked with God. What is your testimony, and mine? 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

Psalm 1:1-3 gives us a perfect picture of the result of being planted by these glorious streams of God's pleasures. People are known by their fruits – where and how you walk, stand, sit, grow and prosper. Psalm 1:1-3 presents Christ Himself: all that He does prospers. Isaiah 53:10 tells us that the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in His hand. How could it not prosper in Christ's hand! Think of all that has been placed in His hand! John 3:35. And **we** are in His hand and God's pleasure prospers there. John 10:7,28. What a sphere of influence the believer is caught up in, indeed.

In Luke 2:14-16 the river of God's pleasure gets wider and deeper as the incarnation and God's pleasure in men is revealed in Christ at His birth. This river flows continually upwards. Are our souls not attracted and swept up in its flow? The shepherds said to one another, "Let us make our way then now ... and they came with haste and found...the babe lying in the manger".

Have you made your way to find this precious Saviour who is Christ the Lord?

The Lord Jesus Christ was in every detail of daily life the perfection and centre of God's delight. He could say, "I do always the things that are pleasing to him." John 8:29. At His baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration the heavens openly declared that the Father's full delight is in this blessed Man; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight." How deep, indeed, the river of delights flowed then. Nothing could stop the glorious river of God's pleasure. It must flow onward to Gethsemane and on to Calvary where, at every point, it grew fuller and more glorious. We read in Isaiah words which baffle all human thought, "it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath subjected him to suffering." The mighty river of God's delight flowed ever so slowly into death and into the grave. Did it stop there? No! Never! The Man of God's pleasure was raised from the

dead by the glory of the Father. This river flows upward, heavenward. “Wherefore also God highly exalted Him and granted Him a Name, that which is above every Name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow.” God’s pleasure is eternally centred in Christ as Man; once in humiliation on a cross, now in heaven crowned with glory and honour.

In contrast with this, the world’s river of pleasure also has many, many tributaries. Men and women, boys and girls are sometimes quickly and unwittingly swept away before they realize it. Moses was sheltered by his parents from the full force of Egypt’s awful influence; he was hidden three months, and when he could be hidden no longer he was put in an ark of reeds which was plastered with resin and with pitch and placed in the sedge on the bank of the river.

When Moses became great he refused that whole overpowering influence, “choosing rather” (Hebrews 11:25 – a beautiful touch, the word ‘rather’); he chose rather to suffer affliction along with the people of God than to have the **temporary pleasures** of sin. The streams and tributaries of the world are so alluring and they may flow ever so gently for a bit but the rip-tides are strong with forceful under-tow and soon they become a raging white water torrent of fast-flowing misery, strife and want. The naive, unsuspecting soul is rushed headlong onward and is soon engulfed in the vilest evil.

Let us choose rather to be like Moses and esteem the reproach of Christ to be greater than any temporary pleasure this world can offer. Thank God if those influences are broken in our lives! Happy if we can say:

The river of God’s pleasure
Is what sustains us now,
Till Thy new Name’s imprinted
On every sinless brow.

The River Which Flows From The House Of God

The river in Ezekiel 47 has a millennial bearing as well as a present application. This river, although it has a different character from the one that flows from Eden, is inexhaustible and also has many tributaries. The effect of this river's influence may be traced from Genesis 28; Bethel is the 'House of God'.

The measurements of the thousand cubits had an effect on Jacob and will have an effect on each one who is caught up by the influence of this river of God. The measuring of the thousand cubits speaks of experience with God.

In Genesis 32:24-31 Jacob wrestled; he was alone and wrestled until the rising of the dawn. Jacob's thousand cubits that night reached his loins for as the sun rose upon him "he limped upon his hip." He was a changed man with a new name. He is limping and yet he prevailed! The old Jacob with his deeds of independence and cheating for advancement is gone. Now he is a prince of God. The ones caught and influenced by this river have a godly dignity about them.

Have you ever spent a night on your knees in prayer wrestling a matter out with God?

This river which flows from God's house also had an impact on Moses who was in God's house as a faithful servant, Hebrews 3:1-6. The influence of this great river makes a person faithful to God. But as great a man as Moses was, he is eclipsed. Whereas Moses is a faithful servant, Christ as **Son** is over the house of God (whose house are we). Christ is the Builder of it; Hebrews 3:4-6, Matthew 16:18.

King David speaks of *his affliction*, of *his affection* and of *his power* in relation to the House of God, 1 Chronicles 22:14; 29:2,3. God would have a dwelling place and David's desire and devotion are beautifully seen in Psalm 132.

Among the great influences that prevail in God's house is love; love is at home there. This would be considering for and caring for one another, serving one another and provoking one another to good works. It is in the house that we learn to behave, in the house setting we learn good manners; there we learn to imitate what is good. It is in the house that we learn what holiness is and to be holy. It is in the house that we learn to pray. We are corrected in the house; this is where judgment begins. In the house sons and daughters are free and have liberty. We are sons and daughters of God Almighty; 2 Corinthians 6:17-18. God is holy and holiness becomes His house forever. In the light of this fact, should we not walk in godly fear? 1 Peter 1:13-17; Psalm 93:5; Psalm 5:7. Paul tells Timothy to behave himself in God's house which he identifies as "the church of the living God the pillar and base of the truth"; 1 Timothy 3:15. When caught up in the flow of this river of God, persons are made to live, not merely to exist, because of their nearness to the "living God".

The thousands of cubits that are measured are exacting, certain and sure. The ankles affect your walk; the knees affect your prayer life; the loins affect your affections, and, the "waters to swim in that cannot be passed through" lead the soul into what Paul refers to as the 'whole counsel of God'; Acts 20:27 All this is connected to the river which flows from the doorstep of the House of God.

The River Which Flows From The Throne

The river which flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb shows some of the characteristics of government in the world to come; Revelation 22:1-2. The government will be upon Christ's shoulder. Scripture speaks of persons who live and reign with the Christ a thousand years. What is the character of this river's influence? **Life!** In previous chapters in Revelation, reference is made to "fountains", Revelation 7:17; and also to "the

fountain of the water of life”, Revelation 21:6. But as regards the kingdom, as regards the throne, it is noteworthy that the “**river** of water of life” is mentioned as emanating from this most exalted source, the Throne of God and of the Lamb. The full expression of its influence will be known publicly throughout the world to come (during the millennium). Now, it is known to faith. What a contrast it is to the world’s governments where death and the intimidation of war hold sway; where there is arrogance of man in the power and advancement of nuclear armaments and weapons of mass destruction and where the sacred value of life, even that of the unborn babies, is forsaken and abandoned. The beginning of man’s kingdom is Babel and it will end in Great Babylon whose judgment is swift and sure to come.

The holy city, heavenly Jerusalem, Revelation 21:9-22:5, is in direct contrast to Great Babylon. There is no arrogance flowing in this river of water of life! Take a look at the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 5 where, having opened His mouth, He taught His disciples saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed they that mourn...Blessed the meek...Blessed they who hunger and thirst after righteousness...Blessed the merciful...Blessed the pure in heart...Blessed the peacemakers...Blessed they who are persecuted on account of righteousness...Blessed are ye when they may reproach and persecute you, and say every wicked thing against you, lying, for my sake...” Now, contrast that with what prevails in the governments and politics of this world.

Then the second feature of this blessed flowing influence is this: “clear as crystal.” Crystal clarity and brightness marks all of God’s dealings. With God there is no darkness at all and no shadows of grey. Again, contrast this with the governments of the world, with the secret, behind-closed-doors meetings, double dealing and corruption with money and favours buying a decision and a vote! These evil, corrupt features of darkness and deceit will not prevail in God’s kingdom. They belong to this world’s

politics, not to God's world. In God's world things are as "clear as crystal." Jesus Christ will soon be publicly and altogether made supreme; for He is King of kings and Lord of lords of whom the Bible says, "Thy throne, O God, is to the age of the age, and a sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom," Hebrews 1:8. Those that will reign with Him forever and ever are being trained, fitted and formed even now for a part and a place in that world to come of which we speak. Someone may say, 'How is this possible today?' It is possible today by the influence of this river of God which emanates from His throne.

There is much more to these rivers than what we have feebly touched here. As you pray over these little impressions may the Lord Himself lead your heart to know the fulness and depth of the rivers of God.

Are you being influenced by the rivers of this world and their tributaries which are all flowing downwards?

The persons who are carried away by the terrible engulfing evil influences of the world may seem to prosper and succeed better for a time, yet the awful judgment of God and the lake of fire will be their final destruction and curse.

Or, are you being influenced and carried along by the glorious rivers of God which are flowing upwards to heaven and to glory and joy and blessing both now and for eternity? May it be so, for His Name's sake!

There only is the fountain
Whence living waters flow,
Which like a glorious river
Still gladden as they go.

David F. Wiseman, Los Angeles, 2011.

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

Leviticus 25: 1 – 13; Luke 4:16 – 32.

I hope you all enjoyed the Queen's Diamond Jubilee last week. We thank God for a faithful Queen who has reigned over us for 60 years

The concept of the Jubilee goes back a long way as we can see from the scripture we have read in Leviticus. Every seventh year was to be a Sabbath. The land would rest and the people would eat the produce that grew of itself. After seven sabbatical years there would be a Jubilee. The word 'Jubilee' means "a blowing of trumpets" or "shouts of joy," and what shouts of joy there would be when the captives and slaves were set free to return to the possessions and families that God had given them. The Jubilee year commenced on the Day of Atonement which would remind us of the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ who died to make propitiation to God for our sins by His shed blood and to be our substitute so that our sins are never remembered again.

Sadly, there is no record in Scripture that the sabbatical year was ever kept; and without the Sabbath there could be no Jubilee. We know that the sabbatical year was ignored for centuries and that God overlooked this for 490 years. Then the people of Judah were carried away captive to Babylon so that the land could rest for the 70 years of Sabbaths that had been missed (2 Chron 36:21).

It is interesting that when Peter asked the Lord how many times he should forgive his brother he was told to forgive seventy times seven (490 times), the same number as the years that the Sabbaths were not kept in the Old Testament.

Like so many Old Testament types the Jubilee is fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ. We have read in Luke's Gospel of the commencement of His ministry after He had been anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism, following which He had met every

temptation of the Devil in the wilderness. He had bound the strong man and was now going to divide the spoil (Luke 11:21,22).

So the Lord came to Nazareth where He had been brought up. The people had heard what he had done in Capernaum and there would have been an atmosphere of anticipation as He stood up to read from the prophet Isaiah. It was not a book such as we have today, but a hand written roll with no chapters or verses. But the Lord knew where to look and He found the place we know as chapter 61. It was a little different from our Bibles as the Lord was reading from the Septuagint, the Greek translation from the Hebrew that had been made about 300 years before by 70 Jewish scholars in Alexandria.

The people must have been familiar with the passage the Lord read. No doubt the Rabbi had told them that it spoke of the coming Messiah for whom they all waited. But then Jesus said something that astounded everyone, “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears”! The local carpenter’s son was announcing Himself as the long-promised Messiah! And more than that, He was proclaiming the Jubilee – the acceptable year of the Lord when the brokenhearted would be healed, the captives delivered, the blind given their sight and those bruised set at liberty. We can understand how they wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.

We are still in the acceptable year of the Lord today. Captives to sin are still being delivered, those sitting in darkness are having their eyes opened by the Saviour (Matt. 4 v 16), the brokenhearted and bruised in this sinful world are healed and set at liberty through His death on the cross. What a Gospel we have to proclaim!

If you look at Isaiah 61 you will see that the Lord stopped reading in the middle of verse 2. He did not go on to read of “the day of vengeance of our God” for His was a ministry of grace.

The day of God's vengeance will surely come when the acceptable year of the Lord has run its course. Judgement is God's strange work, only a day compared with a year.

Then the congregation in the synagogue began to mutter, "Is not this Joseph's son?" and the Lord warned them that they could so easily miss the blessing that He was offering. There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, but he was sent to a widow of Sarepta. What extraordinary grace that the prophet should be sent to a city ruled by Jezebel's father! There were many lepers in Israel in Elisha's day, but none was cleansed save a Syrian general!

Alas, instead of rejoicing, the people attempted to cast Jesus over the cliff; but as He said so frequently in John's Gospel, His hour had not yet come and He passed through the midst of them and went His way.

Eventually, His hour did come (John 13:1). As Peter said at Pentecost, He was delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, but at the same time He was taken by wicked hands and crucified and slain (Acts 2:23). Man rejected the Saviour, but God's counsel was fulfilled so that the blessing of the Jubilee can come to us today.

And what a blessing it is! The whole question of our sins has been settled fully and finally at the cross to God's eternal satisfaction so that through repentance and faith we can come into the freedom of the year of Jubilee. Well may we shout for joy!

Soon the Saviour will come again, not only in judgement, but to bring blessing to the whole earth. Then as we sang at the commencement of our meeting, "Earth will keep her Jubilee"!

What a Saviour we have! Is He not worthy of our praise and worship?

*Substance of a gospel preaching by
Tony Sheldrake at Selsdon, Croydon, 10th June, 2012.*

TIMES AND SEASONS

THE MOMENT OF THE SPIRIT'S CRY

“The Spirit and the bride say, Come.” (Rev. 22:17)

IT is well to see the difference between the observance of “days and months and times and years” as being part of the system of this world (the religious system it may be, but none the less are they the elements of this world), and the way in which God is pleased to pass on through this time state from one point to another in the history of His ways with the world, and with men in it. We are none of us in the same spot of our journey, or in the moment of our history, as we were a year ago. With Israel of old the pillar-cloud moved on, and the congregation moved with it. God, however patient and longsuffering He may be, moves on in His ways and dealings with men, whether dispensationally or even individually.

After the expulsion of man from paradise, the first direct dealing of God with the world was in providing salvation for the family of faith, and bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly (*2 Peter 2:5*). Then He brought Noah out of the ark and put the government of the new world into his hand. It was a point reached in the ways of God, but though the name of Noah betokened rest, yet it was but typical; Noah failed, and God passed on to His own end. Things could not stop where they were, and when men were seeking to ripen their own schemes for the possession of the earth, God brought out His heir of the world, and gave the promises to Abraham. The effect of the promises on the patriarchs was that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth (*Hebrews 11:13*), but strangership and pilgrimage were not rest, though another point was reached in God's ways, and He passed on. The 400 years of waiting (*Genesis 15:13*) went on with its many events, and the time of the promise drew nigh, and God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. He was again moving on

in His ways; men had come and gone, and nations had arisen; but God always moves on to His own end, and when God moves on there is no return to that which was before, though the effects abide. God brought Israel out of Egypt as a redeemed people, making good His title of Redeemer against every foe, and established them as a people of possession, giving them His laws and ordinances. Here again Israel failed, and no point of rest was gained for God, whatever might be prefigured, and God again passes on to His own end.

In the history of the people of God we may trace His ways in successive dispensational dealings, and we may trace the history of men raised up of God who served their generation and passed away, while God went on with His plans in patient unwearied wisdom and grace. At the head of the dispensational dealings portrayed in the feasts of the Lord (Lev. 23) stands the Sabbath. The end of all God's ways will be a Sabbath of rest. First in God's movement towards this end comes the passover with its feast of unleavened bread. Deliverance from Egypt and testing in the wilderness succeeded the passover, but the day of the wave sheaf came. In order for that to be offered God must move on, and bring His people out of the wilderness to Canaan. The wave sheaf prefigured Christ in resurrection, the firstfruits of God's harvest. Connected with this is the feast of weeks; a new generation had been brought into blessing, and not merely delivered from Egypt, while the generation of the flesh fell in the desert. So now a generation, the fruit of God's sovereign mercy, are brought to Him, on the new ground of resurrection life in the power of the Spirit (*figuratively, having passed over the Jordan – Ed.*).

We may pause here to notice the history of the men who were raised up of God. I notice first the passing away of Moses, the servant faithful in God's house so that there was none like him, but we read "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab . . . and He buried him." It is most affecting to read, and

Israel might well weep for him for thirty days. Jehovah pauses in His way for their sorrow, but we read further “so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended” and Joshua assumes the leadership. God moves on, and the people move on under Joshua through Jordan, when the Ark of the Lord of all the earth had made a passage for them. The days of Miriam, too, had passed, and there is no one to sing the Lord’s song till Hannah’s voice is heard, and David comes on the scene, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. Aaron the Lord’s priest goes up Mount Hor and is stripped of his garments, and Moses puts them on Eleazar, who becomes the representative of priesthood in the power of life. Men come and go, but the lessons of the past are not lost; God moves on and teaches His people more of His blessed ways. I have referred to David; to no one was it more given to enter into and record the ways of the Lord in long-suffering mercy and faithfulness, as well as in justice and judgment, yet the sweet Psalmist of Israel looked on in the ways of God to Another who should be “as the light of the morning when the sun riseth” (2 *Samuel* 23:4) while it is written of himself, “Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die.” He passes away, for that of which he spoke, the rest of God on the sure ground of His own election and grace – the everlasting covenant made with David ordered in all things and sure – depended for its establishment upon One in whom the purposes of God could centre and abide. To speak according to type, the staves of the ark can be drawn out, and the glory appear, when the Son of David reigns. God is moving on to that point.

In the ways of God a pause is denoted (Lev. 23) after the feast of weeks; the harvest has to be gathered in before the trumpet announces the resumption of God’s dealings with Israel, and the introduction of the rest prefigured in the feast of tabernacles. We are now, so to speak, in the seven days of Pentecost,* though perhaps near to the end of that period. I have said that the wave

sheaf introduced this period; the wave sheaf is Christ risen and glorified. Nothing can be more important for us to-day than to seize this point in the ways of God to which those ways have conducted us. The danger for the Hebrews was lest they should go back to that which God had left. They must leave the word of the beginning of Christ and go on to perfection, that is, to Christ perfected in glory. We can well understand what an awakened Jew must have felt when he became aware of the fact that Christ had actually been among them as the Minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that He had gone from them, slain by wicked hands. There was no recall, the opportunity had come and gone, and they had not known the day of their visitation. There will be another waking up for the Gentile, the elect saints will go in to the wedding (*Matthew 25:10*), and the door will close on a lost opportunity for those who were satisfied with an external religious system. The day of the Spirit will close, but with no hope beyond as there was for the Jew when Messiah's day on earth had closed. Then there could be repentance and forgiveness preached in the name of Jesus exalted (*Acts 5:31*), and the repentant remnant found their place of blessing in the Spirit's day – in the seven days of Pentecost.* But there is no such repentance and refuge for those who slight the

** I do not understand what the author meant by this expression, Pentecost being a one-day observance. Perhaps some reader will be able to enlighten me. The interval of fifty days from the offering of the sheaf of first-fruits just after Passover to the presentation of the two wave-loaves at the feast of weeks (or Pentecost) does, of course, correspond to the interval between the resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the assembly (church) was formed. We are certainly in the (unstated but long) period between Pentecost and the blowing of trumpets (*Leviticus 23:24*), the latter signifying the resumption of God's dealings with Israel after the assembly has been caught up to heaven. – Editor.*

Spirit's day. Slighting will end in speaking injuriously against the Spirit and His testimony to Christ glorified, and there is no forgiveness for that. Notice that in Luke 12:10 injurious speaking against the Holy Ghost is put in wider connection than with the unbelief and malice of the Jew. It is "whosoever" that is in question there, and applies to Gentile as to Jew.

It is deeply solemn and important for us to trace the path of the Lord down here as He moved from point to point in His history upon earth. Opportunities came, and some were blessed in them, and they passed for ever. Jesus passed on – thrice happy they who came in touch with Him as He passed, and knew the virtue that was in Him. We may note the woman of Sychar, and the blind man of John 9, and again the woman of Luke 7, and the one who touched (*the hem of his garment*) in Luke 8, and blind Bartimæus and Zacchæus. On the other side we read of Jesus sending out his disciples two and two into every place whither He Himself would come. It was His last journey as He passed on to Jerusalem to suffer, and it was a last testimony of peace and of the powers of the kingdom of God. If not received, they were to shake off the dust of their feet against the rejecters. Jesus was passing on, and the testimony of His presence in Israel must cease, for the day of visitation would be over.

We are, as we have said, in the Spirit's day, but surely it is drawing to a close, and we may well, on the opening of another year, take to heart afresh this moment in the ways of God as He passes on to the accomplishment of His purpose. There can be no doubt that the moment Jesus sat down at the right hand of God in all the efficacy of His accomplished work a point of rest was reached. How could we be those who are entering into rest (*Hebrews 4:11*), if the rest had not been reached and prepared? All that constitutes the rest of God is already established in Christ. The Spirit links us with it, because He links us with Jesus glorified. All is perfect on that side, but as down here we await the moment

when every disturbing element will be put down, and the rest of God with which we are already linked will be known in this restless scene of man's will, where confusion reigns. What shines for us at this moment is the bright and morning Star. The religious world is trying to go back to Christ as having brought peace to earth when He was born here; they do not walk in the light of the morning Star, and the Spirit's preparation and cry of Come! is to them unknown. Peace is not now on earth. He who brought it here is in heaven, and believers know Him there. He is their righteousness and peace. In Him they have the suited garment for the marriage (Matt. 22) But the Spirit is down here with believers, and in them, because Jesus is up there, and hence they have the oil of Matthew 25. What is theirs in Christ is effective in them by the Spirit, and their suitability for the marriage real and effectual. It is impossible to go back to the period and circumstances of Christ upon earth; that period has come and gone. It is still the Spirit's day, though surely we are in the moment when the Spirit and the Bride say, Come! as Jesus says, "I am the bright and morning star." Let him that heareth say, Come!

T.H. Reynolds (1830-1930)

Extracted from "Food for the Faithful" Vol. 5 [1902].

SALT

Salt is grace in spiritual energy – i.e. the saints being witnesses in this world of the power of holy love, instead of selfishness. Salt is the consecrating principle of grace: if that is gone, what is there left to preserve? Salt is rather grace in the aspect of holy separateness unto God, than in that of kindness and meekness, though of course these are inseparable from grace. When the world creeps in, the salt has lost its savour, and we show that a rejected Christ has little power in our eyes.

Attributed to J.N. Darby (1800-82)

BRINGING CHRIST INTO OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

It may sound presumptuous to speak about bringing the Lord into the circumstances of our everyday life, and into our moral and spiritual struggles, but surely this is what the Bible teaches us to do. In the four gospel narratives we are presented with many instances of the Lord Jesus graciously entering into the circumstances of those who needed Him, as we all do. For example, in Mark chapter 1 we read that He entered with His disciples into the house of Simon and Andrew and, having been told of Simon's mother-in-law, who was sick with a fever, took her by the hand and healed her, so that she was able to serve them. Then there is a lovely reference at the end of chapter 4, where it says that the disciples "took Him even as He was in the ship." The sequel was that they witnessed the power over creation of Him who had just been asleep in the stern as a lowly man. What grace on the part of the Son of God to be so approachable, to listen to our troubles and to take them on Himself! Not only has He already done that for all who believe on Him – "Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17) – but He continues to support us from His place on high: "For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). But we need to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). In other words, we must take action to appropriate the help that is available to us.

But there is another important thing for us to grasp: it is not just a question of our asking the Lord to do something for us or of obtaining relief; we need to appreciate the way in which He Himself – what He has done and all that is displayed in Him – relates to the situation in which we are. Our problem should lead us to *learn Him* in a fresh and living way, so that we "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

I think we are entitled to look at some incidents in the Old Testament as teaching us this in a figurative way.

1. **The Waters of Marah** (Exodus 15:22-26).

At this point the children of Israel had been saved from judgment by the blood of the Passover lamb and delivered from Egypt by their passage through the Red Sea. These things speak to us of Christ having borne for the believer the judgment due to us because of our sins and then of our being identified by baptism with the death by which He was cut off from this present evil world (Romans 6:3,4).

But it is one thing to be delivered *as to our position* from this world of sin and another thing to *experience* our severance from the things which ministered to our old life; this can be a bitter lesson. So the children of Israel rejoiced on the bank of the Red Sea at their deliverance from captivity but then murmured at Marah when they tasted the reality of life in the wilderness. “When they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter.” For me to have done with the old, sinful life *in practice* involves suffering: “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1).

But the bitter waters were made sweet. How? “The Lord showed (Moses) a tree (*or, “wood”*), which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.” We can think of the wood as a figure of the manhood of the Lord Jesus. We are not told what kind of tree was shown to Moses at Marah but the ark later placed at the centre of the tabernacle system, prefiguring Christ as the One who has given effect to all the will of God, was made of shittim (or acacia) wood, which well endures desert conditions. Thus we have Christ in His life here on earth entirely for the will and pleasure of God. “For He shall grow up before

Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground” (Isaiah 53:2). The tree which Moses took has also been linked to the tree on which our Saviour was lifted up (Acts 5:30), which speaks poignantly to us of the way in which the Lord Jesus took His exit from this world.

Either way, the wood of Marah brings Christ before us. As we learn to appreciate *Him*, how He lived in this world and how He took His exit from it, the bitter trials of the wilderness become sweet *because we find Him in them*. Thus we are enabled to walk in newness of life.

O worldly pomp and glory,
Your charms are spread in vain!
I’ve heard a sweeter story,
I’ve found a truer gain.

(Miss Hannah Burlingham)

2. The Salt in a New Cruse (2 Kings 2:19-22).

This incident took place perhaps 600 years after the previous one, but again the problem is with the water and once more something needed to be cast into it to make it good. The place is Jericho, the city of a curse – a curse which had been fulfilled; see Joshua 6:26 and 1 Kings 16:34. But Elisha’s ministry was one predominantly of grace, foreshadowing the grace of God which would in far greater measure be brought to us by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11).

The commodity needed this time was salt. As we know, salt is a preservative; it acts against corruption. It was to be present in every oblation (or meat-offering) offered to God (Leviticus 2:13). John tells us that He who was the Word made flesh was “full of grace and truth,” and that “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:14,17). It was a wonderful ministry of grace that the Lord Jesus brought into this world but alongside the relief, the

forgiveness, the healing and comfort that He offered, God's truth was always present. He perfectly fulfilled what is enjoined upon us: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Colossians 4:6). So in the synagogue at Nazareth He not only spoke words of grace but also addressed their state of heart, to the point where they thrust Him out of the city and would have cast Him over the precipice. Again, to the adulterous woman in John 8 He said not only "Neither do I condemn thee;" but also, "go, and sin no more."

The salt was to be put into a new cruse. What the Lord Jesus has brought to us, while *fulfilling* what went before, has also *superseded* it. This is thrust of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He Himself warned us as to the folly of sewing a patch of new cloth on to an old garment, or putting new wine into old skins (Mark 2:21,22). "So if anyone be in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new: and all things are of the God who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17,18 – Darby Translation.)

Elisha "went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there." People today are grappling with many problems – social, economic, political, environmental, etc. – but rarely go to the *source* of the trouble. Rather, they search for some expedient or compromise to ameliorate the difficulty. Alas, this approach is often also evident in Christendom. But God deals with the root of a problem. The underlying problem in the world is sin. The chapter from which we have just quoted (2 Cor. 5) finishes with these words: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Similarly in His ways with us individually, God goes to root of the problem. The Lord Jesus did this with Nicodemus when He told him that he needed to be born anew (John 3:3); it was useless to try and patch up the old nature – he needed an entirely new one if he was to appreciate anything of the kingdom of God.

“So the waters were healed unto this day.” Because the One who brought God’s grace to us was rejected, the day has yet to come when, in virtue of the work He has already done, the sin of the world will be taken away (John 1:29). Then He will arise as the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2). But already the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, when confronted by badness or impurity (whether in or around him), can turn to Him in whom grace and truth are so perfectly combined, find cleansing and healing, and receive living water from Him, as the woman did at Sychar’s well (John 4).

3. The Great Pot (2 Kings 4:38-41).

This time the problem related to food. The location was Gilgal, which speaks to us of the cutting off of the flesh; see Joshua 5:2-9. The moral and spiritual import of circumcision is opened up to us by Paul in Philippians 3:3 and Colossians 2:11. Both baptism and circumcision refer to my identification with Christ in His death and burial, but the former relates to my relationship to the world of sin through which I move and the latter to the potentiality for sin that lies in the flesh that I still carry with me.

But it is not good enough just to be in the *place* where circumcision was carried out; its *meaning* has to be maintained. And circumcision applies not only to the obviously gross behaviour of which the flesh is capable but to all that comes from that source. So in Philippians 3 we see that Paul had dumped all that in which he might boast as to worldly credentials. Here in 2 Kings 4 the man who went and fetched wild gourds may have been considered helpful, going in search of food in a time of famine, and the fruits may have looked nice – these gourds were probably colocynths, which apparently resemble types of cucumber – but the results were deadly.

Although there are undoubtedly many places where good, spiritual food is ministered to the flock of Christ, famine is nevertheless widespread today and many of God's people are hungry. In these circumstances there is a tendency to bring in something novel. Those gathered around the great pot did not know what it was that was being shredded into the pot. How important it is for all of us (not just those who are prominent in ministry) to keep to that which is from the beginning, that is to say, the beginning of Christianity; see 1 John 1:1 and 2:24. We need to test everything by the Scriptures and by the unction which we have from Christ, the Holy One, by the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20 and 27). The experiment with colocynths caused them to exclaim, "Man of God, there is death in the pot!" – such will always be the result of human contribution to the things of God.

But what was the answer? "[Elisha] said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot." The meal undoubtedly points us to Christ, as it does in the case of the oblation (Leviticus 2). How important it is for us to be constantly feeding on Christ – in His life here on earth, in His death, burial and resurrection, and in His present position in glory at the right hand of God. How important it is, too, that those who minister among the saints always have Christ at the centre of their ministry. Indeed, all of us can pass on impressions of Christ to others, to refresh and edify them. Even where things are not as they should be, there is some presentation of Christ that will just suit the circumstances; we see this in the addresses to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

So which of us is going to respond to the injunction, "Then bring meal"?

4. The Sunken Axe-Head (2 Kings 6:1-7).

It was gracious of the prophet Elisha to consent to go with the sons of the prophets in their development project. The Holy Spirit does not record an adverse comment on their plan, so perhaps we should be slow to criticise them.

The building site was on the bank of the river Jordan. This river is often used as a symbol of death. The crossing of the Jordan in Joshua's day, which brought them into the promised land, is figurative of our death with Christ (Colossians 2:20), which brings us (not yet actually to heaven but) into the sphere of eternal life (Col. 3:3). But here in 2 Kings 6 we do not have the crossing of the Jordan but something sunk in it.

This reminds me of Romans 8, where we are told that "the mind of the flesh is death" (Darby Trans.). In that chapter Paul is addressing the very real question of how the Christian believer practically gets free from "the law of sin and of death." We may know that our sins have been forgiven and that we shall reach heaven at last and yet be continually pulled down by the activities of sin in the flesh and the sense of defeat and condemnation which that brings. The axe-head sinking in the river perhaps reminds us of this.

It is to be noted that the axe-head had been borrowed. Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that they were not their own; "ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19,20). But the awareness that I belong to Another and should be glorifying Him, when I am oppressed by "another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7:23) only makes matters worse. The young man's cry, "Alas, master!" may perhaps be likened to the apostle's exclamation, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24).

The answer at the Jordanian building site was again to cast something into the water – a stick. The result was that a power acted on the axe-head which was greater than the law of gravity which had been pulling it down to the bed of the river. So in Romans 8 we are told of a power which is greater than the law of sin and of death: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” If the mind of the flesh is death, the mind of the Spirit is life and peace.

But the stick had to be cut down and cast into the river. For us to be set free from bondage to sin in the flesh it required that God should send “His own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin,” and thus condemn sin in the flesh. This is not Christ bearing our sins – our sinful acts and omissions, which are forgiven – but being identified in grace with our sinful state, which has been condemned. What wonderful grace, that He who was entirely sinless should receive in Himself God’s judgment of sin in the flesh, that we might be set free from it.

So the apostle assures us that, having God’s Spirit dwell in us, we are not in flesh but in Spirit. We can disown the flesh and live by the Spirit; thus we can live our responsible lives in victory. “The righteous requirement of the law [is] fulfilled in us who do not walk according to flesh but according to Spirit.” So the iron was made to swim and we can, as it were, stretch out the hand and take hold of it, knowing a more powerful principle than that which caused it to sink.

No doubt Paul is speaking not just doctrinally but experimentally when he says, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” Are we able to say the same?

May these examples help us to appreciate that there is in Christ just what we need, whatever our problem may be. – *Editor.*

NOT IN HADES, BUT WITH CHRIST

They say that after death man goes into *hades* (good or bad), or (as in the Old Testament) into *sheol*. Dictionaries call it “the Place of departed spirits,” or “the unseen World.” Sentimentalists talk of it as “Over the river,” and speak of the “Great Beyond” etc. It does not appear to me that any of these expressions convey what is very definite or comforting to the soul (albeit that only those who accept them said to be *orthodox*). Suppose we turn to Scripture.

I cannot find that the dying believer goes to *hades*, whatever that may mean to the learned. He goes to Christ. This is what I find:- “Absent from the body, present with the Lord” (2 *Corinthians* 5:8). “To depart, and to be with Christ,” the apostle says, “is far better” (Philippians 1:23). And we must surely distinguish between Christ and *hades*. If one departs to be with Christ, Christ is not *hades*, nor is He *in* *hades*. As to *hades*, Scripture says (with regard to Christ), “Thou wilt not leave my soul in [or *to*] *hades*; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption” (*Psalms* 16:10; *Acts* 2:27). Hence Christ is not in *hades*, and therefore “to depart and be with Christ” cannot mean to go into *hades*. His holy body went into the grave, His holy spirit He commended to His Father, but His holy soul, He says here, was *not* left in *hades*, and could not be. Though he stooped to all that death and judgment meant for man, “yet it was not possible that He should be holden of it (*Acts* 2:24).

The French version of the Darby Translation says in *Psalms* 16: “Tu n’abandonneras pas mon ame au *sheol*” (*Thou wilt not abandon [or give up] my soul to sheol*.)” And in the German version it says, Meine seele wirst du dem *sheol* nicht lassen.” Notice here we have “*to* *hades*” in both places. I gather from the Lord’s words that *hades* was no more a desirable place for the *soul* than the grave was for the *body*! Sin introduced both. I do not know any saints in *Hades*; I know many who are *with Christ*.

Yes! Christ, the only one unique and perfect MAN – Christ, neither holden of the grave, nor detained by hades – Christ, “body, soul and spirit,” rose triumphant over every adverse power (and they were all there), spoiling these principalities and powers “in Himself,” or “in it” (Colossians 2:15). And he ascended, “leading captivity captive” (*Ephesians 4:8*), and there He is now in heaven, and we believers are either going to Him there, or we are waiting for Him to come from heaven and take us there! “From whence [heaven] also we look” for Him as Saviour” (Philippians 3:20).

So far as my reading goes, I find *there is no hades for the believer*. He goes to Christ, and, as I have said, Christ is not hades, nor is He in hades. The dying believer’s body (by means of which he has been known as a man on the earth) will probably go into the grave, if he dies, but not the man himself. The body is only the shell, not the inhabitant, though even the shell is dear to the Lord, and will come up as “a spiritual body” (*1 Corinthians 15:44*). So we read that Stephen was *buried*, that is, the body was put into the grave by “devout men” (*Acts 8:2*). But without doubt Stephen went to Christ! He went to Him whom, with his dying breath he addressed in those memorable words, analogous to those of Christ Himself: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” Yet Stephen left at that moment the poor, stone-battered “earthly tabernacle house” (this is what the apostle calls the body in *2 Corinthians 5:1*). That body they laid in the grave, but what of Stephen? The Lord Jesus received him at the same moment. Who can doubt it?

If saints who die now go to be with Christ, where did believers go before Christ? They went to “Abraham’s bosom” (*Luke 16:22*), whatever that may mean. A better place than hades!

The fact (it appears to me) is that death and hades *stand or fall together*. They have FALLEN, and Christ holds the keys of hades and of death (*Revelation 1:18*). When they have triumphed they have triumphed together. I read, “his name that sat on him is

called Death, and Hades followed with him” (*Revelation 6:8*). It seems to me that the break-up of the man (the body going to the grave and the soul to hades) *came in through sin*. But if you cannot connect Christ now any more with sin, if you cannot connect Christ any more with death, if you cannot connect Christ now with hades, neither can you connect either of them in the thought of God with the believer! I know, of course, that a believer *may* have to die. But even than I say that the *house* is not the *tenant*. The believer is connected not with death but with life. He is connected for time and eternity with the Lord. *This* is his association now. IN VICTORY (1 Corinthians 15:57).

We are so completely in association with Christ and life now, as believers, that the very word *death* is everywhere changed for the believer into *sleep* (John 11:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:14 and 5:10; 1 Corinthians 15:51 etc.).

Death and hades are found linked together in 1 Corinthians 15:55, where the Christian is seen to be delivered from both: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ... Thanks be to God, who giveth *us* the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here we see that the believer is not waiting till the resurrection of the body to be assured of victory over death and hades. He is in the good of it now, and *may not have to die at all!* I have already referred to Revelation 6, where death and hades are seen together. But there is a further and most important passage showing their intimate connection in Revelation 20. There, where we have the subject of the great white throne, and the dead before it after the millennium, and where neither *death* nor *hades* will deliver up a single believer, we read: “And death and hades delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to his works. And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire.” Death and hades here deliver up their occupants; they, in this act, go together, and here, at their final dissolution, it is seen that *they each contain that class only called*

the unbelieving. It is, moreover, without question that the unbeliever at death goes both into hades and into torment. The Lord lifts that awful veil which hides the unbeliever's future, and shows us this in Luke 16: "In hades he lift up his eyes, being in torments."

I am reminded to say one word more. All this present blessedness of the believer as to his body, his soul and his spirit springs from his association with Christ, the *second* man, just as the break-up of man (as God created him) comes upon him through sin, and his association with Adam, the *first* man. It is the resurrection of Christ which leaves death and all involved in it not only for Himself, but also for us, behind. He who could say, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," has enabled the believer also to say, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." *He* said it in all the calm, full joy of His triumph, and a dying believer knows something of *that* victory. Nothing can separate those who are Christ's from Him.

Belever! You are not going into the grave, nor into hades, if you should have to die. I cannot find any *good* hades. Do not forget that the Lord's coming (1 Cor.15:23) is your hope. But *if you should have to die*, you are going straight away TO BE WITH CHRIST! Let no-one rob you of this fact.

"Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8). By "H.C.A.", from "*Food for the Faithful*".

It will be noted that in several places in the above article, "hades" has been substituted for "hell" in quotations from the Bible (KJV), "hades" being the original word in these instances. J.N. Darby says, "Unfortunately, two words are translated "hell" in the English Bible – Hades and Gehenna: one meaning the temporary state of departed spirits, the unseen world without saying any more; the other used for the fire that never shall be quenched."

POETIC PAGES

The Living Water.

OH! well of living water,
That flows for evermore,
From whence Samaria's daughter
Drank in the days of yore.
And myriads through the ages,
Have drunk and been sufficed
With what all thirst assuages,
The deep, sweet love of Christ.

And still as fresh as ever,
Those living waters flow
In undiminished measure,
Full blessing to bestow,
Dispensing joys immortal,
Through knowledge of His love,
And opening wide the portal
Of glory bright above.

Oh! well of satisfaction
That will for ever last,
When all of earth's attraction
Is vanished, gone and past,
The love that is eternal,
For ever will flow on
Full, deep and sweet and vernal,
When earth and all are gone.

Alexander Stevenson (1855-1918)

The Fourth Watch of the Night

Habakkuk 2:1-3; Hebrews 10:37; Matthew 14:22-27

He stood upon his watch
To hear what God would say. / P.T.O.

The word he heard was “Wait for it;
For it will not delay.”

For us it’s not the foe
That we await, as he;
But Thee to come and take us home,
O Lord, to be with Thee.

But be Thou now with us
In all our trials here!
In sorrow, pain, pressure and strain
We need to know Thee near –

As Thou didst visit them
Who, tossed upon the sea,
With might and main, the land to gain,
Rowed vainly without Thee.

But Thou, alone in prayer,
Didst know and feel their plight;
To those in fear Thou didst appear
The fourth watch of the night.

Is it the fourth watch now,
The last before the dawn?
Lord come to us; in Thee we trust
As we await the morn.

G.S.B. April 2012.

NOTE

The Editor trusts that the selection and composition of material for this magazine has been undertaken with the Lord’s guidance and that the contents are of moral and spiritual value and appropriate to present needs. The only infallible statement of truth, however, is found in the Holy Bible and the reader is, therefore, urged to follow the practice of the Bereans, who “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). The Editor is always happy to receive comments and inquiries, and to consider suggested articles for inclusion in future issues.