

Week 5

Introduction

One of the themes which runs through the chapters in Matthew this week is the reception different classes of people gave Jesus as he “went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people”. *Mat.9:35* By these mighty works, the Jews should have recognised he was a inspired messenger sent from God. Two distinct classes are highlighted in the record: those who believed his teaching and reacted accordingly; and those who rejected him, either through indifference or implacable opposition. Both of these classes are set forth as examples for us, either to follow or avoid, so that we may, in the end, receive Jesus’ commendation rather than his condemnation.

People today are indisposed to believe the record of Jesus’ miracles even though we now take for granted the wonders performed by men in almost every sphere of life. If mankind, with the advance of knowledge and power, can do such remarkable things, we should be able to accept that the omniscient and omnipotent God did do the deeds recorded in the Bible. The people of those times gave reliable witness to the marvellous deeds performed by Jesus with God’s power, just as we can witness to the wonders of our own age, and they should be believed as readily as we would wish to be. Furthermore, in the record of the miracles itself we have evidence of divine authorship. Not only are the miracles described factually but also in such a way as to reveal God’s plan of salvation through Jesus.

Sunday

Matthew 8

Day 29

This chapter describes how Jesus, in the course of his teaching, healed people of sickness (leprosy, palsy, fever), made the disabled whole, cured men of severe mental illness, and even controlled the wind and the sea. The reactions of the people to these deeds are recorded for our learning, and most notable is the case of the centurion, a Gentile,^{v.5} who had perceptive insight into the relationship between Jesus and his Father. The centurion recognised that he himself was a man under authority (of Caesar) so that he could issue a command and be immediately obeyed.^{v.9} He recognised similarly that Jesus was a man under authority (of God) and could therefore command any element in nature and be instantly obeyed. Consequently, he concluded that there was no need for Jesus to travel to his house but could heal his servant from a distance with a simple word of command.^{v.8} This Gentile’s faith, so different from the Jews’ general response, moved Jesus to think of all the faithful Gentiles in later times who would believe and obey the

gospel and eventually live with him in the kingdom of God: “When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven”. *vs.10-11*

Jews and Gentiles will only be able to live for ever in the kingdom of God if they are cleansed from their iniquities and healed of sin in the flesh, therefore the healing of peoples’ diseases not only benefited the individual cured but also illustrated God’s purpose in Christ of taking away our sins. If we are seriously ill we long for someone to remove our sickness, and we are all desperately afflicted by sin which is taking us to oblivion in the grave. But Jesus can take away our sin, heal us, and enable us to live for ever. We should therefore adopt the attitude of the leper, *v.2* for Christ is willing to cleanse us from all our iniquities *v.3* The record, therefore, after the healing of Peter’s mother, directs us to the prophecy in Isaiah concerning Jesus’ healing work: *v.17* “the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”. *Isa.53:6*

God gave Jesus such great power that he was even able to control the forces of nature. While people today may find this difficult to accept, soon when Jesus reigns as king in Israel and ruler of the whole world, everyone will know that by God’s authority everything is under his absolute control. The apostles were given a foretaste of this power when he saved them in a storm at sea, and they exclaimed: “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” *v.27* This power will be used in full when God’s kingdom is established to benefit all mankind. This is illustrated in the curing of the two men with mental illness (expressed in the terminology of the Greeks who attributed such illness to “demons”, i.e. messengers of pagan gods). Not only did Jesus restore these two men to their right minds but he also transferred the derangement to a nearby herd of pigs because eating of swine’s flesh by the Jews was forbidden by God.

The response of the citizens of that vicinity was remarkable. When they saw the severely mentally ill man had been cured they urged Jesus to depart from their shores immediately! How blind to their own true interests people can be. Many today reject the evidence of Jesus having power to heal and, as it were, thrust him from them, even though he could deliver them from all their distresses, including death itself. When Jesus then crossed the lake again the people were waiting eagerly for him, *Lu.9:40* seeking the healing benefits of his power *14:34-36* and illustrating the attitude of the Jews when Jesus returns to the earth, for they will “be willing in the day of his power”. *Psa.110:3*

When Jesus healed the paralysed man his words indicated that he had power not only to heal the sick but also to forgive sins, enabling men to recover from all ailments and to live for ever. Some scribes, however, judged this to be blasphemy, whereupon Jesus pointed out to them the logic that a man with power from God to perform miracles patently had power to forgive sins. Therefore, having declared the man's sins forgiven, he cured him with a word so "that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins".^{v.6} This is the real value of the record of the miracles: we can be sure that Jesus has authority to forgive iniquity and give us eternal life. It is as easy for Jesus to say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee" as "Rise up and walk", but if we deny he cured a paralytic by God's power, he is unlikely to forgive us our sins.

Those who readily accepted his word and the evidence of his mighty deeds were despised by the religious leaders. Matthew himself was a publican (tax gatherer) ^{vs.9-10} and classed among "sinners", and Jesus himself was condemned by the Pharisees for associating with these "publicans and sinners". But Jesus explained he had not come to call the "righteous", i.e. the self-righteous like the Pharisees, but to call "sinners to repentance". Jesus came to save us from our sins, and those he associated with in the past, and also will in the future, are those who receive his teaching, repent, and depart from their sins.

Jesus likened his followers to the friends of the bridegroom waiting for him to come to the wedding,^{v.15} most of whom have died and will therefore be raised from the dead. These are not dead for ever but simply "sleeping", as Jesus said of the little girl because he intended restoring her to life.^{v.24} Most people, unfortunately, reject the doctrine of resurrection, adopting the same attitude as the majority at the girl's funeral who "laughed him to scorn".^{v.24} Jesus had them "put forth", as all rejectors will be, while he brought her back to life. Jesus will likewise restore to life a great many who have fallen asleep in death. He will, however, only do this for those who, if asked by him: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" can genuinely answer: "Yes, Lord", for according to our faith it will be unto us.^{vs.28-29}

Unfortunately, so many people do not have this faith but explain away his miraculous healing. The Pharisees, for example, attributed the healing of a dumb man, whom they thought had a demon, to the power of the "prince of demons". Characteristically, they would not accept the evidence of God's power before their very eyes but they did believe in the imaginary god of the Philistines. Jesus wanted all people to accept the evidence because he had great compassion on the multitudes because they were perishing,^{v.36} and he therefore desired "labourers" who could go forth and prepare people for the great harvest of the earth which is coming and who would "reap everlasting life".^{vs.37-38}

Jesus chose twelve of his disciples to be apostles, special witnesses of all that he taught and did including, later, his resurrection from the dead. He sent these twelve apostles to preach the same gospel of the kingdom of God that he himself taught, ^{v.7} but initially only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel”.^{v.6} Gentiles were specifically excluded.^{v.5} He instructed these apostles to preach the gospel and predicted how they would be received, not only on that particular occasion, but also after his resurrection. Generally, he said, they would be rejected as he was ^{vs.24-25} hated even by their own families, ^{vs.21-22} persecuted,^{v.23} and put to death.^{v.21} They were not, however, to fear what men could do to them because they could not kill the soul. “Soul” in the scriptures is used in the same way as those in peril on the sea say: “Save Our Souls”. It never refers to “immortal souls”, which none of us has, but to our *psyche*, the Greek word in the original. This is the content in our minds, our memory and character, our essential identity. While enemies may kill our bodies, God is able to remember all that is in our minds and later, at the resurrection, impress this upon reformed bodies. The Greek word *psyche* is translated “life” in the warning that we could lose it,^{v.39} which proves that the soul is not immortal because it would be impossible to lose an immortal soul. However, God is able to destroy our *psyche* for ever and therefore he should be feared rather than any man. If we develop minds and characters which are pleasing to God, i.e. we lose our *psyche* to him now, then it will be restored to us in the resurrection in immortal bodies.

Jesus also spoke of the recipients of the apostles’ message. Those welcoming the apostles would, in effect, be receiving Christ himself and his Father,^{v.40} and for responding with righteous acts they will receive in due course a righteous person’s reward and even small acts of kindness will be acknowledged by Jesus and be rewarded. ^{v.42}

This should motivate us to receive the word of the apostles written in the New Testament, for there is dire warning to rejectors of their teaching: it will be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment than for them.^{v.15}

This chapter speaks of the reception, or rather the rejection, of both John the Baptist and Jesus by the Jews. John was Christ’s forerunner, as Elias (Elijah) will be at his second coming.^{v.14} However, the people did not receive John as “the messenger of the Lord”^{v.10} but treated him merely as a spectacle.^{vs.7-8} When they contemplated John, who came as an ascetic “neither eating nor drinking”, they said he had a demon;^{v.18} but perversely they judged Jesus, who came “eating and drinking”, to be

“a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners”.^{v.19} But these rejectors of God’s word were condemned by Jesus, e.g. “But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee”.^{v.24}

There were, however, some who readily accepted the teaching of both John and Jesus, and such are likened to babies, who drink the word of God as milk.^{v.25} It is truly remarkable that throughout history experts in theology, the “wise and prudent”,^{v.25} are unable to understand the teaching of the scriptures while ordinary people who read the word of God with willing minds do understand. But this is God’s will.^{v.26} What a lesson this is for us: to become like little children in relation to the things of God, for Jesus said: “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein”.^{Lu.18:17}

Jesus invites all, especially those who are heavily burdened, to come unto him and find rest.^{v.28} In those days, burdens were made lighter by carrying them on a yoke and Jesus offers us his yoke ^{vs.29-30} to ease the strain of our present life. By learning from him we obtain a glorious hope for the future in which saints will obtain eternal rest in the kingdom of God. This hope can make any affliction or suffering in this present life seem insignificant compared with the glory of the future ^{age}. ^{Rom.8:18, 2Cor.4:17}

Thursday

Matthew 12

Day 33

The Pharisees, a very strict Jewish sect, were offended by the actions of Jesus and his disciples. In particular they accused them of breaking God’s sabbath law, charging them with doing “that which is not lawful on the sabbath day”.^{v.2} But Jesus proved to them from the scriptures, citing the case of David and the priests,^{vs.3-5} that it is possible while apparently breaking the law to be guiltless. They themselves saved life on the sabbath day ^{v.11} without offending, therefore Jesus declared, “It is lawful to do well on the sabbath days”.^{v.12} Their mistake was not correctly identifying what God requires of us. They thought only in terms of sacrifice, but Jesus had previously told them to go and learn from the book of Hosea what God really wanted from them.^{9:13} They failed to do so, therefore Jesus said: “But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless”.^{v.7}

Jesus reinforced his teaching by healing a man with a withered hand, despite it being the sabbath day, but this so incensed them that they “went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him”.^{v.14} Jesus, however, did not retaliate against them because God required him at that time to be

harmless and non-resistant to evil. Therefore he withdrew himself,^{v.15} fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: “He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench”.^{vs.19-20; Isa.42:3} This will not always be the reaction of Jesus, but only “until he send forth judgment unto victory”,^{v.20} for on his return he will execute righteous judgment on his enemies.

The religious leaders of the Jews were also anxious to prevent the people accepting Jesus as “the son of David”, i.e. the promised Messiah,^{v.23} therefore they claimed that he did his miracles by the power of the Philistines’ imaginary god: “Beelzebub the prince of demons”.^{v.24} Jesus disproved their reasoning by pointing out the consequence of such an adversary (Hebrew: “satan”) opposing himself. He also condemned their misattribution of God’s power as “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” which he said was a sin that cannot be forgiven.^{vs.31-32} This is a very serious warning for any of us claiming that our words and works are by the Holy Spirit when palpably none today has the Holy Spirit to perform the mighty deeds done by Jesus and his apostles.

Jesus looked for men and women to understand the significance of his healing, receive his teaching, and keep his commandments. Most of the Jews failed to comply, but Jesus knew that when the opportunity was extended to the Gentiles many would respond acceptably, according to the prophecies: “I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles”^{v.18} and “In his name shall the Gentiles trust”.^{v.21} The Jewish religious leaders, however, were obdurate, even after seeing him perform such mighty works, demanding that he show them a sign that he came from God. He therefore contrasted their unbelief with Gentiles in the past. The people of Nineveh, for instance, repented of their wicked ways when the prophet Jonah preached to them. Jonah was delivered from virtual death after three days in a fish, and this was the sign Jesus gave to his detractors: “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the fish’s belly (“whale” is a translating error); so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”.^{v.40} after which his word would be preached to Gentiles who would believe and repent.

The purpose of God, achieved by the preaching of the gospel to Jews and Gentiles, is to develop individuals who will constitute his family, the brothers and sisters of Jesus: “And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother”.^{vs.49-50} The wonderful message is that any of us may, by adoption, become members of this divine family!

This chapter illustrates the way in which Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in Psalm 78:2 that he would speak God's message in parables.^{v.35} The disciples asked him why he taught by this method ^{v.10} and the answer was so that people of the right disposition would understand and consequently be greatly blessed, as were his apostles: "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them".^{vs.16-17} We can be similarly blessed if we are the type of people represented by ground in which the word of God can flourish: "He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty".^{v.23}

Many of Jesus' parables illustrate the different kinds of individual who may be affected by the word of God. There are two main types: the righteous and the wicked. It may be difficult to identify them now but this will be done at the judgment-seat of Christ, and this is illustrated in the parable of the tares.^{v.24} Tares look like wheat, but are weeds. Thus there are many people claiming Jesus as their Lord who will be rejected by him. There will be much wailing and gnashing of teeth at that time,^{vs.41-42} but it is then that the righteous, represented by the wheat, will enjoy the fruit of faith and obedience: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." ^{v.43}

The preaching of the gospel is likened to the casting of a net into the sea (of nations) catching many fish, some good and some bad,^{vs.47-48} with the bad in the end being thrown away.^{v.49} Therefore, the only safe course of action is, not just professing to follow Christ, but actually doing so by accepting his teaching and obeying his commandments. The offer of life and glory to the righteous is truly marvellous and of greater value than anything we may gain in this life. It is likened ^{v.44} to unexpectedly discovering treasure for the possession of which a man sells everything he has!

John the Baptist was executed as a result of his condemning Herod for unlawfully taking his brother's wife, and Jesus, moved by the report of his death, sought solitude in the desert. He did not have it long, for multitudes followed him seeking cures for their sicknesses.

Instead of insisting on his own needs, Jesus “was moved with compassion for them, and he healed their sick”.^{v.14}

When it became late in the day, the people grew hungry but there was no food, apart from a few loaves and fishes. Jesus, therefore, miraculously converted the bread into a sufficient amount to feed the whole multitude. We are told that this literal feeding of the people with bread represents being fed the word of God but, while ordinary bread will sustain life for a short time, the word of God as the true bread of life will sustain us for ever. This illustrates the remarkable way in which the miracles performed by Jesus were enacted parables foreshadowing the outworking of God’s purpose. It is instructive, therefore, to consider the sequel to this feeding of the multitude which represents Jesus feeding the Jews with the word of God.

After the apostles packed the remaining bread into their knapsacks they were sent by Jesus into the sea, representing them going forth among the nations to feed them the word of God. Meanwhile Jesus himself ascended a mountain to pray, representing his ascension into heaven to be a mediator at the right hand of God, praying for this disciples. In due course the apostles, toiling through the night, were caught in a severe storm, representing the disciples among the nations during the night-time of the world’s history, with the nations as “the sea and the waves roaring” in wars and tumult. Eventually Jesus will return and subdue the nations, bringing peace and tranquility, so that the sea will be “a sea of glass like unto crystal”.^{Rev.4:6} All peoples will be put under his feet, represented by his walking on the water, when he will quell the storm and save his disciples from all their distresses. And he will also, as he did for them on the Sea of Galilee, bring them immediately to their desired haven, which is the paradise of the kingdom of God.

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Week 6

Introduction

In accordance with God's promise, Abraham had a son by his wife Sarah. He was called Isaac and inherited the same promises made to his father as, in time, did his son Jacob. These three men are set forth as examples of faithfulness, so much so that the LORD declared he is not ashamed to be called their God, *Heb.11:16* saying "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". *Exo.3:6* These are designated the fathers of all the faithful, so the record of their lives is highly instructive to us, that we might learn from them how we too can please God by our faithfulness.

Sunday

Genesis 21

Day 36

Abraham was promised a son when he entered the Promised Land at the age of seventy-five, and twenty-five years later Isaac was born. During this long period of waiting Abraham never ceased to trust that God would perform his promise: "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform". *Rom.4:18-21*

The new baby was named Isaac, meaning "laughing" in the sense of "rejoicing", because God had caused them to rejoice, *v.6* this name also signifying that "all who hear" with understanding shall rejoice. Ultimately this will be all people of the earth, when the seed promised through Isaac rules the whole world. Abraham was given the assurance that the Saviour would come in his line through Isaac for: "in Isaac shall thy seed be called". *v.12* The apostles cite this assurance to prove that the inheritors of God's promises to Abraham are not his natural descendants but those, whether Jews or Gentiles, who have Abraham's faith: "Neither, because they (the Jews) are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed". *Rom.9:7-8*

The two classes of Abraham's seed, natural Jews and adopted faithful children, are represented in Genesis by Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, *Gal.4:22-31* their lives being an allegory to illustrate God's purpose with both natural Israel and faithful believers in Christ. Although Ishmael, Abraham's first son, was not to inherit the birthright, God

promised that his descendants would nevertheless become a great people,^{v.18} and they became Arab nations, kindreds of the Jews. Isaac was the inheritor of both the birthright and the blessing and through him the promised seed would come. In his seed (Christ) all the nations will be blessed, and the rest of the Bible concentrates on Isaac's descendants until the coming of Christ.

Monday

Genesis 22

Day 37

This chapter is one of the most remarkable in the Bible in that it typifies, two thousand years beforehand, the sacrifice, death and resurrection of Christ. Abraham's faith was put severely to the test when God told him to take Isaac and sacrifice him in the mountains of Moriah, significantly, the very place where Jesus was later crucified. Abraham knew that God's promise would be fulfilled in Isaac's seed and therefore that, even if he did die on the mountain, he would rise from the dead. This explains his confident instruction to the servants to wait at the foot of the mountain until he and Isaac returned.^{v.5}

Abraham bound Isaac on the altar and raised his knife to kill him, but an angel intervened and a ram was sacrificed instead. By this act Abraham demonstrated his faith: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure".*Heb.11:17-19* This event not only shows Abraham's exemplary faith but also typifies the death and resurrection of the "lamb of God", according to the statement: "God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering".^{v.8} As Abraham did not withhold his beloved son ^{v.16} so God did not withhold his Son for he "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life".*Joh.3:16*

Following this monumental act of faith, God reiterated his promise to Abraham: "And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice".*vs.16-18* Possessing the gate of an enemy's city means completely vanquishing that enemy which Jesus, for he is the seed, will do when he returns. He will overcome the wicked and all enemies among the nations until the last enemy "death" is destroyed at the end of the Millennium.

Tuesday**Genesis 23****Day 38**

Sarah died after spending sixty-two years in the Promised Land without inheriting any of it. This is what she and Abraham expected because they knew that God's promises related to a time long in the future. While their contemporaries set about possessing estates, building cities, and naming lands after themselves to leave to their descendants, Abraham and Sarah were content to remain pilgrims in the Promised Land, living in tents. The apostle explains Abraham's behaviour as the consequence of his faith: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God". *Heb.11:9-10*

Although all the land of Canaan was promised to Abraham for an everlasting possession, he possessed none of it during his lifetime, not even enough to bury his wife, as Stephen said: "And God gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child". *Acts 7:5* Therefore, Abraham bought a field to bury Sarah, in which he also was later buried, in the hope of resurrection from the dead to inherit all the land.

Wednesday**Genesis 24****Day 39**

Because of Abraham's belief in God's promises and his willingness to remain a stranger in the Promised Land, there was no suitable wife for his son Isaac among his neighbours. Abraham was most concerned that Isaac should not marry an idolater among the inhabitants of Canaan, and so he sent his servant to his own people, worshippers of the one true God, in Mesopotamia.

Abraham was confident, because he was doing God's will, that an angel would prepare the way for his servant, this being the role of angels: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" *Heb.1:14* It is God's will that his people marry only fellow believers so that unity and harmony is maintained and that each partner may help the other in faithfulness to God. This is palpably wise and has been insisted upon by God in all dispensations, including the obligation upon Christians to "marry only in the Lord".

A wife, Rebekah, was found for Isaac and her character is well illustrated in her treatment of Abraham's servant, a stranger to her. She willingly drew water not only for him but also for all his companions and ten camels, *vs.19-20* and she exemplifies the character which is pleasing to God.

Abraham had many sons ^{vs.1-4} but, because God's promise concerning the inheritance of the land of Canaan was in Isaac, before he died he sent the others away into the lands east of Jordan. These men later multiplied to become nations, such as Midian, of whom we read later concerning their relationship to Israel.

When Abraham did die and was buried in the same sepulchre as Sarah we are told he "gave up the ghost" and "was gathered to his people".^{v.8} Death of the faithful is consistently described in the Bible in this manner, with no suggestion whatsoever of heaven-going. They all died in the belief that, though laid in the grave, they would be raised from the dead. The word "ghost" is Anglo-Saxon for "breath", and it was breath which left Abraham when he died. The first man became a living soul when the breath of life was breathed into him, and all men become dead souls when their breath leaves them.

The promises of God to Abraham became Isaac's birthright and in due course passed to Esau his eldest son, but Esau despised the birthright and, remarkably, sold it for a bowl of pottage. This occurred when a severe famine put him and his brother, Jacob, to the test. Esau, a skilful hunter,^{v.27} was unable to catch anything but, returning home famished, found his brother willing to exchange food for the birthright. Declaring that, being at the point of death, the birthright had no value to him Esau then sold it to his brother. God's covenant offered him eternal life but he despised it and sold his birthright to satisfy an immediate craving for food. God's judgment on Esau is a warning to everyone else to appreciate God's promises: "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God ... Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright".^{Heb.12:15-16}

Jacob, in contrast, fully appreciated God's promises and desired them above everything else. Throughout his life he was willing, if necessary, to give up anything and everything in life to inherit what God had promised to his forefathers. At the height of the famine he gave up the only food available to gain the birthright, and he is set forth as an example to all the faithful, even as Jesus instructed his disciples: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you".^{Mat.6:31-33}

Despite Esau having sold his birthright, and forfeited the related blessing, when Isaac proposed giving him the blessing he acted deceitfully by concealing the true position. However, his mother Rebekah recognised the deception and acted to ensure that the blessing went to Jacob, the rightful holder of the birthright. Jacob had supplanted his brother Esau, “supplanter” being the meaning of his name, in accordance with God’s will expressed to Rebekah before the children were born, and she acted prudently to ensure that Esau’s deception was not successful and the rightful heir was blessed.

The character of these two brothers is set forth in the scriptures for our learning as God said: “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated”. *Rom.9:13* We should be like Jacob who believed God’s promises, appreciated their true value, was prepared to give up everything to obtain them, longed for their fulfilment, and acted in accordance with God’s revealed will so that he might in due course receive them. Esau’s example is to be avoided: “For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears”. *Heb.12:17* The prophet Malachi warned Israel, who were then acting like Esau, that God loved Jacob and hated Esau. *Mal.1:2-3* and that the day of judgment will come when, despite present appearances, the truly righteous and the wicked will be manifested: “Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not”. *3:18* Then it will be vital to be like Jacob, and not like Esau.

Esau’s supplanting by his brother provoked murderous intent in his heart, ^{v.41} a recurring event in the relationship between the righteous and the wicked. Those, throughout history, who rejected the glorious inheritance God offers nevertheless envied and persecuted those who sought by belief and obedience to inherit them, for example: Ishmael and Isaac; the Jewish religious leaders and Christ; the Jews and the first Christians; as the apostle wrote: “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is _{now}”. *Gal.4:29*

Because of Esau’s threat of murder, and because of his distressing marriage to idolaters of the land, Rebekah suggested that Jacob be sent to Mesopotamia to find a suitable wife among Abraham’s family, as Isaac had done. In this Jacob obeyed Isaac and Rebekah, ^{v.7} obedience to

parents being a command of God and a characteristic of his people, and journeyed to Padan-aram. On the way the LORD gave him the same promise he had made to both his father and grandfather: "I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed".^{vs.13-14} This is the gospel: the blessing of all nations in the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when they inherit the land of Canaan for ever. Interestingly, Jacob received the promise when he dreamed of angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth, showing that open communication with heaven will be a feature of the kingdom of God, as Jesus declared: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man". *Joh.1:51*

Jacob called the place "Bethel", "the house of God", expressing the LORD's great purpose - to establish in the earth for ever his house, composed of men and women who are his sons and daughters because they manifested his character in their lives, as did Jacob.

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Week 7

Introduction

The chapters in Matthew this week bring the narrative of Jesus' ministry to the last week of his life, emphasising by his teaching and parables and miracles, the obligations upon his disciples who hope to have eternal life in the kingdom of God. His teaching brought him into conflict with the religious leaders in Israel so, while teaching his disciples to do the things which would commend them to God, he countered the false accusations of the Jews and warned his disciples against making the same mistakes.

Sunday

Matthew 15

Day 43

The scribes and Pharisees insisted that the people keep the religious traditions they themselves had established, whereas Jesus kept, and taught his disciples to keep, the actual commandments of God. These religious leaders therefore charged Jesus and his disciples with breaking the tradition of the elders, and one particular complaint concerned the washing of hands and of pots and pans. This cleanliness, of course, has its place, but while concentrating on it the Pharisees neglected the immensely more important requirement for men to cleanse themselves of moral defilement: "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man". *vs.19-20*

Jesus proved that, while they worshipped God with their lips, their heart was far from him. *v.8* For example, God commanded them to "honour father and mother" but they released people from this obligation upon paying money into the temple coffers! Consequently Jesus, quoting Isa.29:13, declared that their worship of God was unacceptable: "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men". *v.9* Unfortunately, this type of mistake is all too common, with religious leaders giving every appearance of being true worshippers of God but in reality being "blind leaders of the blind", leading their followers "into the ditch" i.e. the grave. *v.14* This serves as a dire warning to all of us not to "put our trust in man" but to study God's word for ourselves and to ensure our feet are on a path that leads to life, rather than to death.

Jesus was sent only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" *v.24* but in the purpose of God the gospel would later be preached to the Gentiles and, while the miraculous feeding bread to the Jews represented feeding them the word of God, the Canaanite woman eating, as it were, "the crumbs falling from the master's table" *v.27* represented Gentiles being permitted to feed on the bread of life rejected by the Jews.

Jesus warned his disciples against the Pharisees' teaching, again using the figure of bread to represent doctrine ^{v.12} and likening their false teaching to leaven. These religious leaders were able to discern the signs of the weather, but not the signs of the times. They should have known from prophecies in the Old Testament scriptures that their era was the time for the Messiah to be in their midst; but they were ignorant of this knowledge. Similarly, the scriptures indicate that these times in which we live are a prelude to the second coming of the Messiah; but most people, including religious leaders, are completely ignorant of these signs of our times. Men today are even more sophisticated in forecasting the weather, but few know what is about to happen in the earth. Nevertheless, any individual may learn from God's word, not of tomorrow's weather, but of God's imminent intervention in the affairs of the world.

Many throughout the centuries have accepted the teaching of Christ. These, in the aggregate, form the church (Greek: "ecclesia", meaning "called out ones") because the purpose of God is to call out of the nations a people for his name. All of these believed that Jesus "is the Christ, the Son of the living God", and this is the foundation faith upon which Christ's church is built ^{v.18} the faithful members of which will escape from "hell", i.e. the grave. Peter confessed this faith and Jesus, making a play on his name meaning "rock", appointed him the one to unlock the way of salvation. ^{v.19} Therefore, later, he was the apostle who used the keys of the kingdom to open the way, firstly for the Jews and then for the Gentiles.

Before that, however, Jesus would be crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. ^{v.21} Peter, devoted to Jesus, did not wish him to suffer in this way and so protested, ^{v.22} making himself an adversary (Hebrew: "Satan") to Jesus. Peter thought he was expressing Jesus' best interest, but Jesus could not allow himself to be influenced by human emotion to leave the course set out for him in the purpose of God. He came to save the world and was totally committed to God's will, leading him to death on the cross; and he calls for the same level of commitment from his disciples: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". ^{v.24}

Jesus had declared ^{16:28} that some would see him coming in his kingdom before they died and, six days later, three of his disciples did so, being granted a vision of this glorious event. Peter used this experience to

show in a letter that Christ's future coming is not a myth: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his glory".^{2Pet.1:16} In this vision of the future, the disciples saw Jesus as he will be - a partaker of the divine nature: "And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light".^{v.2}

The disciples saw Moses and Elijah ^{v.3} alive again and with Jesus in the kingdom of God, and when they descended the mountain they asked Jesus concerning Elijah. The Jews contended that Jesus could not be the Messiah because the prophecies said Elijah would come first. The truth is that Elijah will certainly precede Christ when he comes in glory, but John the Baptist performed the same role in the days of Christ's suffering. Therefore Jesus countered the Jews' charge: "... Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist".^{vs.11-13}

Wednesday

Matthew 18

Day46

God's promise is that the faithful of all ages will live and reign with Christ in his kingdom, in which there will be a definite hierarchy, with Jesus himself being the King and his apostles rulers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus, therefore, instructed his disciples how they could, not only enter the kingdom, but also attain to high positions therein: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven".^{vs.3-4}

Inevitably, because of human nature, disciples of Christ offend one another,^{v.7} therefore Jesus instructed them how to deal with offences when they arise. The person offended is commanded to go and speak to the offender alone. Most people find this very hard to do because it is against our natures and infinitely easier to speak of the matter to others instead; but Jesus' way often leads to reconciliation,^{v.15} although in extreme cases separation may ensue. Disciples of Christ should not offend others but should rather mortify their own selves to avoid offence.^{vs.8-9} The "hell fire" in this verse is not the "hell" of popular imagination but "Gehenna", the valley on the south side of Jerusalem used as a rubbish dump and for the burning of the bodies of criminals, and applied as a metaphor by Jesus for God's judgments. Christ requires us to be merciful to others, even forgiving offences "until seventy times seven".^{v.22} This is absolutely right because God himself is willing to forgive all our trespasses, therefore it is a relatively small matter for us to forgive our fellow men. Jesus illustrated this by a parable in which a

man, forgiven an immense debt, had another incarcerated for a trivial one. God is prepared to forgive us all our sins, but if we wickedly refuse to forgive others then, instead of receiving mercy, we shall receive deserved punishment: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses”.^{v.35}

Thursday

Matthew 19

Day 47

In this chapter Jesus emphasises the importance of keeping God’s actual commandments, rather than those of men. God gave the Jews a law through Moses in which, for example, he legislated concerning divorce, but they allowed divorce for any cause. This became a matter of dispute among the Jews, and the Pharisees asked Jesus concerning it ^{v.3} and his answer settled the matter of divorce for his disciples: “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery”.^{v.9}

Jesus insisted that the keeping of God’s commandments is imperative, even if it involves considerable sacrifice. A young man approached him to ask what he should do to inherit eternal life, and the answer Jesus gave was: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments”.^{v.17} This man was very rich ^{v.22} so when Jesus cited God’s commandments he omitted “thou shalt not covet”, enabling the man to declare his obedience. Jesus then told him that, in his case, to be completely obedient he should dispose of his possessions and follow him. This the rich young man was unable to do, causing Jesus great sorrow for he loved him.^{Mar.10:21} The apostles had indeed left all to follow Jesus,^{v.27} therefore they were promised everlasting life and high positions in his kingdom as rulers over the twelve tribes of Israel.^{v.28} The promise of living and reigning with Christ, furthermore, is to all his disciples who make the necessary sacrifices in their lives.^{vs.29-30}

At the end of chapter 19 Jesus spoke of the exaltation of the lowliest of men to the highest rulership under Christ in the Kingdom of God, while the highest rulers of the earth will be abased. This principle is enunciated in the last verse: “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first”,^{19:30} and is repeated later,^{20:16} sandwiching a parable Jesus told to illustrate it. The Jews had their own views as to superiority and, in particular, exalted themselves above the Gentiles. While it is true that God chose the Jews first, their rejection of his word led him to offer the great reward to the Gentiles. The Jews’ reaction was to murmur and complain,^{v.11} but the reward is the LORD’s and he may give it to whomsoever he wills: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” ^{v.15}

The disciples rightly anticipated the establishment of God’s kingdom and hoped for places within it, to reign with Christ. However, the purpose of God required that Jesus first suffer, and so he warned them: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again”.^{vs.18-19} The disciples had great difficulty taking in this information and continued to concentrate on the glories of the Kingdom. Jesus, therefore, impressed upon them that only those who humble themselves will be exalted: “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant”.^{vs.26-27} Jesus is the supreme example: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”.^{v.28}

When Jesus entered Jerusalem a week before his death, the people received him as the promised Messiah, the King of Israel. This fulfilled the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9: “Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass”,^{v.5} and the acclamation of the people fulfilled Psalm 118:25: “And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest”.^{v.9}

The religious leaders, viewing Jesus as an imposter, objected to the cries of the people, so Jesus pointed out to them that only those who receive the word of God as little children see things as they really are: “And

Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" ^{v.16} Unfortunately, relatively few in Israel were of this acceptable character so, like the unfruitful fig tree, ^{v.19} the nation was to wither away, which occurred forty years later in A.D.70.

The Jews polluted the worship of God, allowing traders to make merchandise of the people in the house of God. Therefore, Jesus cleansed the temple ^{v.12} saying that they had fulfilled the prophecy in Jeremiah 7:11 in making God's house "a den of thieves" whereas his intention is that it should be "a house of prayer for all people". ^{v.13} This prophecy, of Isaiah 56:7, will be fulfilled when the temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem to which all nations will repair to worship.

The rulers of the Jews had authority over the people with the responsibility of determining whether or not a prophet was from God. Although they rejected John the Baptist they feared to reveal their judgment because the people accepted him as a true prophet. Jesus highlighted this dereliction of duty when they challenged his authority which, supported by miracles, was manifestly from God. These Jewish leaders were of the class of people who say they will obey God's commands, but fail to do so. ^{v.30} Their ancestors had persecuted and killed God's prophets ^{v.35} and they themselves would murder God's son, the heir of his kingdom. ^{vs.37-39} Therefore, said Jesus, the kingdom would be taken from them ^{v.43} and great punishments would come upon them, fulfilled in A.D.70. Nevertheless, there were others who did obey, even if at first they were publicans, harlots, or sinners. ^{v.29} These repented and reformed their lives and would go into the kingdom of God ahead of the Jewish rulers. ^{v.31} The kingdom, said Jesus, would be taken from these rulers and given to others, both Jews and Gentiles, who would bring forth fruits acceptable to God. ^{v.43}

One of the symbols used to represent Jesus in the scriptures is "a stone", e.g. the corner stone of God's house. ^{Psa.118:22-23} Those in Israel charged with building up God's house rejected this chosen corner stone. ^{v.42} Nevertheless Jesus would be exalted to head God's household, and he would, in the day of judgment, be a stone of affliction, grinding the wicked to powder. ^{v.44}

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Week 8

Introduction

After Jacob fled from his murderous brother, Esau, he went north of the river Euphrates to Abraham's family from among whom he obtained a wife. In fact he married two wives, the sisters Leah and Rachel, and returned to the Promised Land, twenty years after leaving, with eleven sons and one daughter. These sons, together with another born later, became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel, the people of God, of whom we read in the rest of the Bible.

During his stay in Padan-aram Jacob was maltreated by his father-in-law but God, according to his promise as Jacob left the promised land, protected him, as Jacob said to that father-in-law, Laban: "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight". *Gen.31:42*

Sunday

Genesis 32

Day 50

Returning to the promised land with his family and servants, Jacob made contact with his brother Esau not knowing if, after so long a time, he still harboured murderous intention against him. He soon heard that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred armed men, and his reaction is instructive. He first prayed to God, citing the LORD's promise to him and seeking his protection, *vs.9-12* but he did not then sit back doing nothing to leave everything to God. While trusting in the LORD, he acted prudently to protect his family from the potential danger: sending abundant presents to Esau to conciliate him and organising his company for the maximum safety of his wives and children.

Nevertheless, God also strengthened and encouraged him by sending an angel to wrestle with him - for if Jacob could contend with an angel he would not fear any man, even his brother Esau. At the end of this episode Jacob's name was changed to Israel, meaning "a prince having power with God". This passage well illustrates the use of the word "God" in the scriptures: it is applied not only to the Creator himself but also to those who act as his agents, such as the angels and Israel's rulers. *Joh.10:34-35* Thus, Jacob saw the face of an angel, a manifestation of the Creator, and therefore he called the place "the face of God". It is impossible for mortal man to see the Almighty and live, therefore he has manifested himself in other "Gods", including angels and the Lord Jesus Christ, whom men have seen and from them learned what the Creator himself is like.

With Esau approaching with many armed men, Jacob divided his company so that, should Esau attack, some could escape. He placed his family in the rear for protection and, significantly, put his son Joseph furthest from danger, because he was the one entitled to the birthright.^{1Chron.5:1} In the event Esau had prospered during Jacob's absence and, happy with his worldly possessions, no longer sought Jacob's death. Nevertheless Jacob still pressed him to accept his bountiful gifts because his desire was not for material possessions but for God's promises to be fulfilled. His major concern was for the survival of his children through whom the promises would be realised and he was therefore willing, if necessary, to lose everything in order to receive the promised blessings, even if those blessings would not come for a very long time. Indeed Jacob, and all the faithful of old, knew that the promises would not be fulfilled till long after they had died. Their hope was that God would raise them from the dead when that time came. Jacob knew that by then the promised seed, which is Christ, would have come and the faithful seed of Abraham would have become a great multitude. He therefore expressed this purpose of God in the name of the altar he built after returning to the promised land. He called it: "El Elohe Israel" which is "The Power (God) of the Powerful Ones (the Saints) of the Prince of Power (Christ)".^{v.20}

Jacob travelled through the land of promise and when he came to Bethlehem his beloved wife, Rachel, died in childbirth,^{Gen.35:18-19} and this is significant for Bethlehem was the intended place for the birth of the Messiah, and the new-born baby boy was given prophetic names. Rachel, before she died, called him Ben-oni, "the son of my sorrow", while Jacob called him Benjamin, "the son of my right hand": so, in due course, God's own Son was first "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief",^{Isa.53:3} and afterwards exalted to sit at God's right hand.^{Psa.110:1}

Because of God's covenant, Jacob was content ^{v.1} to live as a stranger in the land God promised to give him for an everlasting possession. This attitude is contrasted with that of his brother Esau who had despised the birthright and who set his heart on this life, possessing lands, building cities, and settling his children in dukedoms.^{ch.36} The birthright had passed through Jacob to Joseph, Rachel's eldest but the eleventh of Jacob's sons, and it was in Joseph's life that God chose to illustrate that of Christ. Only God could make a man's life an enacted parable to illustrate the suffering of his Son and the glory to follow. Like Jesus,

Joseph was the beloved son of his father ^{v.3} who observed his brethren's wicked behaviour and denounced it; ^{v.2} who was inspired to express parables; whose parables foretold the future in which they would all bow down to him when he reigned over them; ^{v.8} whose brethren envied him ^{v.11} (compare Mar.15:10) and conspired to kill him. ^{v.18}; *Mat.26:3-4*

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the scriptures is the way in which God represents the death and resurrection of Christ in the experiences of men in the past. Thus Joseph was thrown into a pit, ^{v.24} representing the grave into which Jesus was later placed; but he was afterwards brought up out of the pit to represent Christ's resurrection. These events are a shadow of good things to come *Heb.10:1* but not an exact representation. Looking carefully at the record, we can see how God illustrates different aspects of Christ's life. For example, both Joseph and Jesus were sold by their brethren for silver money, ^{v.28} their blood was shed, as it were, by men acting like beasts, ^{vs.31-33} their deaths brought grief to their distraught loved ones who were unaware at first of their rising out of the pit. ^{vs.34-35}

Wednesday

Genesis 39

Day 53

The purpose of God was that Joseph, following his symbolic death and resurrection, would be greatly exalted just as Jesus would be; but before the glory both men had to pass through great suffering. Like Jesus, by his character and behaviour, Joseph found favour with both God and man, ^{vs.2-5}; *Lu.2:52* although they were each falsely accused of crime and cast into prison. Nevertheless, despite Joseph's suffering he maintained his trust in the LORD who preserved him and he, like Christ and many men and women in the scriptures, is set forth as an example of enduring adversity in the right spirit. He was able to do this because he knew the purpose of God and, like the apostle Paul, reckoned: "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us". *Rom.8:18 vs.2-5; Lu.2:52*

Thursday

Genesis 40

Day 54

One of the ways in which God made known his purpose was by dreams. While Joseph was in prison he was joined by two personal servants of Pharaoh who were accused of serious crime. Each had a dream from God, but neither understood its meaning. Joseph, inspired by God, interpreted the dreams, telling the baker and butler what would happen to them. And so it transpired: within three days the baker was executed and the butler was restored to his former position.

Joseph's hopes of release must have been raised, for the dreams clearly came from God and the butler promised to speak to Pharaoh concerning his unjust imprisonment, "yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him".^{v.23} This apparent delay in the outworking of God's purpose is a recurring feature of the experience of faithful men and women throughout the ages. Today the faithful await the return of Christ and the promised time of salvation and blessing, but it seems a long time coming. Nevertheless, God will certainly do what he has promised and in the meantime his true servants do not fall away into unbelief, but endure unto the end as exhorted: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh".*Jas.5:7-8*

Friday

Genesis 41

Day 55

Two years after Joseph correctly interpreted the butler's dream, Pharaoh also had impressive dreams but could obtain no interpretation from his magicians. Only then did the butler remember Joseph and recommend him to Pharaoh. Joseph, again inspired by the LORD, told Pharaoh that the dreams were from God ^{v.25} specifically to inform him of seven years of famine to follow seven years of plenty. Pharaoh was greatly impressed and, adopting Joseph's scheme to store food in the good years in preparation for the coming famine, appointed him administrator, and exalted him to be the highest ruler in the land, second only to Pharaoh himself.^{v.40} This is typical of Christ who, after years of suffering, was brought out of the prison house of death and appointed, under God, ruler over all.

These events in Egypt show us how God is in absolute control both of nature and of activity among the nations so that everything works out according to his predetermined purpose. Those today who understand that purpose can see the hand of God at work in history and in events taking place in our own time. They can see that the present state of the nations is as God describes in the Bible and can anticipate events about to happen with the return of Christ and the establishment of God's kingdom in the earth.

The worldwide famine brought people, including Joseph's own family, from afar seeking food out of the store houses he had built in Egypt. God had told Joseph's great grandfather, Abraham, that his descendants would leave the Promised Land temporarily to live in a strange land before returning in the fourth generation. *Gen.15:16* The seven year famine was the means by which Israel was brought down to Egypt. These events also illustrate the greater purpose of the LORD with Israel and the Jews' relationship with God's son.

Joseph was highly exalted in Egypt, but Jacob believed he was dead: Christ is now exalted at God's right hand, but the Jews think he also is dead. Joseph's brethren did not realise that the great personage they were dealing with in Egypt was their very own brother. Joseph did not immediately reveal himself to them because they had to recognise the enormity of their crime against him and to learn that their treatment of him and his exaltation in Egypt was part of God's plan of salvation. These events also foreshadowed the way in which Jesus will soon come to Israel as a great saviour, delivering them from all their enemies, but only after their full acceptance of him as their Messiah will it be borne in on them that he is Jesus of Nazareth whom their fathers had crucified two thousand years before. Not only should Jews therefore be prepared for the Messiah's coming, but all of us also, for it is "unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation". *Heb.9:28*

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