

Week 25

Introduction

In the first half of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote of God's great plan with the earth and mankind and how the disciples had been called to be a part of his purpose. In the second half of the letter therefore he writes of the commandments they should obey to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called".^{4:1}

We shall also read this week the letter the apostle wrote to the disciples in Philippi which was a city of Macedonia, now part of Greece. When he introduced the truth to the inhabitants of that city he was flogged by the authorities and put in prison. However, the jailor of the prison believed the gospel and was baptized, and a congregation of believers was established to whom the apostle wrote this letter to encourage them in the way of righteousness.

Week 25

Ephesians 4

Day 169

Those who are called by the gospel are required to love one another,^{v.2} and to maintain unity in the truth,^{v.3} forming "one body".^{v.4} Unity is an important concept for: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all".^{vs.4-6}

Sadly, the Christian community did not remain united for long. Error was introduced into the body and many fell away from God's truth into apostasy. A principal error, and now almost universally accepted, is to deny that there is "one God who is the Father of all and above all".^{v.6} About three hundred years after the time of Christ, the pagan doctrine of the trinity was forced upon people by the Roman authorities who had adopted "Christianity" as the state religion. This false doctrine made Jesus a God and equal with his Father. To meet the objection that this denied the truth that God is one, they said the one God consisted of three persons - three in one and one in three! This is inexplicable but called "a mystery". The truth, however, is simple. There is one God who is the Creator of the universe and over all. There is also one Lord, Jesus,^{v.5} who is certainly very great, being the Son of God, but he is also the son of Mary and subject to his Father as he himself declared.^{Jn.5:30}

The apostasy has given the name "Holy Spirit" to the imaginary third person of their trinity, but in fact the Holy Spirit is God's power, not a person. There is one Spirit^{v.3} and it sustains the universe, and this power of God has in the past been given to men. It was given to Jesus at his baptism, and he promised that the apostles would also receive it after he went to heaven. This was foretold in the Old Testament as Paul showed by quoting the Psalms: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men".^{v.8, Psa.68:18} They received the gifts of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost^{Acts 2:4} and they could pass the gifts on to other disciples. The principal gifts were those for teaching the truth, and are the only ones mentioned here by the apostle.^{v.11} These gifts were for the building up of the

body of Christ which consisted of a great many disciples. ^{v.12} until it was mature (perfect) like an adult person. At first the church was like a child, easily blown away from the truth by false teaching, ^{v.14} but the spirit gifts of wisdom and knowledge enabled the body to remain steadfast while it matured. These gifts were only to remain within the church “till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man”. ^{v.13}

The faith was established by the apostles and written in the New Testament so that all disciples could “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”. ^{Jude 3} By the end of the first century the gifts had been withdrawn and there has been no further inspired scriptures, no more knowledge sent from God, and no additions to the faith. Many claim to have the gifts today but can give no conclusive proof, as the apostles and first Christians could, and they rarely speak of the teaching gifts which were the most important ones.

The vital requirement for disciples in all ages is not the possession of Spirit gifts but the development of characters like Christ's. True disciples have “learned Christ” ^{v.20} and “been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus”. ^{v.21} They do not live like other Gentiles ^{v.17} who do not understand the truth ^{v.18} and who devote themselves to their own desires (lasciviousness). ^{v.19} Rather, they become new people “created in righteousness and true holiness”. ^{v.24} This is difficult to do because we are all subject to the sinful influences in our flesh. While there is no such person as the evil supernatural “devil” of popular superstition, there is the very strong “diabolos” (the word in the original Greek) which means “pierced through”, i.e. a very deadly enemy. It is mainly applied to the lust in our own sinful nature, the most deadly enemy, so the apostle exhorts us to give no place in our lives to this. ^{v.27}

Week 25

Ephesians 5

Day 170

At the end of the previous chapter the apostle exhorted the disciples to forgive each other, as God had for Christ's sake forgiven them. Therefore he continued with the exhortation: “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love”. ^{v.1} By loving one another we do as Jesus has done for us: “as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God”. ^{v.2} It is vital for us to love fellow believers if we are to receive the favour of God, but it is also essential to separate from others who practise the evils listed by the apostle and which are rife in the world today. ^{vs.3-5} Such people do not “have any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ”. ^{v.5} and “the wrath of God” will come upon them. ^{v.6}

The disciples of Christ are commanded to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove” ^{v.11} for, having learned the truth, they walk in the light ^{vs.13-14} and light, has no fellowship with darkness. ^{2Cor.6:14} A great advantage of having light is that we can see where we are going, and Paul exhorted the disciples to “walk as children of light”. ^{v.8}

To enable us to walk according to God's will, the apostle gives us

commandments to obey, including those concerning domestic relationships, especially marriage: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church” ^{v.25} and “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord”. ^{v.22} The disciples of Christ are represented in the scriptures as his bride whom he loves and for whom he gave his life. Therefore, any disciple who is a husband or wife is commanded to be towards his or her spouse as Christ and his church are to each other. It is unfashionable today to recognize the husband as the head of his wife, but Christians will maintain this relationship in their marriage to reflect the beautiful one between Christ and his bride. Husbands and wives benefit greatly from developing their marriage according to this commandment of Christ for they are based on undying love.

The love between Christ and his bride is expressed beautifully in the Song of Solomon, a love poem cited here by the apostle, in which the bride is without blemish: ^{v.27} “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee”. *Song 4:7* Other passages in the Old Testament also portray this beautiful relationship between Christ and his bride, and Paul gives a remarkable illustration from Genesis. When Eve was created and presented to Adam he said: “This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”, and God said: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh”. *Gen.2:23-24* This, says the apostle, expresses the intimate relationship between Christ and his disciples, and this is a great mystery (secret). ^{v.30-32} We have the privilege of knowing this secret. Just as Adam’s side was opened while he was in a deep sleep and a bride was developed out of his side, so when Jesus fell into the sleep of death on the cross his side was opened and out of it came his blood, the shedding of which provided the means for the development of that holy community which constitutes his bride!

Week 25

Ephesians 6

Day 171

The apostle gave instructions concerning other family relationships, besides husbands and wives, including parents and children and, as was common in those days, masters and slaves. Children who have been baptized are commanded to obey their parents in the Lord, a commandment which is full of promise, ^{v.2} and parents are required to bring up their children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord”. ^{v.4}

In those days many slaves (translated “servants”) believed and were baptized, and these were commanded to obey their masters “as unto Christ”. ^{v.5} We are not slaves, but many of us are employees so we can apply this commandment to ourselves, not only working well when we are being watched as in “eyeservice”, ^{v.6} but always working as the servants of Christ who sees all, knowing he will reward each one for faithful service. ^{v.8} No disciples today are masters of slaves but some are employers and these are required to be Christ-like in their behaviour towards their workers. ^{v.9}

Disciples of Christ are forbidden to take up the sword to kill other people so, though they have had many violent enemies throughout the centuries, they

do not “wrestle against flesh and blood” in battle as other men do. The saints fight the good fight of faith in preaching the gospel and obeying Christ, and in this they come against “spiritual wickedness in high places”,^{v.12} i.e. evil in the secular and ecclesiastical rulers of the world. The disciples are therefore exhorted to put on, not the physical armour of the Roman soldier, but the spiritual armour of God.^{v.11} This consists of truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer.^{vs.14-18} These virtues enable us to withstand all the onslaughts of sin^{v.11} in whatever form it afflicts us, whether from the impulses of our own flesh or from the actions of other people. There is a great battle to be fought against sin and in the end, while many will lie slain, a great multitude will remain standing with Christ in victory. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”.^{v.13}

Week 25

Philippians 1

Day 172

Paul wrote his letter to the disciples in Philippi from Rome where he was a prisoner awaiting trial before Caesar, so he makes reference to his “bonds”.^{v.7} While preaching the gospel in Philippi he was flogged and thrown into prison. As a result the jailor and his family believed and were baptized, and a congregation of disciples was established in the city. Paul was confident God who had “begun a good work in them would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”,^{v.6} and he exhorted them to abound in love, knowledge and judgment “that they may approve things that are excellent; that they may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ”.^{v.9-10}

“The day of Christ” is the time true disciples look forward to, for then Jesus will return to raise the dead and give eternal life to the faithful. It is important to notice this fact because some words in this chapter are often wrested to suggest that Paul hoped to go to heaven at death. He faced an early execution, which would be a welcome release from his suffering, and then he would be unconscious in the grave until the day of Christ. However, it might be God’s will that he remained alive to encourage and help the disciples in churches near and far. Either way Christ would be magnified in his body, whether by life or death.^{v.21}

He was therefore in “a strait betwixt the two” - life or death.^{v.23} It is helpful to know that the word translated “depart” only appears once more in the Bible, and there it is translated “return”! Jesus said: “Be ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will “*return*” from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately”.^{Lu.12:36} Clearly this Greek word should be translated “return”, not “depart”, so it seems the apostle was saying that he could not choose between living or dying, but his earnest desire was for a third event - the return of Christ that he might be with him.^{v.23}

Paul exhorted the disciples to “be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”.^{v.2} Each was to think like Jesus and develop a mind like his: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”.^{v.5} Jesus was very great, being not only the Messiah, but also the Son of God. He was “in the form of God” but he did not make himself equal with God.^{v.6} Equality with God was a false charge levelled against him by the Jews which led them to put him to death.^{Jn.5:18} This false accusation is maintained by advocates of the trinity who claim the Son is equal with the Father. Jesus, however, repudiated this charge against himself and Paul shows that Christ, far from exalting himself to equality with his Father, “made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a slave... he humbled himself, and became obedient [to his Father] unto death”. Jesus was perfectly obedient “therefore God also hath highly exalted him above all”.^{vs.7-9}

Jesus is now exalted at the Father’s right hand in heaven but we do not yet see all things put under him.^{Heb.2:8} However, when he returns to the earth, “Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.^{vs.10-11} This is the day for which all things are preparing and therefore Paul exhorted the disciples to “be blameless and harmless, the children of God without rebuke” and to “hold forth the word of life” that he might “rejoice in the day of Christ”.^{vs.15-16}

The apostle warned the disciples to beware of those who would lead them away from the truth, especially those of high status among men. The apostle therefore reminded them of his own previous status.^{vs.4-6} Paul certainly had been a great man among the Jews but he gave up everything for Christ,^{v.7} counting all human glory as dung,^{v.8} that he might “attain unto the resurrection of the dead”.^{v.11} Paul had no ideas of glory at death, such as the Pagans and apostate Christians possess. His hope was for the same resurrection that Jesus experienced, to take place at Christ’s return.

Paul explained that in striving for the promised reward he was like an athlete in the Greek games. Like a runner in an Olympic race, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”.^{vs.13-14}

The prize is exceedingly great, much more glorious than gold medals, for it is eternal life with Jesus in the Kingdom of God and the rulership of the nations. Therefore the apostle urged the disciples to have the same motivation, to be “thus minded”^{v.15} and to “be followers together of me” and of those who took him for an example.^{v.17}

The citizens of Philippi were very proud of their Roman citizenship, their colony being modelled on Rome itself. They could boast: “our citizenship is in Rome”, but the disciples had a far higher status than that, as the apostle said:

“Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ”.^{v.20} Paul and the first Christians looked for Jesus to come from heaven to set up a political organisation in the earth which will be heavenly. Their anticipation of this event was heightened by the knowledge that, after resurrection, their bodies would be transformed from mortal and corruptible to immortal and incorruptible, for Jesus “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the power whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself”.^{v.21}

Week 25

Philippians 4

Day 175

In view of the glorious hope, the apostle exhorted the disciples to “stand fast in the Lord”, to have the same mind, and to help other believers whose “names are in the book of life”.^{vs.1-3} They were to throw care aside and trust in the living God.^{v.6} They were to fill their minds with the best thoughts: to think on things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, of virtue, and praiseworthy.^{v.8} If they did what they had learned, and received, and heard, and seen in Paul, the God of peace would be with them.^{v.9} This applies to people of all ages. It is fashionable now to dismiss the apostle Paul and his writings. Many opine that his instructions are irrelevant and inappropriate today, but Jesus set him forth as a model for us to copy. Consequently, if we follow his example we shall receive the commendation of both Christ and the Father.

Paul concluded his letter with expressions of glory to God.^{v.20} sending the greetings of all the saints in Rome, including some members of Caesar’s household,^{v.21} expressing the benediction with which he uniquely concluded all his letters: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all”.

When the people of Israel crossed the River Jordan into the Promised Land they constituted the kingdom of God. The LORD himself was their king and he appointed judges to rule for him. The first of these judges was Joshua who succeeded Moses and led them into the land. The book of Judges tells us of other judges of Israel during the following four centuries. During this time Israel went through a recurring cycle: disobedience, followed by suffering at the hands of other nations, followed by God raising up judges to deliver them, followed by a period of faithfulness before falling away into wickedness and idolatry again to restart the cycle. The book therefore shows the hand of God at work among his people and his responses to both their faithfulness and disobedience in accordance the admonitions given to them beforehand through Moses.

The judges are examples of faithfulness and are included among those whom we know will be in the future kingdom of God.^{Heb.11:32} We are going to read of two of these, Gideon and Samson, and give particular consideration to the way in which they foreshadowed the Lord Jesus Christ who is God's appointed judge and deliverer of Israel.^{Mic.5:1 and Rom.11:26} The last judge of the kingdom of God was Samuel and we shall also read of him in *The first book of Samuel*.

Chapter 6 describes how Israel once more “did evil in the sight of the LORD” so that they were delivered into the hand of the the Midianites who continually raided the land from the east and took all the fruit of Israel's labours. Therefore, the people cried to the LORD and he sent a prophet to appoint Gideon as a deliverer. Gideon's first act was to destroy the altar of the idol Baal which belonged to his own father, after which he was called Jerubbaal. This means “let Baal plead” referring to Gideon's charge that Baal, being a dumb idol, could not speak for himself.

God then ordered Gideon to call the men of Israel to assemble to him to fight against the Midianite invaders. A great multitude came to Gideon,^{v.1} but God wished to deliver them in such a way that there would be no doubt he had done it and not they themselves by their own power. Therefore, the number of fighting men was greatly reduced, firstly by allowing any who wished to return home to do so^{v.2} and secondly by selecting only those who drank water from a river in a particular way.^{v.5} The result was that only three hundred men were retained by Gideon to overthrow the Midianites.^{v.7}

This reminds us of the words of Jesus that “many are called, but few are chosen”.^{Mat.22:14} While there does not seem to have been any stigma attached to those who were not included in the three hundred chosen, there does seem to be a representation of the selection of those chosen to be with Christ. Only those with “willing hearts” will be selected, and those who “bow down on their knees” to idols will be emphatically excluded.

The victory was achieved against overwhelming odds, which is what God promised would occur when he aided them. We have examples of this in modern times. The Jews have returned to the Promised Land after 1900 years, according to God's promise, and they will remain there until the return of Christ. When, however, the State of Israel was established in 1948 the Arabs in the land and the surrounding countries attacked the untrained Jews with efficient and powerful armies. The Jews were outnumbered fifty to one yet they successfully defended themselves and gained double the land they had willingly received by United Nations' partition. For the next twenty five years the neighbouring Arab states threatened Israel with annihilation, yet she survived. In 1967 the Arabs attacked on three fronts, north, south and east, but Israel successfully defended herself and defeated the might of Egypt, Syria and Jordan in just six days! Thus we can see the hand of God at work in our day, just as we read of it in the Bible.

The method of overthrowing the Midianites also pointed forward to the overthrow of the enemies of the LORD by Jesus and the saints in the future. This overthrow will be sudden, as it was for the Midianites: "When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them". ^{1Thes.5:3} Christ's intervention likewise will be with the sound of the trumpet: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God". ^{1Thes.4:16} The sudden judgment of God resulted in the Midianites slaying one another, and this will occur in the future also. In particular, the Russian armies, soon to invade Israel and be overthrown by God, will react against each other in this way: "And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man's sword shall be against his brother". ^{Ezek.38:21}

By the power of God the wicked of the earth will be overthrown, and God's people will be delivered as in the day of Midian. ^{Isa.9:4} This will be accomplished by Jesus accompanied by the resurrected saints. In their lifetimes the saints had the light of the LORD but this was hidden from most of the world, just as the light of Gideon and his three hundred hid their light in the empty pitchers. ^{v.16} The saints are like the empty pitchers with light within, and when they are made immortal this light of the LORD will shine forth in great brightness. This victory over flesh will be seen to be the LORD's: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us". ^{2Cor.4:7}

Week 26

Judges 13

Day 177

Israel again fell into wickedness and idolatry so that they were afflicted, this time by the Philistines for forty years, ^{v.1} and again God raised up a deliverer to save them and to judge Israel. This saviour was Samson who is a remarkable type of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great saviour and judge of Israel. The foreshadowing of Jesus is first seen in the manner of Samson's birth. He would not have been born at all apart from the direct intervention

of God for his mother was barren,^{v.2} and Jesus' mother was a virgin. Likewise, Samson's mother was told beforehand that her son would be devoted to the LORD all his life, from the womb to the day of his death,^{v.7} and so also was Mary concerning Jesus. Samson would be a Nazarite, one who willingly dedicated himself to the LORD.^{Num.6:2} A person could vow to do this for a specified period of time but Samson, like Jesus, would do this all his life. During this period the Nazarite would be holy to the LORD and, among other things, would not drink strong drink (representative of imbibing false doctrine)^{v.4} or cut his hair,^{v.5} a feature which became highly significant in Samson's life.

An angel was sent to Samson's mother, as later an angel was sent to Jesus' mother, and it is notable that she referred to him as "God". This word in the Hebrew means "mighty one" and is applied to the LORD himself, to Jesus, to the angels, and to the rulers of Israel. This causes confusion in some minds leading them, for example, to think that Jesus is God himself. However we can readily understand that the Father is the source of all power and he gives this power to agents who may rightly be termed "gods" (see Jesus' explanation - *John 10:35*).

The name Samson means "sunshine" and is appropriate to a man who was to be strong and was to represent Jesus, for Jesus was a strong man by God's power and also like the sun.^{Psa.19:4-5} And again: "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved".^{Psa.80:17-19} Like Jesus as a child, Samson grew in favour with God.^{v.24 Lu.2:52} and in due course the Spirit of the LORD came upon him.^{v.25 Mat.3:16} By God's power Samson would begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines^{v.5} but Jesus went forth to deliver men from sin and death.

Week 26

Judges 14

Day 178

Samson, grown to manhood, fell in love with a Philistine woman^{v.1} and this was God's will, for "it was of the LORD".^{v.4} As this woman pleased Samson well^{v.3} and he was a man of God, devoted to the LORD, she was clearly of good character. Gentile women were acceptable as wives of faithful Israelites if they worshipped God in truth, and we have a marvellous example in Ruth (see the book of *Ruth*). Samson's parents were naturally upset that he was not marrying a woman of Israel, and this was the reaction of the Jews when Gentiles were given the opportunity to become part of the bride of Christ. However, the love of Samson ended in betrayal, this being a major feature of the record, to point forward to the suffering of Jesus when he was betrayed by an individual he loved.

Samson was given great power by God to deliver Israel from her strong enemies. Nations are often represented by lions in God's prophecies, and we read of Samson defeating a lion with his bare hands by God's Spirit,^{v.6} no doubt to illustrate the overthrow of powerful nations by Jesus with God's power. The consequence will be sweetness for the saints and the people of the

world. Samson afterwards represented his action in a riddle,^{v.14} just as Jesus represented in parables the overthrow of the nations and the establishment of the kingdom of God. The Philistines could not understand the riddle and so they resorted to violence,^{v.15} and when the Jews could not receive Jesus' parables they did likewise. In the face of persecution, Samson was betrayed by his "friend" ^{v.20} just as Jesus was betrayed by his own familiar friend.^{Psa.41:9}

Week 26

Judges 15

Day 179

The consequence of betrayal was the death of the betrayers ^{v.6} and the destruction of the enemies of Samson.^{v.8} The result was the gathering of the Philistine armies against Israel. But Israel, faced with a great and powerful enemy, chose to deliver God's appointed deliverer into the hands of their enemy to save themselves! ^{v.12} Likewise, when the Jews perceived the activities of Jesus would bring the Roman armies against their nation, they chose to deliver him to them! The reason was expressed by the High Priest: "It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not".^{Jn.11:50} So the Israelites bound Samson and delivered him to the enemy,^{v.13} just as their descendants would do with Jesus.^{Mat.27:2}

The power of God reacted in Samson ^{v.14} and he slew a great multitude with a jawbone of an ass.^{v.16} This was a great feat, as are the victories of Jesus over sin and death and over all other enemies at his return. Samson was made strong by God to perform his purpose in overthrowing the enemies of his people, so Jesus was made strong to save God's people from mighty enemies, not only human, but also from sin and death. Jesus, like Samson, was a man that God made strong for his own purpose: "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself".^{Psa.80:17}

A notable characteristic of the deeds of the Judges is that they achieved their victories by the use of weak things, e.g. the jawbone of an ass, for "out of weakness they were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens".^{Heb.11:34} God does not deliver in ways that men expect but he uses the weak things of the world to manifest his strength: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty".^{1Cor.1:27}

Jesus himself "was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God", and the apostle adds concerning the apostles: "we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you".^{2Cor.13:4} Samson was tremendously thirsty because of his exertions in gaining the victory ^{v.18} and we are reminded of Jesus' great thirst upon the cross as he gained his victory over sin and death.^{John 19:28} Afterwards Samson judged Israel,^{v.2} and so will Jesus at the time appointed by God.

On a certain day Samson went into the heart of Philistine territory, demonstrated God's great power against them, and in so doing foreshadowed the work of Christ in the future.

Samson went into Gaza and, like Joshua's spies in Jericho, took refuge in a harlot's house.^{v.1} The Philistines knew of his presence and lay in wait in the gate of the city to kill him in the morning, but at midnight Samson went out of the city taking the whole gate, with its posts and bars, carrying it thirty miles uphill to Hebron. He could only do this feat by the power of God, and we have in this event a representation of Jesus' future action against the enemies of God and of Israel. The enemy to face Jesus after his return is symbolized by a harlot who has slain the saints through the ages ^{Rev.17:5-6} and he will overthrow her city.^{Rev.18:2-7} Samson's taking the gate of the city is also significant, for God has promised that Jesus "shall possess the gate of his enemies".^{Gen.22:17}

After this, Samson was betrayed by a woman he loved and, no doubt, this is written to represent the betrayal of Jesus by those whom he loved, especially Judas Iscariot. We can appreciate the devastating effect this had on Samson and also later on Jesus whose mind is expressed in the Psalms: "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it... but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance".^{Psa.55:12} As we read of the machinations of the Philistines are reminded of the scheming of the Jews to entrap Jesus with his words.^{Mat.22:15} and to destroy him.^{Mat.12:14}

The secret of Samson's strength lay in his hair which could not be cut because he was under the vow of a Nazarite. When this secret became known and his hair cut he became weak as other men. There was, however, no power in the hair itself, but its being cut broke the vow and God withdrew his power. So Samson was involuntarily placed in the position of a sinner, as was also Jesus for our sakes, and like Jesus Samson was then led to prison and to death. But, also like Jesus, he accomplished more in his death against the enemy than in his life. Samson killed more Philistines by demolishing their temple than in his battles against them: Jesus fought against sin in all its manifestations during his life, but he destroyed it completely by his death.

Samuel was the last of the Judges because in his days the people desired a king and, after this was granted, a human ruler sat on the throne of the LORD over Israel. The record begins by describing a common scenario in the purpose of God where a barren wife suffers through having no children. In this case, Elkanah's wife, Hannah, is additionally persecuted by another wife, but again God intervenes so that she has a son who is dedicated to the LORD-Samuel, whose name means "asked of God". When he was about five years old, he was taken to Eli the priest to serve the LORD at the tabernacle which had been at Shiloh in Ephraim since Israel's entry into the land, and he served God for the rest of his life.

Hannah's predicament portrays the situation in which the wicked prosper and persecute the righteous. The righteous are represented by the barren woman who cries to the LORD in her distress and is heard, God then intervenes to provide a son to deliver the faithful. This points forward to Jesus, deliverer of Israel, who was born as a result of God's direct intervention. The saints are also represented as the children of the barren woman and are called upon to rejoice: "For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband". *Gal.4:27* Hannah herself greatly rejoiced and sang in joy, not only at the birth of her son, but also at the future prospect which her deliverance portrayed: "My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory... He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness... The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed [Christ]". *2:1-10*

Week 26

1 Samuel 3

Day 182

Hannah lived at a time when "there was no open vision". *v.1* Throughout history there have been different dispensations, with varying degrees of God manifestation. In some periods God has inspired prophets to speak his words and to perform mighty deeds, but at other times he has remained silent. Our days are like those of Hannah, for there is no open vision now, and so "the word of the LORD is precious" *v.1* i.e. it is scarce and highly valued by those who appreciate it. However, there soon came a change in those days, for Hannah's son was inspired to speak for the LORD, so that once more the people could hear the spoken word of God. *vs.19-20*

During periods when God is silent, people are inclined to conclude either that he does not exist or that he acts neither on behalf of his people nor against the wicked, but he warns us against such an attitude. *Psalms 50:21-23* The scriptures foretold that when Israel were scattered among the nations there would be no prophets to enlighten the people: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it". *Amos 8:11-12* And again: "For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people". *Isa.60:2* Nevertheless, the signs of the times indicate we are *approaching the time when God will again openly intervene in the affairs of the world and this same chapter of Isaiah speaks of that time when Christ returns to Israel and the light of God's truth enlightens the people.

oooOooo

Luke, inspired by God, wrote a record of the life of Jesus which he addressed to Theophilus ^{Luk.1:3} This name means “lover of God” and applies to all the saints. Luke wrote “those things which are most surely believed among us”, ^{v.1} so we should expect that all disciples of Christ would believe all that it written by him in this gospel. He wrote about the words and deeds of Jesus “that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed”, for we have in this record the true sayings of God.

Luke was just one of the gospel writers and he wrote of Jesus as the Son of man, emphasising the human aspects of his character and work. For this reason he was the only one to trace the genealogy of Jesus from the first man to prove that he was a human being of Adam’s race, as are we all. This was most important in the purpose of God for Jesus had to endure the same temptations as those for whom he died. Luke was a physician and he used medical words and terms in his writing which give a sympathetic feel to his record.

Jesus is both the Messiah and the Son of God, and therefore it was right that he should be introduced to Israel by a suitable personage. In preparation for this, God arranged for the forerunner to be born six months before Jesus so that thirty years later he could introduce Jesus to the people. Again, God intervened to enable a barren and aged woman to have a son. He would be called John and would go before the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elias (Elijah in the Old Testament). God had declared, in the last sentence of the Old Testament four hundred years before, that Elijah, the great prophet in Israel, will go before the Messiah when he comes in great glory. This has not yet happened but when it does Elijah will go to the Jews and prepare them to meet their Saviour. It was appropriate therefore that another man should fill this role at Christ’s first coming, and this was John.

It is also interesting to note it was the angel Gabriel who brought this information both to John’s parents and to Mary the mother of Jesus. The angels are the servants of the LORD and perform their duties mostly unseen by us, and Gabriel is one of the highest of them. ^{v.19} This same angel appeared to the prophet Daniel to tell him when the Messiah would come ^{Dan.9:21-27} and now, over four hundred years later, he appeared again to announce the Messiah’s birth.

God had said in the beginning that the Saviour of the world would be “the seed of the woman” ^{Gen.3:15} therefore, when the time came, Gabriel was sent to a virgin in Israel. ^{v.27} Mary was told that the baby would be called Jesus which means “Yah saves” and that, in accordance with God’s promise to David, ^{1Chron.17:11-14} Jesus would receive the throne of his father David and reign over the house of Jacob (Israel) for ever and of his kingdom there would be no end. ^{vs.32-33} This has not yet happened but true disciples are looking forward to Jesus reigning over Israel when he returns from heaven. Mary was

also told that Jesus would be “the Son of the Highest” ^{v.32} as well as her son. She asked how this could be as she was only betrothed to her husband.^{v.34} She was told that her son would be conceived by the power of God acting upon her so that her child would also be the Son of God.^{v.35} This is easy to understand, although often misconstrued, and we can readily appreciate that Jesus had no existence until he was born of Mary. John’s birth and the news of the Messiah’s conception caused great joy in their two families, but we notice that they both rejoiced, not only at the birth of these sons, but also at the glorious future in prospect through their birth and in the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham and his seed.^{vs.55,73}

Week 27

Luke 2

Day 184

God had declared five hundred years earlier that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem ^{Mic.5:2} but Mary lived in Nazareth, therefore God moved the supreme ruler of the world to bring the circumstances into line with his purpose. This is a good example of what is taking place all the time because God controls events in the world according to his own will. He “rules in the kingdom of men”.^{Dan.4:17} On this occasion he moved the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, to order the whole Empire be subject to census.^{v.1} We are told incidentally that this was the first census conducted when Cyrenius was governor of Syria ^{v.2} for there was another one conducted ten years later.^{Acts 5:37} Sometimes people confuse these two censuses and find fault with the record in Luke, but close study always demonstrates that the Bible is true despite supposed contradictions.

This census brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, the city of David the king to whom the promise had been made concerning his seed, and both Joseph and Mary were his descendants. The time of year was probably the Autumn. It certainly was not December because shepherds did not tend their sheep on the hills in the freezing winter. The reason 25th December is given as the date of Jesus’ birth is that, when the whole world was made “Christian” three hundred years after the birth of Jesus, the pagan midwinter festival was renamed “Christmas”(Christ’s Mass) and celebrated wrongly as Jesus’ birthday.

The shepherds were informed of Jesus’ birth by an angel ^{v.9} telling them tidings of great joy - the Saviour and Messiah, for which the whole of Israel looked, had been born. Then a great company of angels burst into song in which they declared: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”.^{v.14} This exclamation is often quoted by religious and secular leaders, especially at Christmas time, but they usually omit the first clause and cite only the benefits to men. However, there will not be “peace on earth and good will toward men” until there is first “glory to God in the highest”. The Bible tells us a great deal about this future, so we too can rejoice at the prospect of that glorious time.

The birth of the Messiah and Son of God brought great joy to those who heard of it because they knew that in due time he would deliver Israel, re-

establish the kingdom of God, and glorify the LORD in the earth. First of all Jesus had to grow to manhood, and throughout his childhood he “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”.^{v.52} At the age of twelve in the temple in Jerusalem he demonstrated he had a profound knowledge of both the scriptures and the purpose of God so that the religious leaders of the Jews “were astonished at his understanding and answers”.^{v.47} This was, of course, because he was God’s Son and had divine mind. *Psa.22:9-10*

Week 27

Luke 3 and 4

Day 185

Luke gave details of rulers and places ^{3:1} which are omitted by the other gospel writers. In the past, some of these historical details have been challenged, but with the discovery of more information, e.g. through archaeology, they have been proved correct, as we should expect of the word of God. Also, because Luke wrote of Jesus as the Son of man, he gave his genealogy through Mary, all the way back to Adam, to prove that he was a descendant of the first man and an inheritor of our nature which needed to be overcome. People sometimes confuse this genealogy with the one given in Matthew which traces Jesus’ legal line through his foster father back to Abraham, to prove Jesus is legally Abraham’s seed and heir of the promise. Although people supposed Jesus was the son of Joseph ^{v.23} his actual line of descent from Adam was through his mother Mary, whose father was Heli.
^{v.23}

Jesus lived with his family in Nazareth until the age of thirty ^{v.23} when he was sent to preach the gospel and to give his life for mankind. Before this, John the Baptist exhorted the people to repent of their sins,^{v.3} preparing the way for Christ, as prophesied by Isaiah.^{vs.3-4 and Isa.40:3-4} In due course, Jesus himself came to John and was baptized in the River Jordan, whereupon the Holy Spirit, God’s power, came upon him so that he, being anointed by God, became the LORD’s anointed, i.e. Christ.^{vs.21-22}

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit ^{4:1} to be tempted of the devil. If the popular idea of the devil as a supernatural evil being was true it would put him and God in collusion together against God’s own Son. In fact the devil is sin in the flesh, the great enemy of mankind, and the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness so that he could be tested by the prompting of his flesh. We considered this when we read the parallel record in Matthew (Week 3) when we saw Jesus’ complete success in this trial.

Early in his ministry Jesus returned to his own town of Nazareth where, in the synagogue, he read the scriptures to the people, reading from Isaiah 61 the prophecy written five hundred years earlier. “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me” i.e. Jesus ^{v.18} as he was the LORD’s anointed (or Christ), and the prophecy in Isaiah had declared beforehand what Christ would do. If we compare what Jesus read ^{vs.18-19} with the prophecy in *Isaiah 61:1-2* we see that he stopped reading in the middle of a sentence, and then “closed the book

and sat down”, to the astonishment of the audience.^{v.20} The reason he did this was that the prophecy speaks of Christ’s deeds in two different eras, firstly when he preached the gospel and gave his life, and secondly when he returns from heaven with great power. Therefore on that occasion Jesus read the first part of the prophecy only, that he would “preach the gospel” while doing good to the needy ^{vs.18-19} to be able to say: “this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”.^{v.21} The rest of the prophecy tells us what Jesus will do when he returns “to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God”, to give the faithful joy in Jerusalem, to rebuild Israel as in the days of old, and establish righteousness in the earth.^{Isa.61:2-4,11}

Because his neighbours in Nazareth were familiar with Jesus as the carpenter’s son, they had difficulty accepting him as the Messiah.^{vs.22-24} Furthermore, he incensed them by pointing out that God had intervened at certain times of trial for Israel to deliver, not Israelites, but Gentiles.^{vs.25-27} Luke was writing for all mankind and therefore it is appropriate that he, and not the other gospel writers records this conversation. However, it raised the ire of those Jews, provoking them to attempt to kill him.^{vs.29-30} Although Jesus had power to perform miraculous deeds, and he did so, his main duty was to preach the gospel, as he emphasised to the people. He had to preach the kingdom of God in all the cities of Israel because God had sent him specifically to do this,^{v.43} and he obeyed.^{v.44}

Week 27

Luke 5

Day 186

In this chapter we read of various miracles which Jesus performed. Those deeds proved that his message came from God, but they are also significant in representing the purpose of God. For example, some of his closest disciples were fishermen and Jesus took them away to become “fishers of men”.^{v.10} Their efforts in saving men would have been fruitless if attempted alone, as was their fishing in the sea of Galilee,^{v.5} but when they acted at Jesus’ command, “at his word”, ^{v.5} they caught a great multitude.^{v.6}

Jesus also cleansed a leper, and leprosy is used in the scriptures to represent sin in the flesh, for both are fatal corrupting afflictions and, just as he had power to make a leper clean,^{vs.12-13} he can also cleanse us from sin. Jesus has authority from his Father to forgive our sins, as he said: “the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins”.^{v.24} The Pharisees considered this blasphemous ^{v.21} but Jesus made the irrefutable assertion that the power of God in his possession which healed the paralysed man was proof that he had God’s authority and it was as easy for him to say “Thy sins be forgiven thee” as to say “Rise up and walk”.^{v.23} When Jesus returns from heaven he will come with the same power and authority, and we hope that he will say to us: “Thy sins be forgiven thee” and “Rise up out of the grave to the divine nature”.

The Pharisees considered themselves “righteous” ^{v.32} and were disdainful of “publicans (tax gatherers for the Romans) and sinners” ^{v.30} who welcomed

Jesus. But he did not come to save the self-righteous, but sinners: as a doctor heals the sick, not the healthy.^{v.31} The Pharisees were unable to accept his teaching which was like “new wine”^{v.37} for they preferred the “old wine”.^{v.39} Those who did receive his teaching had to be new people; in the same way as new wine had to be put in new leather bottles, because fermenting wine would burst the old ones.^{v.37}

Week 27

Luke 6

Day 187

The Pharisees severely criticised Jesus concerning the Sabbath. They taught that people could only do certain specified acts on the Sabbath day and found fault with Jesus for healing on that day. They charged him with “breaking the Sabbath”.^{Jn.5:18} This shows how unreasonable, hard hearted, and blind people can be. Jesus warned his disciples against following such blind religious leaders for both the leaders and followers would fall into the ditch.^{v.39} So we should beware of following religious leaders who can lead us into the grave, and eternal death. We should always test what anyone says against the word of God. Jesus demonstrated from the scriptures that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath days^{vs.2-3} and he continued to heal people on these days, asserting it was lawful to save life on the Sabbath.^{v.9}

Jesus taught the people God’s truth, and we have here one of his speeches spoken in the plain^{v.17} which is similar to one given by him on a mountain.^{Mat.5} Jesus emphasised the importance of doing what he commanded. Unfortunately, there are many people who call him “Lord, Lord” but do not do what he says.^{v.46} Many claim to be his disciples but consider they need do nothing because, in their opinion, “Jesus has done it all”. This is a fatal mistake, as will be manifest when Christ returns, for he will reject those who have not done his will, even though they may have expressed great loyalty to him. The safe way is to believe and obey: to listen to Jesus’ sayings and do what he says.^{v.47} Then we shall be like a house founded on a rock which will remain when the storm breaks.^{v.48}

Week 27

Luke 7

Day 188

Jesus healed a centurion’s servant at a distance. He did this because of this Gentile’s faith, which Jesus greatly appreciated.^{v.9} This man recognised that Jesus’ relationship to God was like the centurion’s to Caesar. The centurion was a man set under authority (of Caesar) and could issue an order and be obeyed.^{v.8} Likewise Jesus was a man set under authority (of God) and could therefore issue commands and be obeyed. Caesar’s authority extended over the Roman Empire so that the centurion could command people of the Empire, but God’s authority extends to all people and Nature so that Jesus by his authority could command even sickness and be obeyed. Jesus was most concerned that people recognise he did his Father’s works with the Father’s authority: “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him”.^{Jn.10:37-38}

Most people who accepted Jesus as the Messiah anticipated he would take possession of the land and re-establish the kingdom of God. When he did not do this immediately, they expressed doubts. Even John the Baptist, in prison at this time, sent messengers to confirm he was “the one who should come.” And Jesus reassured him by the works of God which he did, saying: “Tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me”. *vs.22-23*

Jesus then spoke to the people concerning John. He and Jesus behaved differently *vs.33-34* but the religious leaders rejected them both. They should have accepted John because he was God’s messenger, as foretold in Malachi, *v.27 and Mal.3:1* but they did not do so. John was a great prophet but there is one greater than he: Jesus himself, who made himself the least but was afterwards exalted above all... He “made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a slave ... he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow”. *Phil.2:7-10*

In contrast to the attitude of the Pharisees, many “publicans and sinners” welcomed Jesus joyfully because they believed through him they could be saved. One woman, despised by the Pharisees, *v.39* washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with ointment *v.38* because she loved him. Therefore Jesus said: “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven”. *vs.47-48* May we love Jesus as much, so that our sins will be forgiven.

Week 27

Luke 8

Day 189

During the whole period of his ministry of three and a half years, Jesus continued to obey his Father by preaching “the glad tidings of the kingdom of God”. *v.1* The reception of God’s word varied according to the character of the people who heard it, as Jesus illustrated in the parable of the sower (see *Week 5*). Those favoured by Jesus are like “the good ground” who “in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience”. *v.15* Those who hear the teaching of Jesus and understand it are greatly blessed for they can look forward to the kingdom of God and eternal life. *v.10* The important thing is to believe and obey the word of God which Jesus taught, because those who do this will be counted by him as members of his family and the children of God. *v.21*

Jesus also continued to demonstrate that he came from God by performing deeds which could only be done by the power of God. He quelled the storm, *v.24* healed the severely mentally ill, *v.35* staunched an haemorrhage, *v.44* and raised a young girl from the dead. *v.55* Many mock at the record of such deeds, even “laughing to scorn”, *v.53* but the miracles are an integral part of

God's purpose at particular times and such a time will soon come again when Jesus and his faithful disciples, raised from the dead, will perform even greater works for the benefit of all mankind. The people of the Gadarenes,^{v.26} who witnessed the curing of the mentally ill Legion and the passing of the deranging influence into pigs, which they should not have been raising because pork was forbidden by God, urged Jesus to leave their neighbourhood.^{Mat.8:34} He then crossed the Sea of Galilee and "when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him".^{v.40} Jesus has gone away since teaching so marvellously and doing such great miracles but many have since learned to appreciate what he did so that they are now "waiting for him" and will also "gladly receive him".

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Week 28

Introduction

The early chapters of Samuel describe dramatic events in Israel which changed the constitution of the kingdom. Israel was the kingdom of God, the LORD being their king and the appointer of their judges. However, in the days of Samuel a human king was chosen to sit on the throne of the LORD over Israel. The kingdom still remained the kingdom of God and it will also exist again in the future when Jesus returns and sits upon the same throne of the LORD as “the King of Israel”.

We shall read of this constitutional change and of both the first king, Saul, and his successor, David. The characters of these two men are disclosed - one was disobedient and rejected; the other obedient and exalted - and they are set forth as examples for us to learn from.

Week 28

1 Samuel 8

Day 190

Samuel was the last judge of Israel because when he was old the people requested a king similar to those of other nations. Their justification for this request was that Samuel’s sons had departed from the path of righteousness.^{v.5} It is true that the sons of Samuel were wicked, accepting bribes and perverting judgment, ^{v.3} but the real reason was revealed later. The people’s request distressed Samuel but God said: “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them”.^{v.7} This was clearly a serious mistake. Israel was the only theocracy on earth - it was the kingdom of God and the LORD himself was their king - but the people had turned aside to idols ^{v.8} and now they rejected him as their king. However, he accepted their request because it fitted in with his purpose. In particular the chosen king would sit on the throne of the LORD and in due time God’s Son would sit on the same throne and rule over Israel.

Samuel was told to show Israel the consequences of having a human king.^{v.9} He would need to be maintained in wives, servants, palaces, and much else, and all the costs would fall on them,^{vs.11-17} and we shall see their reaction to this a hundred years later when they sought relief from the tax burden.^{v.18} The people however would not listen to Samuel’s sensible remonstrations ^{vs.19-20} and God instructed him to give them a king,^{v.22} although the LORD himself would choose the man.

Week 28

1 Samuel 10

Day 191

In chapter 9 we can read how God informed Samuel that a certain man would come to him concerning whom, said God: “Thou shalt anoint to be captain over my people Israel”,^{9:16} and how Saul of the tribe of Benjamin came to him, and God said: “Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! This same shall reign over my people”.^{9:17} Therefore Samuel anointed Saul with oil, making him the LORD’s anointed and the king of Israel.^{v.1} Shortly after this, Samuel called all Israel together to present Saul to them and to remind them that they had rejected God from being their king.^{v.19}

After appropriate ceremony, Saul was brought forth before the people as the man God had chosen to be Israel's king.^{v.24} It is important to note that God chose who should be the king. This king is called "the king which ye (Israel) have chosen" ^{1Sam.12:13} but this refers to the fact that they had chosen to have a human king, not to the choice of the actual man, because God himself did this. Saul was received with delight by most of Israel, as his physique seemed appropriate for a king: "He was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward",^{v.23} but some were displeased with the choice.^{v.27} Very quickly, however, Saul showed he was a deliverer of the people for he saved the citizens of Jabesh-Gilead from the Ammonites. All the people of Israel then accepted Saul as their king.^{11:15}

Week 28

1 Samuel 12

Day 192

After the full acceptance of Saul as king, Samuel exhorted the people concerning their behaviour in the future. He did this in the presence of the new king ^{v.2} who had become the LORD's anointed (Heb. "Messiah").^{v.3} Firstly, Samuel declared his own faithfulness as the servant of the LORD ^{v.3} then recounted their history from the Exodus, emphasising their departure from the LORD ^{vs.6-10} and reminding them how God had nevertheless delivered them.^{v.11} He also declared the reason they had requested a human king.^{v.12} It was because they were impressed by the king of Ammon who led his people into battle against Israel! They had done wrong, but if they obeyed the LORD's commandments from then on they and their king would prosper,^{v.14} otherwise they would be punished.^{v.15}

Samuel then demonstrated the power of God he possessed which could have been used to punish them, but God is merciful and he forgave them. Furthermore, Samuel exhorted them concerning the future.^{vs.20-25} He promised to "teach them the good and the right way",^{v.23} urging them: "Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you". ^{v.24}

Week 28

1 Samuel 13

Day 193

Saul reigned over Israel for two years, and then his son Jonathan smote the Philistines ^{v.3} who persecuted Israel. The Philistines gathered their armies against Israel,^{v.5} terrifying the people,^{vs.6-7} so that Saul called the fighting men to him at Gilgal.^{v.4} Saul and the people waited for Samuel to come to make a sacrifice before the battle but, in his impatience when Samuel was delayed, Saul himself made the sacrifice, which was disobedience. Samuel, when he arrived, therefore told him he had done foolishly in disobeying the LORD,^{v.13} and the consequences of his disobedience would be disastrous. Obedience would have established the kingdom of God with him and his descendants, but disobedience resulted in the kingdom being taken from his dynasty and given to another man who would be faithful and obedient. This new king would be "a man after God's own heart".^{v.14}

The people of Israel were greatly disadvantaged in the battle against the Philistines in that they had no swords, spears, or other metal weapons.^{v.22} Nevertheless, they were victorious in the battle and defeated the oppressors (chapter 14) because God was with them. This, of course, is the vital factor determining success or failure, and Israel's history, ancient and modern, is full of examples of their success against all the likelihood when God was with them, but also of failure when God withdrew his help because of their disobedience. We can learn from their experience: to help us in our fight against sin.

Week 28

1 Samuel 15

Day 194

Saul, as the LORD's anointed,^{v.1} was called upon to destroy Amalek who for centuries had persecuted God's people.^{v.2} Israel did successfully overthrow the Amalekites but Saul spared Agag their king and the best of their flocks.^{vs.8-9} This was disobedience, just one of the many by Saul which grieved the LORD and distressed Samuel.^{v.11} Saul nevertheless sought to justify his behaviour. He did not give any explanation of why Agag was spared but he said the flocks were kept for sacrifice to the LORD. Even as he disobeyed he thought he "performed the commandment of the LORD".^{v.13} This illustrates how important it is to examine our own behaviour, not according to our own thinking, but in the light of God's word.

In his reprimand, Samuel enunciated a most important principle: "Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams".^{v.22} We do not now sacrifice animals, but many people make what they consider great sacrifices for God, thinking it will please him and bring them a reward but, if at the same time they disobey his commandments, their sacrifices are unacceptable to him. The essential thing is to obey God's word for if we reject it we will be rejected by him, as was Saul.^{v.23} He appealed for forgiveness and begged Samuel to pray for him, but God determined to rend the kingdom from him ^{v.28} and give it to "his neighbour" – to David.

It is interesting to note that "Agag" was the Amalekites' title for their ruler, just as "Pharaoh" was the Egyptian's, and it is the title applied in prophecy to the leader of the nations who will attack Israel when Jesus intervenes to save them.^{Ezek.38:1} The title appears slightly differently in English because "Agag" comes to us directly from Hebrew, whereas "Gog" comes via Chaldean. Amalek was the chief enemy of Israel in ancient times ^{Exod.17:16} so it was appropriate that the title of their ruler should be used by God as that of her enemy at the time of Israel's final affliction and deliverance.

Week 28

1 Samuel 16

Day 195

The LORD had rejected Saul from being king and had chosen "a man after his own heart", therefore Samuel was sent to anoint this man to be king over Israel.^{v.1} He lived in Bethlehem with his father Jesse, so the prophet was sent

there. Samuel did not know which of Jesse's sons was to be king but he was greatly impressed by the look of the eldest.^{v.6} However, God is not impressed by appearance but by character: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart".^{v.7} Seven sons were brought before Samuel but none of them was chosen by God, then the eighth and youngest, David, was called and chosen, therefore Samuel anointed him to be king of Israel.^{vs.11-13}

It is significant that David was tending the sheep, because God later declared he had taken David "from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel".^{2Sam.7:8} His experience in protecting the sheep against wild animals was invaluable in preparing him to deliver Israel from her human enemies. As soon as David was anointed with oil, the Spirit of the LORD came upon him while at the same time the Spirit departing from Saul.^{vs.13-14} It was years, however, before David ruled over Israel for, like Jesus, he had to endure a period of suffering before ascending the throne. David's hometown was Bethlehem and God arranged, by his providence a thousand years later, for his anointed, the greater son of David to be born in this same "the city of David".

Week 28

1 Samuel 17

Day 196

Once more the Philistine armies attacked God's people,^{v.1} so the men of Israel gathered together to face them ^{v.2} and were confronted by the Philistine champion, Goliath, a giant.^{v.4} We have read of these giants before. They were a race of very large men who had almost all been exterminated, but a few remained in Israel, notably in Gath, ^{Josh.11:22} Goliath's city. This Philistine champion challenged the soldiers of Israel, but they were all afraid of him.

David's three eldest brothers were in the army and he was sent with provisions for them, and when he heard Goliath's reproaches against Israel he was astonished that none of his own people was willing to meet the challenge of this man who dared to "defy the armies of the living God".^{v.26} David himself then offered to fight the giant, confident of God's help, as he said to Saul, citing his experiences as a shepherd when wild beasts attacked the sheep: "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God".^{v.36} David refused Saul's armour because he had "not proved it" - was not used to wearing it.^{v.39} This shows that David was a big man, able to wear Saul's armour, for Saul was head and shoulders above other men. David was still a youth and inexperienced in battle so the people doubted he could be victorious, but he did successfully defeat and kill the giant - his trust in God being vindicated.

When they confronted each other the giant boasted of himself and denigrated David, but David expressed his complete confidence in victory, not by his own might, but by the providence of God: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the

LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands".^{vs.45-47} The fight was over in moments for David slung a stone which struck Goliath in the forehead, throwing him to the ground. Whereupon David cut off his head with the giant's own sword. The Philistines then fled before the men of Israel and a great deliverance resulted.

This record is a marvellous exhortation to us all to be courageous and to trust in the living God in the face of any adversity that comes to us in life, and it is also a wonderful representation of the salvation effected through Jesus. God's promise from the beginning was that the seed of the woman would wound the enemy, which is sin, in the head, i.e. destroy the adversary as David destroyed Goliath. David came as Israel's saviour and was amazed that there was no man to help them: and it was prophesied of Jesus: "God saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke".^{Isa.59:17}

David's brothers rejected him as Israel's saviour and derided him,^{v.28} and the brothers of Jesus rejected and derided him.^{John 7:5} Both David and Jesus trusted in the living God and achieved great victories over the enemy. Jesus destroyed sin by his life of obedience and his sacrifice, and he will destroy the enemies of God and of Israel when he returns from heaven. This future victory is well signified in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, recorded in *Daniel 2*, in which the kingdoms of men were represented by a colossus which is finally destroyed by a stone, symbolising Jesus "the shepherd, the stone of Israel".^{Gen.49:24}

It is interesting too that David took Goliath's head to Jerusalem because it would be there that Jesus would achieve his victory over sin - at Golgotha, "the place of a skull" ^{Mar.15:22} Also, Saul expressed lack of knowledge concerning David's identity, asking him: "Whose son art thou?" ^{v.58} even though he had been in his presence before! Likewise, when Jesus returns and saves Israel from the invading armies, the rulers of the nation will also be confused as to his identity. They will know he is the Messiah by the power of God he manifest, and it will soon dawn on them that he is Jesus of Nazareth whom they, the Jews, have rejected for centuries. They will realise that their Saviour is the same man who came before to comfort them. On his return they will ask: "Whose son art thou?" and he will answer: "The Son of God!".

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