

In his letter to the Hebrews the apostle wrote to the Jewish Christians to prove that salvation through Christ is superior to anything they could obtain under the Law of Moses. He demonstrates in his letter that Christ is superior to the angels, to Moses the mediator of the old covenant, to Aaron the high priest under the Law, and that the sacrifice of Christ achieved eternal salvation which the sacrifice of animals under the law was unable to achieve. In every way the new covenant is superior to the old and the way to eternal life is by faith in Christ and not through the works of the Law of Moses.

Week 45**Hebrews 1****Day 309**

In the first two chapters, the apostle shows that Jesus is superior to the angels. Jesus is the Son of God but also the son of man, and both these aspects of Jesus are brought out in this letter. God had spoken often in the past through his prophets but in the last days (of the Mosaic era) he had spoken by a Son.^{v.1} He had made this Son the heir of all things and through him “had constituted the ages”.^{v.2} Jesus is not God, but the Son of God and heir of the promises which God has made, and everything that has happened through the ages (the word “world” is “ages” in the original) has occurred because of God’s purpose in Christ.

The apostle says Jesus is “the express image of God’s person”, just as we might say a son is the spitting image of his father. Jesus, in the days of his flesh, was a manifestation of his Father’s character, and since his resurrection has also been a manifestation of his divine nature, “being the brightness of his glory”.^{v.3} “When he had by himself purged our sins” he was raised from the dead, made immortal, went to heaven, and “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high”.^{v.3} Thus, Jesus was “made so much better than the angels”,^{v.4} not because he was a God who had existed from eternity, but because “he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they”^{v.4} by his perfect life of obedience to his Father.

The apostle then cited a number of Old Testament scriptures to prove that Jesus is better than the angels. God called Jesus his Son in Psalm 2, making reference to the day he was begotten,^{Psa.2:7} and also in his promise to David ^{2Sam.7:14} but this has not been said of any angel.^{v.5} Again, God called upon all his angels to worship Jesus

^{v.6} for the angels are God’s servants, ^{v.7; Psa.104:4} whereas Jesus is his Son. Sometimes people argue that Jesus is God and equal to the Father because he is worshipped, but the word “worship” means “to make oneself prostrate before another” which, for example, one may do before a king. Thus, the wise men sought the baby “born king of the Jews” that they might worship him.^{Mat.2:2}

The quotation in verse 6 is from Psalm 97 where the angels themselves are called gods: “Worship him, all ye gods”. *Psa.97:7* The word “gods” in the original Hebrew is “elohim”, meaning “mighty ones”, and in this sense Jesus himself, being a mighty one, is called “God”. There are no capital letters in the original text so the translators have used “god” or “God” according to their own ideas, but the meaning is the same: “mighty one”. God himself (i.e. the Father) called Jesus “God” in Psalm 45 which declared beforehand that because Jesus “loved righteousness and hated iniquity” his throne would last for ever and he was anointed above his fellows. *vs.8-9; Psa.45:6-7* This shows that Jesus’ exaltation above his fellow men was conditional upon him being righteous. God calls him “the man that is my fellow”

Zech.13:7 and Jesus has other fellows that are men, *v.9* and the fact that Jesus is a fellow of both God and men can only be explained by what is written in the gospels - that he was begotten of God’s Spirit and born of Mary.

The political heavens and earth *v.10* are in the power of Christ but in the end they will vanish away, while Jesus will remain for ever *vs.11-12*. He will create new political heavens and earth when he returns but in the meantime he sits at God’s right hand *v.13* where he will remain until the time comes for all enemies to be put under his feet. This was never said to angels who are the servants of God sent forth to serve the heirs of salvation, *v.14* i.e. they work unseen for the benefit of the disciples of Christ who will in due course live and reign with him in his kingdom.

Week 45

Hebrews 2

Day 310

The law of Moses was “spoken by angels” and anyone in Israel who broke that law was subject to God’s righteous punishment. *v.2* Jesus is higher in status than the angels, therefore we should be careful not to neglect his word: “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should drift away from them”. *v.1* “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord” and confirmed by the apostles *v.3* and by God. *v.4* Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God which was good news concerning “the world to come”, *v.5* but the apostle proves from Psalm 8 that Jesus had first of all to be made lower than the angels. *vs.6-8* He had to be of our nature so he could fight against the same temptations and sin in the flesh as ourselves. He was made lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. *v.9* It was an essential part of God’s purpose “in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering”. *v.10*

By belief in Jesus’ word, baptism, and obedience we can be counted God’s children, being with Jesus “all of one” Father, so that Jesus is not ashamed to

call us “brethren”.^{v.11-12} This is a quotation from Psalm 22 which recorded beforehand the suffering of Christ and tells us that Jesus’ thoughts as he hung on the cross turned from his agony to the glorious future when he will declare God’s name to his brethren in the great congregation of the redeemed.^{Psa.22:22} Because the children of God are partakers of flesh and blood, Jesus partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death.^{v.14} Sin causes death and holds people in the grave, but Jesus overcame it by a perfect life and a sacrificial death at the hands of sinful men. Afterwards, this innocent man was raised from the grave to live an everlasting life free from sin and death. Thus he destroyed sin in himself, and he will destroy it for all his brethren and sisters whom he will raise from the dead to immortality. Sin is personified in the scriptures and called “the false accuser”, translated here as “the Devil” because of the popular misconception concerning some imaginary evil supernatural being. It is difficult to understand how Jesus “who was crucified through weakness”^{2Cor.13:4} could destroy such a powerful superhuman being by his own death, but when we understand that the enemy is sin his victory becomes clear.

By their relationship with Christ, the saints are all the seed of Abraham. Therefore to save them Jesus needed, not the nature of angels, but the nature of the seed of Abraham. If he had the same nature as angels he could not have been tempted as

we are and he could not have overcome sin and delivered us from death. It was essential therefore that Jesus possessed our nature, which he did by his birth of Mary: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren... For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted”.^{vs.17-18} Partaking of our nature, he was able “to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” and become “a merciful and faithful high priest” to sympathetically intercede for us with the Father.^{v.17}

Week 45

Hebrews 3

Day 311

Jesus, in heaven, is God’s High Priest ^{v.1} with a higher status than any priest or Levite under the Law of Moses. He is, in particular, higher than Moses in whom the Jews trusted. God’s testimony concerning Moses was that “he was faithful in all God’s house”. ^{v.2}; *Num.12:7* Moses was faithful to God, but he was only a servant in God’s house ^{v.5} whereas Jesus is God’s Son so that God’s house is his house.^{v.6} God’s promise to David was that his seed would build God a house ^{2Sam.7:13} and Jesus will certainly build a temple for God, as Solomon did, but he is also a builder of a house of God comprised of people. As disciples of Christ, we can be members of this household: “Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope

firm unto the end”.^{v.6} The provision of God in the scriptures is that anyone can believe the gospel, be baptised, and obey Christ’s commandments, to be counted the children of God and members of his house. It is vital, however, for such people to remain steadfast in the faith.

The apostle cites the example of the people of Israel in the wilderness who had the opportunity to enter into the promised land and enjoy the blessings God had promised but who hardened their hearts,^{v.8} erred in their hearts,^{v.10} and had an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.^{v.12} Therefore God declared: “They shall not enter into my rest”.^{v.11} The apostle exhorts the disciples not to be like that generation who perished because they did not believe. Now is our day of opportunity to believe and obey,^{v.7} therefore the apostle urges: “Exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end”.^{vs.13-14} Not all the people provoked God in the wilderness ^{v.16} and two men, Caleb and Joshua, were preserved by God to enter the promised land with the next generation of Israel. We are exhorted to be like them so that when Jesus re-establishes the kingdom of God in the Holy Land we shall be preserved to live and reign with him there.

Week 45

Hebrews 4

Day 312

The people that came out of Egypt with Moses were offered places in God’s rest, and so are we ^{v.1} and for this reason the gospel is preached to us as it was to them.^{v.2} We see, therefore, that the gospel is not only found in the New Testament but also throughout the Bible, including Genesis, for it was also preached to Abraham. *Gen.12:3, Gal.3:8* The gospel did not profit unbelievers, therefore the apostle warns the disciples to believe. The LORD rested on the seventh day after six days, transforming the earth into a suitable habitation for man ^{v.4} and this typifies the seven thousand years of God’s purpose with mankind which will conclude with a

thousand year rest. Although Joshua ^{v.8} (“Joshua” in Hebrew is the same name as “Jesus” in Greek) took the next generation of Israel into the land, this was not the rest spoken of in Psalm 95. David wrote five hundred years after Joshua’s day and spoke of a rest still to come, a rest that “remaineth for the people of God” ^{v.9} which we are invited to enter.^{v.11}

The purpose of God will culminate in the promised millennium which will follow six millennia of toil. The thousand year reign of Christ will be a time of blessing and refreshing for Israel and all the people of the earth, and we are invited to believe now so we will rise from the dead, be made immortal, and reign with Jesus throughout this long period. We shall fail to enter God’s rest if we do not believe.^{v.11} We shall all be judged by the word of God which is

“living and powerful and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”,^{v.12} and “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do”.^{v.13} Happily, the disciples of Christ have him as their great high priest in the heavens ^{v.14} who can be touched with the feeling of their infirmities for he “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”.^{v.15} Through him the disciples can “come boldly unto the throne of grace, and may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”.^{v.16}

Week 45

Hebrews 5

Day 313

Every high priest ordained by God,^{v.1} e.g. Aaron and Jesus, is appointed to make sacrifices for sins ^{v.1} and he can have compassion on the wayward, being himself compassed with the infirmity of the flesh.^{v.2} The high priest therefore made sacrifices for sins, not only for other people, but also for himself.^{v.3} This applied also to Jesus for, even though he was personally sinless through a life of righteousness, he was a partaker of our sinful nature. No man can arrogate to himself the position of high priest but has to be appointed by God,^{v.5} so even Jesus was called to this position by God who said to him: “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec”.^{v.6}; *Psa.110:4*

Jesus was compassed about with infirmity ^{v.2} and in his suffering “offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared”.^{v.7} Again we have the clear distinction made between Jesus and his Father. Although Jesus is the Son of God, “he learned obedience to his Father by the things which he suffered” v.8. As a result of his perfect obedience he was also made perfect in nature and “became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him”.^{v.9}

The apostle shows in the following chapters that the priestly order of Melchizedek was higher than that of Aaron. Melchizedek was the priest to whom Abraham, the ancestor of Aaron, offered tithes, showing that Melchizedek was of higher status than both Abraham and Aaron. The record in Genesis concerning Melchizedek is full of typical information and the apostle had much to say about him and Christ which the disciples found hard to receive.^{v.11} They were like babes in the truth who could only receive the milk of the word ^{v.12} and his instruction here stresses the importance of studying the word of God. Everyone needs to learn the first principles of the truth, likened to milk, and then to mature and feed upon the meat of the word. Like adults, strong and of full age, they should then practise the commandments of God, having their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. vs.13-14. Most people, unfortunately, do not study the word of God

sufficiently even to learn the first principles of the truth, but those who do so grow in Christ and learn how to please God so they can look forward to receiving eternal life at Jesus' return.

Week 45

Hebrews 10

Day 314

In chapters six to nine, the apostle shows how the Law of Moses foreshadowed Christ and God's scheme of salvation through him, "the law having a shadow of good things to come".^{v.1} The Law provided beforehand a picture of Christ, not an exact image,^{v.1} but as it were a silhouette so that by reading the Law and noting the patterns contained therein we can see Jesus depicted. For example, animals were sacrificed under the Law of Moses and we can see in them a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ. However, "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins",^{v.4} so Jesus had to be of our nature, and he willingly shed his blood for us. Therefore, it was prophesied in Psalm 40 that Jesus would come and do God's will and by the sacrifice of himself achieve what the sacrifice of animals failed to do.^{vs.5-7}

The priests under the Law offered sacrifices continually ^{v.1} because of recurring sin.^{v.2} They sacrificed daily, even though they could not take away sins.^{v.11} In contrast, Jesus offered his body as a sacrifice once,^{v.10} removed sins for ever,^{v.12} and perfected for ever them that are sanctified.^{v.14} Afterwards Jesus did not sacrifice himself again but sat at God's right hand anticipating the time when all enemies will be put under his feet.^{v.13} In the meantime, because of Jesus' sacrifice, we can enter into a new covenant with God by which, having his law written in our hearts,^{v.16} he will remember our sins and iniquities no more.^{v.17} Because sins are remitted for ever by the sacrifice of Christ there is no more need to offer animal sacrifices for sin ^{v.18} and by his sacrifice Jesus has opened up a new and living way to God.^{v.20}

The ultimate condition of the saved will be immortality and this is represented by the Most Holy place in the Temple which is entered from the Holy Place through the veil.^{v.20} This veil was rent in two when Jesus died and it represents his flesh which was broken. The design of the tabernacle and its furniture represents God's scheme of salvation through Christ so by studying this design we can see the purpose of God detailed and be guided in our behaviour before him. For example, the laver outside the Holy Place was for the priests to wash themselves, and we can "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water".^{v.22} Israel were warned to obey God's commands implicitly and we also should heed this warning for "if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there

remaineth no more sacrifice for sins”,^{v.26} and “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”.^{v.31}

The first disciples suffered greatly at the hands of men ^{vs.33-34} but were exhorted to remain confident in view of the “great recompence of reward” they would receive.^{v.35} Endurance is required to continually do the will of God and finally receive what he has promised ^{v.36} which will certainly arrive, “for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry”.^{v.37} Men and women will be declared righteous at the coming of Jesus if they have faith, i.e. they believe God’s word and promises, for it is written “the just shall live by faith”.^{v.38}; *Hab.2:4* The apostle declared he had no part with them that departed from the faith and who would end up in perdition, i.e. they would perish,^{v.39} but he had pleasure in these faithful disciples that believed to the saving of the soul.^{v.39}

Week 45

Hebrews 11

Day 315

It is unfortunate that the Greek word for “belief” is translated “faith” because the true meaning of faith can be lost. People often treat faith as if it is credulity, blind belief in things for which there is no evidence, whereas the faith that pleases God is belief of his word for the truth of which there is abundant evidence. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”.^{v.1} The scriptures speak of many things which cannot be seen, e.g. God himself, but they also provide plentiful evidence of their existence, and the unseen things which God has promised provide us with a wonderful hope for the future. This chapter cites many examples of men and women who had faith to emphasise that this virtue is vital for “without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” v.6. If we deny God’s existence, reject the reward he offers, or hope for a reward he has not promised we will fail to please him and be rejected.

God promised Abraham and his seed the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession.^{v.8} This seed is Christ *Gal.3:16* and through him a great multitude of saints would be developed.^{v.12} Abraham believed God and was content to remain a stranger and pilgrim in that same land of promise,^{v.13} as was Sarah his wife ^{v.11} and Isaac and Jacob, his son and grandson.^{v.9} All the disciples of Christ are counted as Abraham’s seed and heirs of God’s promise, and all true disciples therefore “declare plainly that they seek a country”.^{v.14} The word “country” in the original Greek is “patris” meaning “fatherland”, and Abraham left his natural father’s land to inherit his heavenly Father’s land. He sought a better country, a heavenly country, and God says he is not ashamed to be called the God of all those who believe his promise and look

forward with Abraham to inheriting the Holy Land.^{v.16}

Abraham's faith was greatly tested by God telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac. This was not because God desired human sacrifice but because he had declared that the promised seed would come through Isaac. Abraham knew therefore that Isaac had to live and have a son, and he also knew that if Isaac died at that time God would raise him from the dead. Therefore, because he believed the LORD, he obeyed, "accounting that God was able to raise Isaac up, even from the dead; from whence also Abraham received him in a figure".^{v.19} These events recorded in Genesis 22 prefigure the sacrifice of Christ, as do the lives and experiences of other faithful men cited in this chapter. They are all excellent examples for us to follow. Moses gave up the riches and honour of being an Egyptian prince ^{v.24} because he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward".^{v.26} We likewise can have "respect unto this reward" and be motivated to devote our lives to the doing of God's will. Many of these men and women suffered persecution at the hands of wicked men vs.33-38 but they remained faithful, not accepting deliverance from torture and death by denying the faith, "that they might obtain a better resurrection" v.35. All these obtained a good report from God because of their faith and obedience but they died without receiving the promised reward.^{v.39} This is because all the faithful will be rewarded together when Jesus returns, the dead are raised, and Abraham and Christ inherit the promised land. The giving of the reward was postponed to give those who would live afterwards, including ourselves, the opportunity of believing. God has provided some better thing for us, that the faithful of past ages should not be made perfect without us.^{v.40}

oooOoo

Jeremiah prophesied during the last years of the kingdom of God, including the reign of the last king, Zedekiah,^{1:3} to sit upon the throne of the LORD in Jerusalem. Many people consider Jeremiah a gloomy prophet, but he spoke the word of God to the Jews in times of great distress when God brought upon them and the surrounding nations the recompense for their wickedness. Jeremiah gave them warning and exhortation to turn to righteousness, but they would not hear and they persecuted him. Nevertheless, God also inspired him to speak of the glorious future when Israel will return from their scattering and the kingdom of God will be restored under Christ.

Week 46**Jeremiah 1****Day 316**

The words of God to Jeremiah in this chapter show us that the prophets of the LORD did not speak their own thoughts but expressed the mind of God. The word of the LORD came to him ^{v.4} informing him that God had known him before he was born and had preordained him to be his prophet.^{v.5} He was told to declare to the nations whatsoever God commanded him to speak ^{v.7} and not to be afraid of the persecution this would bring.^{v.8} God put his words in Jeremiah's mouth ^{v.9} and the things he declared would certainly occur: "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant".^{v.10} Jeremiah did none of these things literally, but he declared what would happen and God brought them to pass. The prophets spoke with authority because they spoke the word of God, and we can accept their message with absolute confidence, knowing that all that they said comes from God.

Jeremiah was immediately given two visions which, at first sight, seem cryptic. However, the almond tree ^{v.11} was the first tree to blossom in the spring and is used here to show that God would very soon do what he declared.^{v.12} It is also a symbol of resurrection for a rod of an almond tree ^{v.11} was used to represent the resurrection of Christ when Aaron's rod budded and sprang back into life.^{Num.17:8} The second vision was that of a seething pot ^{v.13} to represent the cauldron that Jerusalem would become when nations invaded the land from the north ^{v.14}, besieged the city,^{v.15} and punished the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem for their wickedness.^{v.16} When Jeremiah told the Jews of the impending judgments he was branded a traitor and persecuted, but God encouraged him in advance, promising protection.^{vs.17-19} This echoes the encouragement Jesus gave to the apostles when telling them of the persecution they would suffer for his sake.^{Lu.21:16-19} In the event, Jeremiah survived to see Jerusalem destroyed and the people of Judah carried away captive to Babylon.

The statement: “The word of the LORD came unto me” ^{v.1} occurs repeatedly throughout this book, showing that the message was not Jeremiah’s but God’s. The prophets sometimes had, not only to speak the word of God, but also to act in ways, often distressing, to depict in action what God would do. Jeremiah was commanded not to marry and have children ^{v.2}, to emphasise his dire warning as

to what would happen to women and children when the Babylonians destroyed their kingdom and Jerusalem. ^{vs.4-9} Naturally, upon hearing his message, they would ask why such calamities were coming upon them, ^{v.10} and he told them the reason. It was because of their long history of continual wickedness ^{v.11} and because they themselves were worse than their ancestors. ^{v.12} They made the common mistake of acting according to the imagination of their own hearts ^{v.12} instead of listening to the word of God, and the consequence was that they were expelled from the promised land. ^{v.13}

Nevertheless, the ultimate purpose of God is that the people of Israel, his people, will live in his land under the righteous government of Christ, his Son. Therefore, the LORD spoke of that future time when Israel would be gathered out of all nations. The ten tribes had been removed from the land by the Assyrians, and the two tribes were about to be taken away by the Babylonians. A few would later return, but God declared that one day he would gather all Israel out of all nations and bring them back to his land. “Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers”. ^{vs.14-15}

The return of the Jews to the promised land is a first principle of the true faith of Christians, but few today believe it or are looking forward to the return of Jesus to sit on his throne of glory in Jerusalem and to reign over Israel. Millions have been led away from the truth by false doctrines and the denial of God’s word, but the time will come when they will acknowledge they have believed lies: “The Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit”. ^{v.19} It is much wiser not to wait for this before learning the truth from God’s word for, by belief and obedience, we can secure for ourselves places with Christ in his kingdom when God will prove his existence by demonstrations of great power: “Therefore, behold, I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is The LORD”. ^{v.21}

The sin of the Jews was deeply ingrained v.1. They turned from God to idolatry ^{v.2} and therefore they would be removed into their enemies' lands.^{vs.3-4} They made the fatal mistake of trusting in man instead of in the LORD, and were cursed.^{v.5} We can make the same mistake. Most people listen to men, experts in every field, but few give diligent attention to the word of God in the scriptures, and therefore most people are barren of fruitfulness to God. They are like the heath in the desert and they will not see the good times God will bring.^{v.6} However, those that hope and trust in God are blessed ^{v.7} and are likened to a tree planted by the waters which continually yields fruit, because they will be immortal and serve God for ever.^{v.8} We have to realise that our "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"

^{v.9} and we naturally go the wrong way. Therefore we have to fight against our natural inclinations and submit our minds totally to the word of God. He searches

our hearts and he will "give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings".^{v.10}

The LORD is the fountain of living waters ^{v.13} and if we drink his word we shall be saved ^{v.14} but if we do not we shall be "written in the earth", returning to the dust for ever, instead of being written in "the book of life".^{Phil.4:3} The Jews professed to want the word of God ^{v.15} but persecuted his prophet, Jeremiah.^{v.18} He warned them to keep God's commandments, "but they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, making their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction".^{v.23} If they had listened, God would have established the throne of David and blessed Judah and Jerusalem,^{vs.24-26} but they did not and Jerusalem was destroyed by fire.^{v.27} Nevertheless, the throne of David will be re-established and Jesus will reign over Israel with those who have listened to the word of God and obeyed it.

Jeremiah lived through the distressing times when the Jews were afflicted by the Babylonians and taken captive, but he was reassured that God would ultimately bring all Israel back to the land. He was told to write this in a book ^{v.2} for people to read and learn the purpose of God with Israel. He declared plainly that he would cause both Israel and Judah to return to the land,^{v.3} but he also informs us that this will occur in a period of intense persecution for the Jews.^{vs.4-7} It is called "the time of Jacob's trouble",^{v.7} out of which they will be saved ^{v.8} to serve their king, Jesus, the greater son of David.^{v.9}

Therefore we can anticipate a time of worldwide anti- Semitism when the Jews will be persecuted almost everywhere. This will motivate them to leave all nations and return to the promised land and, although the Gentiles will try to prevent them, with God's help they will be invincible.*Mic.5:7-9*

Although all other nations may come to an end, Israel will survive v.11. Israel were punished.*v.11* and God used other nations to administer this punishment, but afterwards these nations were brought to a full end. For example, Babylon itself was so completely destroyed that experts in later times declared it had never existed! Likewise, Hitler conquered almost the whole of Europe, murdered millions of Jews, and declared his Nazi empire would last a thousand years, but within a few years it was completely destroyed. God will certainly carry out his declared purpose with Israel. He will bring again their captivity and rebuild, Jerusalem on its ancient site.*v.18* He will make them rejoice and will glorify them^{*v.19*} appoint Jesus and the saints over them as governors,^{*v.21*} and make himself their God and they his people.^{*v.22*} History, sadly, testifies to the fierce anger of the LORD, but it will not last for ever. In the latter days, soon to come, it will cease when he has performed the intents of his heart.^{*v.24*}

Week 46

Jeremiah 31

Day 320

At the same time when God performs the intents of his heart he will confirm himself the God of Israel and they his people.^{*v.1*} He loves them with an everlasting love and he will bless them,^{*vs.2-6*} and the nations are called upon to be glad for Israel and to cry to the LORD to save her.^{*v.7*} He calls on us to look at what he will do: "Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her

that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither".^{*v.8*} He tells all nations to hear what he will do: "He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock".^{*v.10*} He will redeem them from powerful enemies.^{*v.11*} bring them rejoicing to Jerusalem,^{*vs.12-13*} and completely satisfy them with his goodness.^{*v.14*}

Firstly, however, they would pass through many centuries of suffering because of their wickedness, and this suffering is represented as "Rachel [Jacob's wife] weeping for her children".^{*v.15*} This is applied to the murder of children by Herod at the birth of Jesus *Mat.2:17* which was just one example of the distress which came upon God's people. Nevertheless, the faithful could always look forward to the end of their suffering when the children of Israel will be regathered into the land.^{*vs.16-17*} "And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to

throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD".^{vs.27-28} God will make a new covenant with Israel.^{vs.31-34} The old covenant was the one he made with them through Moses and the new covenant is the one he made with Abraham but was not confirmed until the shedding of Jesus' blood - his blood is the blood of the new covenant.^{Lu.22:20} These verses in Jeremiah are cited in the New Testament and applied to the disciples of Christ ^{Heb.10:16-17} so we can now, by belief and baptism, enter into this covenant with God, and natural Israel will do so also when they are regathered into the land. Both Israel and the saints will have God's law written on their hearts.^{v.33}

We can be as confident that God will perform his word as we are that the sun will rise each morning.^{v.35} Only if the ordinances of the natural heavens, earth and sea come to an end need we fear that God will not redeem Israel. Many assert that God has cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done ^{v.37} which is a lie. The LORD will save Israel and re-establish Jerusalem as a holy place. Even the valley of Gehenna (translated "hell" in the New Testament and cited by many to support the erroneous idea of eternal torments), used as a place to destroy the bodies of criminals and by Jesus as a metaphor for God's judgments, will be made holy unto the LORD.

Week 46

Jeremiah 33

Day 321

Jeremiah was thrown into prison for his prophecies ^{v.1} but the LORD, the Creator,^{v.2} encouraged him by showing him the great and mighty things he will do.^{v.3} We should note that these deeds all have to do with the salvation of Israel and the establishment of their king, Jesus, over them in righteousness. At that time the Chaldeans (i.e. the Babylonians) were destroying the city and killing the people,^{vs.4-5} but God will bring health and cure to the people of Israel and reveal to them abundance of peace and truth.^{v.6} He will cause the captivity of Judah (the two tribes) and Israel (the ten tribes) to return so they can build their kingdom as at the first.^{v.7} He will forgive all their iniquities ^{v.8} and they will be a name of joy, praise and honour for him before all nations.^{v.9} He will perform such glorious deeds in blessing Israel that the nations of the earth will have no doubt that the Creator of all things has done it, and they will fear and tremble before him.^{v.9}

The promised land was desolate during Israel's absence but on their return it will flourish and be filled with joy, to the glory of God.^{vs.10-13} The days will certainly

come when God will do that good thing he has promised to Israel ^{v.14} and then the seed of David, which is Christ, will execute judgment and

righteousness in the land.^{v.15} The Jews will be saved and dwell safely in Israel, and Jerusalem will be called: "The LORD our righteousness".^{v.16} God made a sure promise to king David

^{v.17} and he will certainly perform it - his seed, Christ, will sit upon his throne for ever - and God declares that the fulfilling of his promise is more certain than the ordinances of the natural heavens. We do not doubt the sun will rise in the morning - so we should not doubt that God will deliver Israel and establish Jesus as her king. Some, however, declare that these two families, Israel and Judah, have been cast off by God and will never be a nation in the land v.24. This is false. God will save Israel and appoint Jesus and the saints to rule over them vs.25-26. This is the true hope - "the hope of Israel".*Acts 28:20*

Week 46

Jeremiah 38

Day 322

Jeremiah told the people that God's purpose was that the Babylonians should capture Jerusalem ^{v.3} and the people could save their lives by leaving the city and going peaceably into captivity.^{v.2} This was taken as the treacherous statement of a traitor by the princes of Israel who called upon king Zedekiah to put him to death.^{v.4} Zedekiah should have listened to Jeremiah and courageously done the will of God, leading his people out of the city, but he weakly submitted to the princes ^{v.5} and they cast Jeremiah into a dungeon.^{v.6} Many of Jeremiah's experiences point forward to the suffering of Christ and this incident is reminiscent of the way in which Joseph also was put into a pit by his brethren to typify the death of Jesus. The grave is called "the pit wherein is no water" *Zec.9:11* and Joseph was put into such a pit, *Gen.37:24* as was Jeremiah who sank in the mire. The Psalms express the mind of Christ in similar circumstances. *Psa.69:2* He cried to God: "Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink". *Psa.69:14* His prayer was heard and, like Joseph and Jeremiah ^{v.13} who were taken out of the pit to represent his resurrection, Jesus could say: "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings". *Psa.40:2*

King Zedekiah secretly communed with Jeremiah ^{v.14-16} and was told what to do to save his life. If he went obediently out of the city, he and the people would live ^{v.17} otherwise the city would be destroyed and many would die.^{v.18} We are given similar instruction from God concerning the world which is full of wickedness and apostate religion which is likened to an evil city as Jerusalem was then, and God says: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty". *2Cor.6:17-18* Zedekiah did not obey

because he was afraid of the princes and the mocking of the people.^{v.19} Consequently the crown was removed from his head and he was told that it would not exist again until “he come whose right it is” when God will give it to him, i.e. Jesus.^{Ezek.21:27} Zedekiah failed to heed the exhortation of Jeremiah to “come out” of the wicked community but we can obey the equivalent command in our day: “Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the LORD, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live”.^{v.20}

oooOoo

Week 47

Introduction

Both the letter to the Hebrews and the letter of James were written to Jewish Christians of the first century. The letter of James was probably written very early after the ascension of Jesus to heaven before the gospel was preached to the Gentiles, whereas the letter to the Hebrews was written later to prove that the Law of God through Moses had been superseded by the law of Christ.

Week 47

Hebrews 12

Day 323

The apostle draws an exhortation from the examples of faithfulness given in the previous chapter, using a metaphor from the Olympic games: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us”.^{v.1} Runners in a race remove every hindrance, and we should do the same to enable us to win the race for eternal life. In this we should follow the example of Jesus who was motivated by “the joy set before him” to endure great suffering and humiliation, and was rewarded with a place at God’s right hand v.2. He had to suffer terribly at the hands of sinful men ^{v.3} but this was part of God’s purpose, for it pleased the LORD to bruise him when he made his soul an offering for sin.^{Isa.53:10} “Whom the LORD loveth he chasteneth” ^{v.6} and all the children of God are chastened by him.^{vs.5-8} Natural fathers chasten their children, but the chastening of our heavenly Father is much more profitable.^{vs.9-10} Of course, no chastening is pleasant but it develops righteousness in us, provided we are rightly exercised by it.^{v.11} Therefore the apostle encouraged the disciples facing violent persecution,^{v.12} and exhorted them to walk in the way of peace and holiness.^{vs.13-14} They were to follow peace with all men, even their persecutors, and not allow bitterness to defile them.^{v.15}

There are also examples of unbelief and wickedness in the scriptures. Esau despised his birthright and sold it to his brother Jacob who did appreciate it, and the apostle warns the disciples not to be like Esau.^{v.16} When he realised he had lost the blessing he wept before Isaac, imploring him to bless him, but

he could not change his father's mind.^{v.17} We too should learn from this example and fully appreciate the wonderful promises God has made so that, in becoming heirs of the promise, we will also receive the blessing when Jesus returns.

The apostle had devoted a large part of his letter proving that the new covenant is superior to the old and that Christ is superior to Moses, and he emphasises this dramatically with reference to the events at Mount Sinai when the Law was given to Moses.^{vs.18-21} Israel were then in terror, whereas we come as it were to a better mountain and better provisions, including Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.^{vs.22-24} Israel were punished for not heeding the words of the LORD spoken at Sinai, and the punishment will be sorer for those disregarding the word of the LORD spoken through Christ.^{v.25} The voice of God then shook the earth and he has declared he will shake the earth again ^{v.26}; *Hag.2:6* to remove all human constitutions, which are only temporary, and set up his kingdom which cannot be removed.^{v.28} Therefore, if we hope to live in that kingdom with Christ, we should "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire".^{vs.28-29}

Week 47

Hebrews 13

Day 324

The apostle concluded his letter to the Jewish Christians by giving them sundry commandments. In particular, he exhorted them, as Jesus had done, to love one another.^{v.1} In exhorting them to be hospitable he reminded them that some in the past have entertained angels without knowing it,^{v.2} e.g. Abraham.^{Gen.18:3} The apostle here gives many commandments, including not to depart from the true teaching of Christ into believing "strange doctrines".^{v.9} Only maintenance of God's truth will bring us immortality like Jesus, "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever".^{v.8} He suffered for us and, as prefigured in the Law of Moses, was taken without the gate of the city to suffer and bleed.^{vs.10-12} Therefore the apostle exhorted the disciples to "go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come".^{vs.13-14}

We are not called upon to make animal sacrifices as the people of God were in the past, but we are required to "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name".^{v.15} Our circumstances are also different from those of the disciples in the first century. In those days disciples had Holy Spirit gifts, including the gift of government ^{1Cor.12:28} to rule the congregations, and the disciples were commanded to obey them that had the rule over them. There are no ecclesiastical rulers appointed by God today whom we must obey, although many claim this authority. The only divine authority extant is that of Holy

Scripture which we can use to test those who claim ecclesiastical authority over others: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”. *Isa.8:20* Likewise, we cannot now pray for the apostles and those who were then with him in Rome *vs.18-19* because they have passed into the grave and await resurrection from the dead. God has already brought Jesus, our shepherd, from the dead and he will raise his sheep also because of the shedding of his blood. *v.20* Therefore the apostle prays that God will “make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”. *v.21*

Week 47

James 1

Day 325

James wrote his letter specifically to Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout the Roman empire, *v.1* and it contains many allusions to Jesus’ teaching on the mount. *Mat.chs.5-7* Some have thought that James taught that works were required rather than faith whereas, like all the apostles, he taught that both faith and works are imperative. He declared that even severe trials which the disciples experienced in those days were valuable in that they proved their faith. *vs.2-3* At that time, disciples had the Holy Spirit and could pray for the gift of wisdom, for which they were required to ask in faith. *vs.5-8* Today, however, we can only receive wisdom from God by reading his Holy Scriptures.

Those early Jewish disciples were persecuted by their fellow Jews, but James encouraged them with the assurance that those who endured trials would ultimately receive, not a gold medal or a coronal wreath as in the Olympic games, but “a crown of life”. *v.12* God does prove his people, but he does not tempt them with evil. *v.13* What really provokes us to do evil is our own sinful flesh. Our fleshly desires move us to sin, and sin brings death. *vs.14-15* In the past men and women have

not found it easy to accept this truth and have invented a god of evil, or “Devil”, as the source of temptation and sin. It is vital, however, to understand that it is our own sinful natures that we must fight against and mortify if we are to attain to everlasting life. We are all born like this, but by belief and baptism we can be born again, God having begotten us with his word of truth. *v.18* Thereafter we must develop characters like his. *vs.19-22*

James emphasised that disciples should not only hear the word of God but also do it. *v.22* We can look into the word of God, as into a mirror, *v.23* and see ourselves as he sees us, and it is one of the inestimable benefits of the word that it enables us to know ourselves as we are known by God. *1Cor.13:12* It is imperative, however, to remember what we are really like and to be doers of God’s work so that he can bless us in our deeds. *vs.24-25* This pure

and undefiled religion includes being like the Father in blessing the needy among the disciples and in keeping ourselves pure from the contamination of the world.^{vs.26-27}

Week 47

James 2

Day 326

The disciples of Christ are not to be respecters of persons.^{v.1} They must not despise the poor in the congregation,^{vs.2-4} especially as God hath “chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him”.^{v.5} Anyone, rich or poor, can inherit eternal life but throughout the ages the rich have had too much to enjoy in this life while the poor gladly accepted God’s promise of blessing in the future age. We live at a time when people enjoy material wealth beyond the dreams even of kings and emperors in past ages, therefore we should beware of the snare of riches. All disciples are required to obey the royal law: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” v.8 (Lev.19:34) for this comprehends all other commandments concerning our treatment of others.^{vs.8-11; Rom.13:9}

While acknowledging the vital importance of faith, James emphasised the need to manifest it by deeds,^{vs.14-16} for faith without works is dead.^{vs.17,20} Even men afflicted by mental illness (supposedly “possessed of devils”) expressed belief in the one true God,^{v.19} and many people may claim to believe the gospel, but only by our deeds can we show this is true. Abraham, the father of the faithful,^{Rom.4:16} demonstrated his faith by his works. God had declared that the promised seed would come through Abraham’s son, Isaac, who had no children. Therefore by obeying the command to slay Isaac he showed his belief in God’s promise and in resurrection of the dead which would need to occur if Isaac died at that time:^{vs.21-22} “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God”.^{v.23} Likewise the example of Rahab, who saved the spies because she believed God would do what he had said, ^{vs.24-25; Jos.2} illustrates the same principle: a person is righteous in God’s sight if he has both faith and works, ^{v.24} i.e. he believes God’s promises and acts accordingly.

Week 47

James 3

Day 327

A person who does not control his tongue, even if he appears religious, deceives himself.^{1:26} But it is so easy to offend with the tongue.^{v.2} Though it is a very small part of the body it has great effect, like bits in horses’ mouths and ships’ rudders.^{vs.3-5} An offensive word can start a quarrel, a fight, a war - igniting a

fire which is very difficult to quench, like the fire which burns in Gehenna (hell ^{v.6}), burning rubbish and bodies of criminals until all is consumed.^{Mar.9:43} No man can tame the tongue, which is full of deadly poison,^{vs.7-8} but with the same tongue people bless God and curse others who are made in his image.^{v.9} The creation record in Genesis records that the first man was made in the image of the Elohim, i.e. the angels, and from this verse we see that this is the divine pattern for we are also in the image of the Father himself.

The wise will bless and curse not,^{Rom.12:14} will manifest wisdom by a good way of life (“conversation” used to mean “manner of life”),^{v.13} and will neither envy nor strive.^{vs.14-16} Our natural wisdom is of the flesh ^{v.15} “but the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”.^{vs.17-18}

Week 47

James 4

Day 328

Fighting arises from our fleshly lusts.^{vs.1-5} The natural inclination of the flesh is the “devil” we have to fight against, but if we resist this “devil” he will flee from us.^{v.7} (Note the use of personification, common in the scriptures). The word of God gives us strength to resist, and if we draw near to him he will draw near to us.^{v.8} Those who have succumbed to the impulses of the flesh and done wrong can submit themselves to God ^{v.7}, purify themselves by his word,^{v.8} repent,^{v.9} humble themselves in the sight of the Lord, and be lifted up again.^{v.10}

It is natural to be blind to our own faults and at the same time be fully aware of the shortcomings of others and to speak evil of them v.11, but there is only one judge who can save or destroy us. Therefore the disciples are commanded not to judge one another.^{v.12} God sees all and will exercise righteous judgment. He is also in control of our affairs, so we should not speak presumptuously of our future plans.^{v.13} We might, for example, die at any moment because our life is short and like a vapour.^{v.14} What we ought to say is: “If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that”.^{v.15} We should consider God in all our ways, especially endeavouring to do what we know he wants us to do because “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”.^{v.17}

Week 47

James 5

Day 329

James warned certain rich disciples who had oppressed the poor that they

would suffer the judgments of God who hears the cry of the oppressed.^{vs.1-6} He is referred to here as “the Lord of sabaoth” ^{v.4} which in Hebrew is “YAHWEH tzvaoth” meaning “He who shall be armies”. This title is translated “LORD of hosts” in the Old Testament. All the disciples were exhorted to have endurance until the Lord Jesus comes, just as the farmer in those times had to endure periods of drought and want before the coming of the early and latter rains permitted sowing and reaping.^{v.7} We too await the coming of the Lord and are exhorted to be patient for he could return at any time ^{v.8} and he is ready to judge us all.^{v.9}

We are exhorted to take the prophets of the Old Testament as examples of men who endured suffering while they waited for the LORD to perform his word,^{v.10}

especially Job who endured great afflictions because of his faith and righteousness. Those who endure in faith are the truly blessed because they will receive the end that God has promised, and he is very pitiful and of tender mercy.^{v.11} In the first century some members of the church had gifts of the Holy Spirit and these “elders” could pray over a sick disciple and restore him or her to health,^{vs.14-15} but none has the Spirit gifts today to perform such healing, although many falsely claim this power. Nevertheless, the prayers of the disciples of Jesus are still heard by God, and “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”.^{vs.15-16} Therefore disciples should pray for one another. Disciples sometimes depart from the truth, but a sinner can always be converted from the error of his ways and by converting another into the right way we can save a person from death,^{v.20} i.e. eternal oblivion in the grave. This action is the work of love which can cover a multitude of sins.
^{v.20; 1 Pet.4:8}

oooOoo

Ezekiel delivered all his prophecies while he was a captive in Babylon,^{1:1} having been taken from Judah in an early phase of Nebuchadnezzar's overthrow of the nation. He saw many visions, some depicting the wickedness of Israel and others their glorious future when Jesus reigns over them. The first chapter symbolically represents the glory of God manifested in Jesus and the saints, and the final nine chapters describe the future divisions of the promised land and the magnificent temple which will be built there when the kingdom of God is re-established. He also prophesied of political events among the nations, some of them taking place now and others about to occur, making his book exceptionally interesting to us today.

Week 48**Ezekiel 2****Day 330**

In the first chapter Ezekiel was shown a glorious vision of God manifested in Jesus and the saints, and when he saw the glory of the LORD he fell on his face and a voice spoke to him.^{1:28} The Spirit of the LORD then entered into him ^{2:2} and he was informed that he was to be sent as a prophet to the rebellious nation of Israel.^{vs.3-5} He was to give them God's message, whether they would listen or not.^{v.5} This illustrates the relationship between the LORD and his prophets, many of whom wrote the scriptures we possess. He inspired them, giving them his word to speak, so that the message was not their own, but his. Therefore, the Bible, though actually recorded by men, is the word of God and should be treated as such.

The prophets often had to deliver God's message in the face of violent opposition but they had God's protection and were exhorted not to fear what men could do to them but to fearlessly deliver his word.^{v.6} Ezekiel was also required to perform certain physical acts to reinforce God's message, e.g. he was given a scroll on which was written God's judgments against Israel ^{vs.9-10} and told to eat it to indicate that he had fully assimilated God's word and would speak it to the people.

Week 48**Ezekiel 3****Day 331**

Ezekiel ate the scroll containing the word of God and was told to go immediately and speak the words to the people.^{vs.1-4} He would have spoken to the Jews in his and their own language ^{vs.5-7} but one of the perversities of Israel was that they more readily accepted the wisdom of other nations than that of the word of God in their own tongue. They would, therefore, set their faces fiercely against Ezekiel when he delivered the message, but God would protect him.^{vs.8-9} Ezekiel himself, however, was a faithful man and listened to God's word, allowing it to enter deep into his heart,^{v.10} and we should be

like him not the faithless Israelites of his day. He was sent to the captive Jews in Babylon ^{v.11} to speak God's words to them, whether they would listen or not, and as he went he was given a glimpse of the vision of glory he had seen in chapter one.^{vs.12-13} These living creatures ^{v.13} are consistently used in the scriptures to represent the community of saints. The four creatures had the faces of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle 1:10, which are the faces of the cherubim above the ark in the Most Holy place of both the tabernacle and the Temple, they are the images upon the standards of the fourfold camp of Israel, and these creatures correspond with the aspects of Jesus depicted in the four gospels.

Ezekiel was sent to warn Israel, with great personal responsibility placed upon him.^{vs.16-21} He was to warn the wicked to turn from their wickedness and the righteous not to depart to wickedness, otherwise they would die. If Ezekiel failed to deliver the warning and any died in their wickedness, their blood would be upon him. However, if he faithfully delivered the warning, and they refused to heed it, he would be free of responsibility. Ezekiel was also required to make himself a spectacle to the people of Israel to reinforce God's message. He remained in his house, bound in cords, and was made dumb, being unable to speak except when God moved him to declare his words.^{vs.22-27} The message was to be impressed upon the Jews whether they would listen or not, and mostly they did not take much notice. God has also ensured that his word is available today throughout the world, with the Bible being the world's best seller, so that people have the word of God presented to them, whether they will hear or not. The wise read it and listen to the LORD.

Week 48

Ezekiel 18

Day 332

A recurring complaint among the people of Israel was that they suffered the judgments of God because of the sins of their fathers, which they considered unfair and expressed this in a proverb.^{v.2} It is true that Israel, being a theocracy, was in God's control and peoples' behaviour brought either blessing or cursing, the consequences of which could affect succeeding generations. Nevertheless, in the eternal issues of life and death, everyone will be judged by God according to his own deeds. If a person is righteous, he shall live.^{vs.5-9}

If the wicked turn from his wickedness and do righteousness, he shall also live. If the righteous turn away from righteousness, he shall die. This is irrespective of the character and deeds of his father.^{vs.10-18} This is perfectly just, although Israel thought it unfair.^{v.19} but the clear principle God applies is that: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die".^{v.20} Notice that souls can die! A false doctrine of most religions is that we are immortal souls and cannot really die. The truth, however, is that we are indeed souls and will perish in

oblivion if we are accounted sinners when judged by God. If, on the other hand, we are accounted righteous souls, we shall live eternally. The vital requirement is that the wicked turn from his wickedness and the righteous continue in his righteousness. Then they shall live, otherwise they shall die.^{vs.21-29} God's exhortation to the Jews then, and to us now, is to repent, cast away transgressions, and develop a new heart and spirit in righteousness that, in God's mercy, we may live eternally.^{vs.30-32}

Week 48

Ezekiel 36

Day 333

Ezekiel was moved by God to speak of the land of Israel ^{v.1} which other nations have coveted.^{vs.2-3} The land was made desolate by the nations ^{v.4} because of Israel's wickedness, but it is still God's land which he promised to his own people. Therefore he speaks against nations which attempt to possess it ^{vs.5-7} and he speaks for the promised land.^{vs.8-15} Idumea,^{v.5} also called Edom, Israel's south-eastern neighbour which particularly persecuted Israel, will be made a perpetual desolation.^{35:9} When the whole world rejoices, Edom will be made desolate ^{35:14} but the land of Israel will flourish with both crops and people, with God blessing it more than he did at the beginning so that Israel will know he is the LORD.^{v.11}

Many people dismiss the idea that the Jews will return to the land to receive God's blessing because they view them as an undeserving people. The LORD, however, declares that even though they were removed from the land because of their wickedness ^{vs.16-19} and they continued in wickedness among the nations ^{v.20} yet he will still regather them into his land. He will do this for his holy name's sake so that the Gentiles will know that the God of Israel is the true God ^{vs.21-23} when he gathers Israel out of all countries and brings them into their own land.^{v.24} This process has already begun in recent times and will be completed soon when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to reign over Israel. Then they will be a righteous people with a new heart and spirit and be acknowledged as God's people.^{vs.25-32} The land was desolate throughout many centuries but God promises to make it flourish when Israel returns to it, and this wonder will cause the Gentiles to recognise it is the LORD's work: "They shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it".^{vs.35-36}

The return of all Israel to the promised land, after centuries wandering among the nations and persecuted by the Gentiles, is graphically illustrated in the vision of dry bones shown to Ezekiel. The Jews, scattered among the nations, are likened to a valley full of men's bones ^{vs.1-3} but God causes the men to live, bringing the bones together, adding sinews and flesh, and finally breathing in the breath of life. ^{vs.4-10} Israel cries: "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts"

^{v.11} but God promises to restore the nation to life: "I shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD". ^{v.14}

Under the rulership of their king, Jesus, Israel will be united as one nation, as represented by Ezekiel holding together two sticks, one for each part of the nation: Ephraim, the ten tribes, and Judah, the two tribes. ^{vs.15-21} "Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all". ^{vs.21-22}

The kingdom of God will be re-established with Jesus reigning on David's throne, which is the throne of the LORD. Israel will then dwell in the land for ever and observe God's laws; and the Gentiles will know it is the LORD who has sanctified Israel. ^{vs.23-28} The gospel preached by Jesus and his apostles was "the gospel of the kingdom of God" - the good news of the restoration of God's kingdom in Israel - and those who believe this gospel have a glorious hope for the future, being able to look forward to the fulfilment of these prophecies when they will live and reign with Jesus in God's kingdom.

This chapter contains a prophecy of great interest to us today for it is about to be fulfilled and result in all nations acknowledging the supremacy of the LORD. The prophecy looked forward to "the latter years" when some of the Jews, having returned to the land desolate for centuries, ^{v.8} are settled, secure and prosperous. ^{vs.11-}

¹² We have seen this occur in recent years with the return of the Jews and the establishment of the State of Israel. God says, when this situation exists, he will bring a nation against the land from the north and overthrow Israel. At this very moment God will intervene openly on Israel's behalf, ^{v.18} defeat the invading armies, magnify himself, and make himself known to many nations. ^{v.23} And the stage is now virtually set!

This prophecy is addressed to a man given the designation “Gog”,^{v.2} meaning “autocrat”. In the original scriptures this verse reads (as can be seen in the *Revised Version*): “Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him”. Rosh is the ancient name of Russia, and Meshech can be identified with Moscow and Tubal with Tobolski in Siberia. From this chapter, people have long known that Russia would invade Israel after some of the Jews returned to the land and we can now watch the final build-up to the situation described. Russia will be joined with many other countries in the invasion of Israel: Persia (Iran), Ethiopia and Libya,^{v.5} Magog (Germany),^{v.2} Gomer (France),^{v.6} and Togarmah (the region of the Caucasus, northeast of Israel i.e. “of the north quarters”),^{v.6}

The autocrat of Russia will think an evil thought, i.e. to attack Israel, v.10-11 and he will be joined in this enterprise by these nations. Some other countries, however, will protest at the invasion: “Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?”.^{v.13} The merchants of Tarshish have long been identified with Britain whose national emblem is the lion, and the young lions are the members of the Commonwealth of which there are more than fifty. These countries, together with those in southeast Arabia, Sheba and Dedan, where Britain has influence and forces, will protest against the invaders, but without effect. It will not be men who save Israel, but God.

With the knowledge provided by this prophecy, we can watch developments among the nations with great interest. One of the marvels of recent history is the transformation of the British Empire into the Commonwealth. While the empires of other European nations - Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Holland - have disappeared from the earth, the British Empire survives in another form. The nations of the Empire have developed from “lion whelps” into “young lions” and will join with Britain in protesting against the Russian confederacy. We can also observe with interest the relationship between Britain and the other countries of the European Union because she will take a different line from Germany and France who will ally themselves with Russia. Likewise, Israel will survive any attack made upon her by the Arabs who may yet attempt to annihilate her so she ceases to be a nation in the earth. *Psa.83:4*

The stage is rapidly being set for the open intervention of the LORD in the affairs of the world when all people will learn, not only that there is a God, but that he is the

God of Israel. We should not wait for this to happen before we are convinced because prior to the Russian invasion of Israel Jesus will return, raise the dead, judge the responsible, and give eternal life to the faithful who will work

with him in saving Israel and convincing the world that the God of Israel must be obeyed. Now is the time to save ourselves. Therefore we should believe, be baptised, and obey, before it is too late.

Week 48

Ezekiel 39

Day 336

This chapter describes the aftermath of the destruction of the Russian invaders. They will be destroyed *vs.1-6* and the overthrow of these mighty forces will convince Gentiles throughout the world that the God of Israel is the LORD.^{v.7} It will take seven years to remove the debris of the war, *vs.8-10* and seven months to bury the dead and cleanse the land. *vs.11-16* God will set his glory in the land to the acknowledgement of all people, Jew and Gentile: “I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward”. *vs.21-22*

The Gentiles will also then acknowledge that the Jews, whom they have despised throughout the centuries, were scattered among the nations by God for their iniquity *v.23-24* and have finally been regathered for God’s holy name’s sake. *v.25* Israel will then dwell safely in the promised land, *vs.26-27* knowing their punishments had come from the LORD *v.28* but also that he will henceforth be with them to bless them for ever. *v.29*

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