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The Remnant of Christ's Ecclesia

in opposition to the Dogmas of
Papal and Protestant Christendom

A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

and a warning against the deception in the last days
foretold by Christ

"Take heed that ye be not deceived"

"AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD"

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AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD
"THE FACE OF AN ANGEL"

Reading in the Acts this past week, we find the Spirit's account of Stephen most uplifting. There are not many details given of his background, as he is mentioned only in Acts; but what an example and inspiration he is, as we also struggle to please God. He was one of seven called to assist Jesus' Apostles in their work. The choosing of these men was not casual; the instructions were:

"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." Acts 6:3.

The qualifications given were "of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." An honest report implies having been known as a witness, testifying to the word of God in such a manner as to be also approved of by the brethren. It was recognized that these seven men were indeed full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, revealing by their living and witness that the spirit of God was alive in them, and that His wisdom guided. Their actions were not foolish, nor were they motivated by worldly reasoning, but by that perfect counsel which is from above. Especially appointed by their brethren, they were indeed chosen of God who knew their hearts and spirits. Having been so carefully designated, they were:

"... set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." Acts 6:6.

Thus were they dedicated to their work and given God's power to accomplish it. The result of this laying on of hands is seen in Stephen as he:

"... full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Acts 6:8.

In addition, any adversaries who opposed him:

"... were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." Acts 6:10.

Unable to prevail against Stephen, these evil men prepared false witnesses against him, who caught him and brought him before the council. This council included elders, priests, Pharisees and possibly even some of those who recently had falsely accused and brought about the death of Jesus. As Stephen stood on trial before them:

"... all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." Acts 6:15.

Yet they looked upon him with contempt and hatred. They would expect to see fear, shame, perhaps self-doubt in his countenance. But no - it was "as it had been the face of an angel" - a messenger, a witness from God. His expression would exhibit tranquility, confidence, and courage, looking his accusers in the eye, and grateful for this opportunity to speak of God's ways. Then the high priest asked:

"... Are these things so?"

Acts 7:1.

How did he answer? How could he answer confidently and with complete truth, seeing it was such a desperate and dangerous position? He knew that the things on which they questioned and condemned him were indeed so. They were his faith, his conviction and his hope of life! So he steadfastly witnessed, upholding truth, condemning the scribes and Pharisees as well as the high priest:

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just one; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

Acts 7:51-53.

What bravery and certainly trust! What truths he spoke, yet with his face like that of an angel - not angry, not vindictive, not smug or arrogant; but as a humble messenger conveying God's words.

Let us look closely at the spirit of this man, for it can help us to be steadfast in our time of stress and testing. His name in itself is a help: Stephanos - a crown awarded to the victor, as one who has overcome. In the revelation given to John, we are permitted to see the twenty-four elders, signifying those who have overcome, gathered before God's throne:

"... clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns (stephanos) of gold.

The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: ..."

Revelation 4:4,10,11.

Here are described those who will have been victorious over their flesh nature through the mediatorship and atonement in Jesus

Christ. We see them in vision crowned as kings and priests before God, yet acknowledging that their crowning was possible only through God's mercy. Stephen no doubt will be among them. Jesus was the Victor, the only One who perfectly conquered His own sin nature - but what a struggle as He agonized to keep it under. How sorely He was tried, yet endured, determined to glorify God and finish the work given to Him. Near the end of His life He was mocked and tormented by the Romans as they placed upon Him a crown of thorns and a purple robe, and jeered: "Hail, King of the Jews!" (John 19:3) Pilate, the governor, then led Him forth to the Jews:

"... wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe...
When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they
cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him..."

John 19:5-6.

Throughout this agonizing trial, Jesus did not defend Himself, did not speak before Pilate, but endured the shame, the injustice, knowing it was required of Him by His Father. We can almost picture His face also, as if it had been the face of an angel. Stephen no doubt would look back to the example of Jesus, as he set his face to be a witness, a messenger of God. He may have heard of Jesus' words spoken to His disciples:

"... they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you,
delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons,
being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.
And it shall turn to you for a testimony (witness).

Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before
what ye shall answer.

For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your
adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist."

Luke 21:12-15.

This was indeed Stephen's experience: "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:10). Jesus had further encouraged His brethren - and through them Stephen - as they were to face severe trials for His Name's sake:

"... some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye
shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your
patience possess ye your souls."

Luke 21:16-19.

Was this part of what appeared in Stephen's face? There was patience, and in addition, unshakable belief that what God had promised would surely come to pass, if he could but endure the

present severe circumstances. How very impressive must have been his demeanor as those rulers of Israel railed on him, and yet were made to hear his words of wisdom and the spirit! What a struggle for him, yet his countenance proclaimed that he was as an angel of God. Stephen may have been sustained in his struggle by a conviction which Paul later expressed:

“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

... they do it to obtain a corruptible crown (stephanos); but we an incorruptible.

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air (fighting invisible, imaginary adversaries):

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: ...”

I Corinthians 9:24-27.

How can we - like Stephen and Paul - keep under our fleshly nature, bringing it into subjection, in striving for the crown of victory? That nature can sometimes unexpectedly hinder us in this race. It is only possible as we consistently and relentlessly meet its temptations with strong resistance, struggling to “keep under” that propensity which so easily weakens our resolve. Persevering and seeking God’s help in this way, is the only hope of being granted that triumph over the adversary - our flesh. All this may have been in Stephen’s mind as he so steadfastly stood before the council, with a countenance like unto “the face of an angel.” It was his own face, transformed from the ordinary one which might reflect fear, shame and reproach, to a face which did shine forth, revealing what was inside: a trust, confidence, God-given power and authority, reflecting a divine strength which one day translate him into a perfect man of spirit. Again, we think of Paul’s instruction to his brethren:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present (yield) your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Romans 12:1-2.

Stephen’s mind and spirit were being made new, being transformed from a mind of the flesh to the mind of the Spirit. His face, reflecting that mind, was likewise transformed. With that spirit and determination, as he died under the stones of the adversaries, he was able to plead with trust:

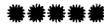
“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Acts 7:59.

However, there was one there who listened, who watched, and who later would remember Stephen's face and witness. It was Saul (Paul) who held the garments of those who stoned Stephen. Was this perhaps one of the "pricks" which later helped him to submit and strive to make amends as he also struggled to obtain the coveted crown of victory? One day Paul will be able to speak with Stephen face to face, and tell him what a help he was, for Paul, too, was laboring to make his mind new, yielding himself to God's service, spending and being spent in love for Him, for His Son, and for His brethren.

We are not able to look upon Stephen's face, Brethren and Sisters. We can, however, discern through God's word, the spirit, the strength, the trust and tranquility that would be there. For Stephen's spirit shines out - in his words and his offering of himself.

J.A.DeF.



BE OF GOOD CHEER

An examination of Paul's ministry as recorded in Acts, instructs and gives an admirable example for us. Preaching during a violent period of time, he risked his life often to carry the message of Jesus Christ as the Saviour to liberate those still under the law. His witness was accordingly accompanied by much trial, hardship and persecution because of the hope he spread abroad. At times he was in sore need of spiritual encouragement to remain strong and steadfast in the face of great adversity.

Accused by the Jews of blasphemy for his teaching of Jesus Christ, Paul was brought before their council. During this interrogation, there arose such a discension over him between the Sadducees and Pharisees, that the Roman chief captain, fearing for Paul's safety, put him in protective custody. The Lord, mindful of Paul's natural apprehension while in prison, sent help which encouraged him:

"And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."

Acts 23:11.

"Good cheer" means courage, coming from a prime root of boldness. Paul was granted spiritual strength and confidence that the Lord was at his side to support and deliver in the midst of this fearful trial. Although the situation was perilous, he was assured of protection from the Jews, that the gospel message might be deliv-

ered also to those at Rome. During these sore trials, he would no doubt remember how he too persecuted Christ's brethren, yet now had become their "champion", preaching the promise of salvation possible only through the name of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus offered this same encouragement to others needing spiritual strength:

"And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."
Matthew 9:2.

This man, so infirm he was unable to walk, was brought by his friends on a bed. The weakness of his flesh was healed by the faith of this man and his friends, with the added encouragement, "be of good cheer" - be strong in spirit, giving no room for doubt or fear to take hold.

In another circumstance, Jesus went into the mountains to pray, sending His disciples on ahead by ship. Caught in a storm, their boat was tossed about until they became fearful. In the midst of the fierce wind and churning sea, their fears mounted as they saw what they thought to be a spirit, walking towards them on top of the waves:

"And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out in fear."
Matthew 14:25-26.

In order to encourage Jesus said, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid". Quieted and bolstered by this, Peter ventured out upon the sea, walking to meet Jesus. However, his natural fear of the tumultuous sea and tempest overcame his faith, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me". Quickly the Lord Jesus "stretched forth his hand, and caught him and said.... O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (verse 31). He knew Peter's faith was weakened by the surrounding conditions and that fear had eroded his new-found spiritual boldness. How aptly this applies to us as well - for as we fear the circumstances which come to test, we first doubt, then falter, forgetting the message, "Be of good cheer" - His hand is there to support.

Shortly before His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus warned the disciples of the tribulations soon to follow, at the same time leaving them with this message of encouragement:

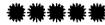
"Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me

alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

John 16:32-33.

He overcame the world and all its lusts, perfectly accomplishing the charge given by His Father. He thus became the means of hope and life for all desiring to be joined to Him - those who struggle to walk after His example although imperfectly. Let us take courage Brethren and Sisters in this endeavor, and determine to "be of good cheer", strengthened by the example and witness of the Lord Jesus and faithful men like Paul.

M.C.S.



"--- BEHOLD, THE HEAVEN AND HEAVEN OF HEAVENS CANNOT CONTAIN THEE ---." (1 Kings 8:27)

It is an indictment of mankind that God is now dismissed by very many as a myth. There is not even a veneer of faith in the vast majority. Science, so called, has undermined faith. In the first part of the nineteenth century most people believed in the literal truth and verbal inspiration of the Bible. But purveyors of geological science arose, aided by critics in the textual and historical study of scripture originating in Germany. And because men generally are naturally forward, respect for God's word dwindled away. So was lost that sublime blessing so eloquently expressed in God's record of Himself, as follows:-

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." (Hebrews 11:1-3)

Such words mean nothing to the modern mind. It is as though a curtain of blindness has fallen over the eyes of mankind. They cannot see that on every side is the wonder of creative power and divine design. The variety of life on this earth is infinite. This is a testimony to heavenly wisdom; each facet of creation is a wonder in itself, so helpfully expressed for those who have ears to hear in the following:-

"O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens ---. When

I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou has ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"
(Psalm 8:1-4)

Yes, what is man in the presence of the vast universe. But puny man (a so called Minister of Religion) recently expressed his conclusion that " - - - there is nothing up there - - -." This very expression is a travesty. Of course space probes to the Moon and to the Planet Mars and further afield have revealed the dust and barrenness of these heavenly bodies. But these heavenly objects were created for a purpose, which the Bible so clearly specifies as:-
"---lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth - - - he made the stars also - - -."
(Genesis 1:15-16)

By those stars mariners of the oceans have been able to find their course from early times. It is not mans' prerogative, then, to say "there is nothing up there." To the mind not blinded by science these heavenly bodies fulfil a purpose for this earth and mankind.

The vastness of heaven is the measure of God's greatness. Astronomers have tried to estimate the number of stars in our own Milky Way Galaxy, (galaxy being a term derived from the Greek word for milk). It is thought there are a hundred thousand million stars in the Galaxy in which we move; no wonder it is referred to as of milky appearance. But the more recent awe inspiring finding is that in one section of the heavens perused by the latest astronomical equipment, is another cluster of stars thought to consist of 27,000 galaxies, comprising billions of stars and planets. The Milky Way is merely referred to as belonging to the Local Group of galaxies, which in turn is part of the Local Supercluster of galaxies, at the centre of which Supercluster (some 50 million light years from Earth) is the Virgo Cluster, containing about a thousand galaxies. Such mind boggling information, if only partly correct, causes the scriptural exclamation to take on an even greater meaning; " - - - What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" Furthermore those words to Abraham of old, appear even more significant:-

"And he (God) brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."
(Genesis 15:5)

The stars, of course, are uncountable, and so also is the number of the faithful chosen for God's eternal purpose, the number of whom is known only to God. Comparatively then, this earth, for all its vastness, is a microcosm when compared to the

stretched out heavens. But this fact underlines that it pleases the Omnipotent Creator, who has made the heavens as a curtain; to particularly delight in, and be mindful of, this jewel of the heaven, which we call the earth.

It also underlines the testimony concerning the uniqueness of Christ as well as the uniqueness of this good earth, as follows:-

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds:

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:

Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?

And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? - - -

And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.”
(Hebrews 1:1-8)

This unique earth, obviously, then, from God’s testimony to man, is for Christ; for the “sceptre of righteousness” concerns a rule and a kingdom; and that Kingdom is about this good earth, teeming with life in infinite variety. In God’s purpose, at the appropriate time a culmination of what God has intended will be seen. Without faith in this truth man is lost in insignificance and becomes a mere particle astray in the vastness which is of God who is the Omnipotent Creator of everything. To say that life came upon this earth by chance, in the face of the irrefutable evidence of design and of plan for every aspect of existence, reveals an insane resistance in the mind of man, to the One who has created him, and sustains him. It is foolishness in a very great degree, which should be scorned in all its ideas by those who profess to uphold the Truth. Give the glory to “ELOHIM”, He who has all the “powers” of life and of goodness, and refuse to take heed to a science, which in its clever pseudo explanations has no faith, nor respect for God’s scriptural witness.

SHIELD, LOGOS AND "UNITY IN AUSTRALIA"

A communication from Australia (per P. B. and I. F.)

The Brisbane Conference

"The Conference has come and gone. It was successful and good fellowship was enjoyed by all. The usual discordant note was the almost total absence of "Logos" brethren, which refutes any notion that the Unity Basis is a success in practice, however much it may be extolled in theory.

In fact it is not so much extolled as grimly perceived as a pragmatic religio-political necessity if the Australian Shield brethren are to be acceptable to their British brethren. It would be easier to see virtue in the Unity Basis if there were more brethren who were idealistically convinced that it is pure truth, and were prepared to conduct a rational defence of its disputed areas. A number of opinions were expressed at the ACC Business session to the effect that the BASF is here to stay whether we like it or not. It was mentioned that there is no mechanism for changing it anyway. Nobody actually got up and said that it does not need changing because it would not be possible to improve it. Nobody praised it more than the Beverly Hills representatives.

The ACC sub-committee investigating the Riverwood-Ten-Beverly Hills issue came in for some criticism for the slowness of its investigation as well as for circulating suggestions hostile to Beverly Hills without first clearing them with the ACC executive. The end result of this discussion was that a motion was passed overwhelmingly to the effect that no ecclesia accepting the Unity Basis should be barred from fellowship at conferences. The tone of the meeting was one of unanimous support for any ecclesia proclaiming acceptance of the Unity Basis (ie Beverly Hills).

At the whole Conference, barely an hour was devoted to a collective discussion of the problems confronting the brotherhood, and possible solutions. There was no discussion of any doctrinal problems, despite the huge differences of opinion that exist in the brotherhood about the meaning of the Unity Basis. These problems have been consigned to the "too hard" or "irrelevant" baskets. The adoption of the Unity Basis has resulted in the non-Logos ecclesias becoming almost totally non-ideological and devoid of conviction as far as the disputed matters are concerned. Many of them don't agree with the Logos stand, or don't care or know what it is, but they think the Unity Basis has absolved them from any responsibility for refuting wrong doctrine advanced from behind the screen which the Unity Basis provides. Thus, wrong doctrine is sanctified so long as those advancing it claim an allegiance to the Unity Basis."

The Remnant's Comments

Anyone reading the above will see there is something wrong amongst Christadelphians in Australia.

Difficulties have existed since the early years of this century. Shield was divided from Temperance Hall (Central) but after the reunion in England of Temperance Hall and Suffolk Street, efforts were made to also achieve reunion with Shield in Australia. As a result of this work an addendum was introduced to the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith, and the following statement was made (dated 14 October 1957).

"Following constant labour in the cause of unity in the brotherhood, a position now obtains whereby a clear basis for ecclesial unity has been formulated for peace in the ecclesias in Australia and New Zealand. This work has been carried on, not only from our own desire to heal the breaches of the past, but also because of the reunion which has been successfully achieved in Britain by the Central and Suffolk Street meetings, and arising from it, their express desire to achieve a satisfactory settlement with the Australian Ecclesias. Suggestion has been made by our English brethren, that, say, a simple endorsement of the Amended Birmingham Statement of Faith, coupled with the addendum to the Cooper-Carter letter or some equivalent together with a clause defining fellowship, will suffice for this purpose - - -"

The addendum to the BASF particularly concerned clauses 5 and 12 of the Statement, and reads as follows:-

"We believe that Adam was made of the earth and declared to be very good; because of disobedience to God's law he was sentenced to return to the dust. He fell from his very good state and suffered the consequences of sin - shame, a defiled conscience and mortality. As his descendants, we partake of that mortality that came by sin and inherit a nature prone to sin. By our own actions we become sinners and stand in need of forgiveness of sins before we can be acceptable to God. Forgiveness and reconciliation God has provided by the offering of His son; though Son of God he partook of the same nature - the same flesh and blood - as all of us, but did no sin. In his death he voluntarily declared God's righteousness: God was honoured and the flesh shown to be by divine appointment rightly related to death. To share in God's forgiveness we must be united with Christ by baptism into his death, rising from baptism dead to the past to walk in newness of life. The form of

baptism is a token of burial and of resurrection and in submitting to it we identify ourselves with the principles established in the death of Jesus "who died unto sin", recognising that God is righteous in decreeing that the wages of sin is death; and that as members of the race we are rightly related to a dispensation of death.

In all His appointments God wills to be honoured, sanctified and hallowed by all who approach unto Him. By His promises God sets before man a hope of life and a prospect of resuming those relationships that are lost by sin. With the setting forth of this hope there comes a new basis of responsibility. Times of ignorance God overlooks but with knowledge a man becomes an accountable and responsible creature with the obligation to believe and obey God."

Now, it is the Remnant's belief that if the words in the addendum had been "In his death he declared God's righteous condemnation of ALL flesh, (Christ included) which is sinful and or prone to sin", the agreement would not have been reached. Therefore we believe there was a gloss put on the wording, for that is really what Central believes, whereas Shield certainly did not at that time.

However an agreement of a kind was reached, through the addendum regarding clauses 5 and 12 of the BASF, and it appears therefrom that Shield felt there had been qualifications which ameliorated their concerns.

The lesson is that if there had been more care about establishing a true unity of fellowship, the trouble and disunity in Australia, now evident INSIDE the fellowship would have been avoided. Numbers of course increased by reunion, and the movers of reunion were pleased; but if some of those involved in that agreement could see the true state of things in Australia today, what would they now say?

The Remnant believes that the Doctrine of Fellowship is a heaven sent safeguard, to promote peace in the Body, and encourage the growth of spirits who are right by conforming to revealed Truth.

A BIBLE CLASS
"I WENT IN BITTERNESS"

Ezekiel 3:14

This consideration further strengthens our understanding of Ezekiel, a faithful man sent as a prophet and watchman to the people of Judah, captive in Babylon. Called by the Almighty to do this work, he was first given a marvelous vision - "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (Ezekiel 1:28). Falling to the ground in awe, he heard the Lord's voice:

"... thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD.
And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious."
Ezekiel 2:4,7.

Knowing the dire events to come, God further warned Ezekiel:

"... Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee."
Ezekiel 2:8.

The prophet was then given a roll (or scroll) of a book wherein was written "lamentations, and mourning, and woe" (Ezekiel 2:10). Now perceiving God's work to come, he was told further:

"... go speak unto the house of Israel."
Ezekiel 3:1.

Spiritually digesting the Lord's words, Ezekiel found them to be "in my mouth as honey for sweetness" (Ezekiel 3:3). For our further understanding, we may turn to similar words concerning God's purpose spoken to the Apostle John in the Revelation:

"And I took the little book ... and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter."
Revelation 10:10.

Although the words that Ezekiel was to speak to Judah seemed right and just (sweet) to him, they shortly would bring terrible suffering, grief, and death upon His people back in Jerusalem. Understanding now what was to come upon this people, the prophet naturally would feel sorrow and heaviness in carrying out the Almighty's requirements:

"So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit..."
Ezekiel 3:14.

The Hebrew for bitterness is Marah, also used as chafed, discontented, and heavy. These define Ezekiel's natural feelings. The "heat of my spirit" may indicate the acute dismay and reluctance there was in his fleshly thinking. This could have made

Ezekiel rebellious as he was required to proclaim these words to Judah. However, our verse continues.

“... but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.”
Ezekiel 3:14.

The prophet would remember the Lord's injunction: “... Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: ...” (Ezekiel 2:8). Feeling God's hand upon him, urging, guiding, as well as revealing in vision the great power of that hand (see Ezekiel Chapter 3:12-13), he went as required to that rebellious house to clearly and courageously carry out the work given by God. This was not easy, bringing to him affliction, danger, ridicule and reproach; but strengthened by his Father's hand, he faithfully witnessed.

Many of God's people have experienced this bitterness of soul, the flesh complaining against the divine requirements. We think of another faithful one, Job, who was grievously afflicted and accused by “friends”. In his tribulation he exclaimed:

“My soul is weary of my life: I will leave my complaint (meditation) upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.”
Job 10:1.

Job, in weariness at his long enduring affliction, felt to forsake this thinking about those troubles, and speak out in the discontent (bitterness) of his flesh. Yet in his heart he knew that God was aware and had a purpose in his affliction. With this in mind he spoke even in the midst of these fleshly feelings:

“Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit.”
Job 10:12.

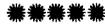
God's hand was upon Job, “visiting” him to bolster his strength and his determination to retain his integrity, by withstanding his adversarial “friends” and waiting with patience for God to work His purpose. Ezekiel undoubtedly struggled in a similar way and found through the Almighty, a willingness and resolve.

We too may be inclined to bitterness of soul as we face unusually hard and painful decisions required of us by God. Overcoming that fleshly reaction calls for a strong trust and resolve that, if it is placed upon us by a merciful and wise Father, it is right - it is needed to make us more pleasing to Him. He will help and so we can resolve, as did Ezekiel, to be subject to His hand upon us, knowing it is indeed a loving hand.

The prophet was required to endure seven years of being speechless except when God commanded. Also he witnessed by lying upon his right side for three hundred and ninety days, and

then upon his left side for an additional forty days - signifying the wickedness of Israel and now Judah. As he labored, a watchman to this most rebellious and indifferent people, would he not look to the Almighty's words, seek His hand, needing His strength, and rejoicing as he came to know the encouragement and assurance of divine help? We, too, are tested, although in lesser ways. Can we, will we endure whatever that hand requires, patiently doing and relying upon the One who overrules all our living? Let us put away these natural or negative reactions which our weak and fleshly natures produce, and rejoice that our Father has seen fit to visit us, giving the privilege of doing His work, and holding out His hand in requiring, helping, and comforting.

J.A.DeF.



"LO, WE HEARD OF IT AT EPHRATAH"

(Psalm 132:6)

The title of this Psalm, a Song of Degrees, suggests a spiritual ascent to Zion. This David meditated upon: the ultimate purpose of God and His promised dwelling place with man. In faith he looked longingly toward this end, reflecting upon the special promises granted him by the Almighty:

"And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever." II Samuel 7:12-13.

We know of David's great desire to build a house for the Lord, yet because he was a man of war, this privilege was not to be allowed, but given instead to his son Solomon. However, because of his faithfulness, God extended to him the promise of his seed to reign eternally - seen in measure with the birth of Solomon who ruled from David's throne, but to be fully accomplished with the return of the Lord Jesus to rule from Jerusalem with His saints over the entire earth in the kingdom age:

"The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.

If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.

For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.

This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.

I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread.

I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.

There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.”

Psalm 132:11-17.

Led by the wisdom of the Spirit bestowed at his anointing, David would ponder that final dwelling place to be established under the rule of his greater Son:

“I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids,

Until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: ...”

Psalm 132:4-6.

David here suggests that this final and glorious resting place that God would establish for Himself and man is connected with “Ephratah”. Where is this place and to what was he referring?

“Ephratah” translates as “fruitful” and is the original name for Bethlehem - that ancient town of Palestine. As seen through the record in Genesis, this was also the place of Rachel’s death and the birthplace of Benjamin, Jacob’s last son:

“And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour.

And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also.

And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin.

And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.”

Genesis 35:16-19.

This little town was also significantly the birthplace of David as well as his greater Son, the Lord Jesus, foretold by the prophet Micah as quoted in the New Testament record of the Saviour’s birth:

"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.

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he 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,

And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

Matthew 2:1-6.

The word Bethlehem means "house of bread", similar to Ephratah or "fruitful" - both names which in figure prophesy of the means of life that would come out of this little town as the birthplace of the Messiah. As too, the birthplace of Benjamin, Jacob's son, the patriarch gives prophetic insight into the position of Christ, the future son of Bethlehem, when at Benjamin's birth it was recorded:

"She (Rachel) called his name Benoni (son of my sorrow): but his father called him Benjamin (son of the right hand)."

Genesis 35:18.

As the seed of the woman, Jesus bore his mother's flesh nature and agonized to overcome its sinfulness, so that He could look forward to the promise of ruling eternally at His father's right hand when and if the victory over His carnal nature was perfectly accomplished. This was His purpose and life struggle.

David believed in the promised eternal dwelling place of God to be shared with His children, and moved in faith to be a part of it. That same hope is set before us, to be made possible only through the mediatorship of Jesus, as we apply His word and strive to take up His cross and follow His example.

M.C.S.

Signs of His Coming and of the End of the World
"Having a form of godliness - - - of this sort are they which
creep into houses, and lead captive silly women - - -."

(2 Timothy 3:5-6)

The behaviour of the young is the cause of lament in all walks of life. Many are behaving immorally from even the early age of thirteen years. Their parents, in a considerable number of cases, are unaware of what is happening, and such matters only come to public attention when things get into difficult and tangled consequences, when national Social Service schemes have to be resorted to by these young and vulnerable people.

The older generation, however, must bear some, if not all the blame, for this great decline. Religious leaders who ought to stand against such moral deterioration greatly fail their profession.

The General Synod of the Church of England recently debated a private motion allowing divorcees to be remarried in church. The Anglican Church's official line hitherto had been to maintain that marriage is for life, therefore annulment should not be granted, even though Methodists have been allowing it for nearly half a century. But the Church is on a slippery downward slope. Having allowed the ordination of women to be priests, the next thing we find, is that one of these new women priests is marrying her church organist, which would not be remarkable except that he is a divorced person. The wedding is to be at a register office, but after the ceremony they are to be blessed in church by a vicar from a neighbouring parish, even though the local Bishop could not allow a church wedding because of the Anglican position. This woman priest commented, "With a rising divorce rate, it is becoming increasingly difficult. Pastorally, it can create big problems when we can't remarry divorcees in church. If you have couples who are members of your congregation, who are Christians, who want to make vows before God and for whom it is the real thing, as it is with us, there seems no good reason for them not to have a church wedding." Another member, of position in the Church of England, supporting the woman priest, commented, "This is the sort of thing I want sorted out. If she was a curate in another diocese, she would not have this problem. It is total anarchy." He was referring to the actual state of things in the church, as distinct from the official doctrinal line. For because secular law allows remarriage, the Anglicans are quite diverse in practice, with some clergy allowing

divorcees to remarry in church and others refusing such requests.

But how dishonouring to church profession is this lax situation, and especially when a church blessing is sought for remarriage and there is talk of wanting to make vows before God.

Can it be wondered that if there is such carelessness at the top, the young follow the trend and more so, in the very great moral deterioration of these last days?

It is a fulfilment of the warning words of Scripture concerning a godliness that has become mere formality, a sign that this is the perilous time of the last days. (2 Timothy 3:1)

NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS

HAMBURG, NEW YORK, *Corner Southwestern Blvd. & Pleasant Ave.*

Sundays: Breaking of Bread 11.30 a.m.
Sunday School 1.45 p.m.
Bible Class: Midweek: Forestville and Hamburg
Alternate Week: Revelation Study

Joining with our brethren in Manchester, we are seeking for God's guidance in considerations before them and we are grateful for the privilege and blessing of being able to jointly counsel in the work which is His.

All here are mindful also of those in trial, uncertainties and illness, seeking the Almighty's guidance and healing as it is His will.

J.A.DeF.

MANCHESTER, *Ryecroft Hall, Audenshaw.*

Sunday: Breaking of Bread 11.00 a.m.
Thursday: Bible Class 7.15 p.m.

As the work of witnessing continues we are caused to remember that this is a duty "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear". Applications are still being made for our booklet on the Doctrine of Fellowship; also for our prophecy booklet which reveals that a few still have some interest in God's word even though it is such a materialistic time.