

Most of John's gospel record tells us of events during the last week of Jesus' life and consists mainly of conversations he had at that time with his disciples and with the Jewish authorities who opposed him. From these words of Jesus we receive so much valuable instruction for ourselves.

Week 41**John 8****Day 281**

The scribes and Pharisees v.3 tried to trick Jesus v.6 by bringing to him a woman "taken in adultery" but, while they remained unrepentant in their own sins which Jesus exposed, he showed that we can be forgiven our sins if we confess and forsake them - if we obey the instruction "Go, and sin no more" v.11.

The rest of the chapter records the ensuing discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees v.13 about paternity because Jesus declared that God, his Father, bore witness to him by the mighty works he did v.18. They claimed, as Abraham's seed v.33, that Abraham was their father v.39. Jesus acknowledged they were Abraham's seed v.37 because they were his natural descendants but by their deeds they proved they were not really his children: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham but now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham" vs.39-40. The Jews then raised their claims to declare: "We have one Father, even God" v.41, but Jesus showed that if God was truly their father they would have loved him because he was the Son of God v.42, although he expressed this in terms they failed to understand v.43. Those, however, who do listen to his word with the right attitude of mind can understand his speech v.43.

Their real father was Sin, as Jesus said: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" v.44. They allowed free rein to their sinful flesh and manifested they were, not only sin's children, but also the slaves of sin v.34. On the other hand Jesus, although a partaker of our sinful nature, overcame sin so that he could challenge them: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" v.46. They expressed the mind of the flesh, but Jesus spoke the word of God v.38.

They did, however, imply that he was "born of fornication", no doubt referring to the unusual circumstances of his birth which they did not rightly understand, but Jesus' miracles proved that he came from God v.42 and bore witness to the fact that God was his Father v.18. But they did not know Jesus' Father v.19 even though they claimed he was their God v.54. Jesus submitted himself to his Father: doing and saying nothing except that taught by him v.28; honouring not himself but his Father v.54, and always doing the things which pleased him v.29. The Jews, however, neither understood his speech v.43 nor that he was speaking of God v.27. Many other people have

wrested the words of Jesus recorded here and misunderstood them.

Jesus told the the Jews: “Whither I go ye cannot come” v.21 which they did not understand v.22, but he was declaring he would go to his Father in heaven where no other man can go. He said to them: “Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye

are of this world; I am not of this world” v.23. Through Adam they had come from the earth beneath, but through the Holy Spirit coming on Mary Jesus had come from heaven above. They conformed to this world while he was in the world but not of it, as he desired his disciples to be 17:16 if they too are to be the children of God, “for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” 1Jo.2:16.

A scripture commonly wrested is: “Before Abraham was, I am” v.58. This is supposed to mean that Jesus existed before Abraham whereas, consistent with the context, Jesus is declaring that he was in God’s purpose from the very beginning and was spoken of before Abraham’s day. The phrase “I am” occurs in this book a great number of times and on each occurrence with a complement telling us what the speaker was. For example, Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd” and “I am the bread of life”. If there is no complement, the translators have added the word “he” in italics to give the sentence grammatical sense. For example: Jesus said “I am *he*” meaning “I am he whom ye seek” 18:5; and, the blind man given sight said “I am *he*” meaning “I am he that was born blind” 9:9. For some reason, however, the translators did not do the same in this verse, but had they done so everyone would have readily understood from the context that when Jesus said “I am *he*” he meant “I am he whose day Abraham rejoiced to see” v.56. Indeed Jesus was spoken of by God to Abraham as his seed, so that Abraham longed for the day when he would be born, but Jesus was also spoken of centuries “before Abraham was”, e.g. as the seed of the woman promised in the garden of Eden (Gen.3:15).

Week 41

John 9

Day 282

Jesus gave sight to the blind man and this sign illustrates how we, born spiritually blind, can come to see God’s truth and in particular to believe in the Son of God vs.35-38. We are all born in sin, of which fact we are reminded by the discussion between Jesus and his disciples concerning the man born blind vs.2-3 and, just as Jesus took the initiative to heal the blind man, so he has acted to enable us to see God’s truth and be saved from sin. Jesus spat on the ground and made clay to place on the blind man’s eyes v.6. Had he done this to a sighted person he would have made him blind, so this illustrates the twofold effect of Jesus’ teaching: “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind” v.39. Thus the blind man saw the truth, but the Pharisees were made blind vs.40-41.

The blind man was sent to the pool of Siloam, which represents the word of God (Isa.8:6), to wash away the clay which represents the flesh, the thinking of which prevents men seeing the truth. Therefore, we ourselves are directed by Jesus to the word of God that we might wash away the flesh and learn the truth. Like the blind man we should obey Jesus' instruction, go to the word, and come again seeing v.7.

The blind man, however, once he had learned the truth concerning Jesus, found himself in conflict with the religious authorities. They accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath vs.13-16 and called him a sinner v.16. Even the man's parents were afraid to support their son before the Pharisees vs.18-23 because they feared excommunication v.22. When, however, the Pharisees condemned Jesus to the man born blind, he vigorously defended Christ. When they said: "We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is" v.29 the

man answered them bluntly: "Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing" vs.30-33. The only answer these religious rulers could give to this excellent reasoning was to condemn the man as a sinner and excommunicate him v.34.

Many men and women since have had a similar experience. Having obeyed Jesus' instruction to go to God's word and learned the truth concerning him, they have found themselves in conflict with the religious authorities and been excommunicated from their church. But they can be assured that Jesus will search them out again, just as he sought out the blind man. It will not matter if they are then in the grave for they will still be brought before Jesus and, if faithful, be commended and rewarded.

Week 41

John 10

Day 283

This chapter continues the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees relating to the man born blind in which Jesus declared himself "the shepherd of the sheep"

v.2. His sheep hear his voice and follow him v.4, and clearly the blind man was in this category but his opponents were not v.26. Jesus is the good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep v.11 in accordance with his Father's will v.15 who therefore loves him v.17. He gave his life that his sheep "might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" v.10. Our lifespan now is only "three score years and ten" but after the resurrection the saints will live throughout the Millennium and beyond. Jesus will give them "eternal life; and they shall never perish" v.28.

Jesus was sent by his Father to the lost sheep of the house of Israel only (Mat.15:24) but he knew that later the Gentiles would have the same

opportunity to follow him, therefore he said concerning them: “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” v.16. Like the man born blind, true disciples of Christ believe the witness of the Father’s works which Jesus did, but many others did not v.25. The miracles proved that God was Jesus’ Father, who “is greater than all”, and Jesus plainly declared his Father was greater than everyone else, including himself. Jesus acted in unity with his Father so that he could say: “I and my Father are one”. This statement is often taken out of context to assert that Jesus and his Father are equal, even though this idea is diametrically opposed to Jesus’ declarations concerning his Father’s superiority.

The Pharisees also misunderstood Jesus’ words and accused him of blasphemy, saying: “Thou, being a man, makest thyself God” v.33. This was a false accusation, and Jesus immediately refuted it, showing from the scriptures v.34 that many people are called gods (same word as God v.33). The LORD himself called the rulers he appointed over Israel, to whom also he gave his word, “gods” v.35 (Psa.82:6). How then could it be blasphemy for Jesus to say he was the Son of God? v.36. He declared he was “the Son of God” but never “God the Son”, which is a later invention of men. He did say: “the Father is in me, and I in him” v.38 which enraged those who did not understand his speech, and they tried to kill him v.39

but he escaped out of their hand v.40. Many came to him and believed vs.41-42, but since then many also have wrested such statements as “I and my Father are one” and “the Father is in me, and I in him” to make him equal with God. This is false, but we can readily understand that Jesus spoke of unity and intimacy, and this will be experienced also by the saints with Jesus and God, as Jesus prayed to his Father: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” 17:21.

Week 41

John 11

Day 284

In this chapter we read of Jesus rising his friend Lazarus whom he loved v.3 from the dead and this is recorded, no doubt, to confirm that he will raise all his friends from the grave when he comes. The friends of Jesus die during his absence but because they will be awakened from the dead they are described as “sleeping” v.11. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick unto death he did not go immediately to him even though, as Lazarus’ sisters said, if he had been there he would not have died vs.21,32. The reason Jesus remained away for two days was because he loved Lazarus and his two sisters vs.5-6. And so it is now. Jesus is away in heaven but he knows that his friends whom he loves are dying. If he returned he could prevent them from dying, but God’s purpose requires that a multitude of saints are developed over two thousand years while Jesus remains away, so most of them have fallen into the sleep of death. Nevertheless, Jesus loves them and in due time he will come again and raise them from the dead “in the resurrection at the last day” v.24.

He is “the resurrection, and the life” v.25 and when he returns those who have believed in him, though dead, shall live v.25 while believers who are alive when he returns will never die v.26. As a demonstration of his ability to do this he raised Lazarus who had been dead for four days and whose body had begun to decompose

v.39. He commanded them to remove the stone from the entrance of the sepulchre v.39, prayed to his Father vs.41-42, and called Lazarus with a loud voice v.43, whereupon Lazarus came out of the tomb, alive. So, in the future, “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” 1Thes.4:16.

We should be impressed by the raising of Lazarus, as many Jews were and believed v.45, for this represents the one great and glorious hope for the future - to live again by resurrection from the dead. The religious authorities, however, did not believe and, because of the raising of Lazarus, “took counsel together for to put Jesus to death” v.53, therefore Jesus removed himself from Judea and their jurisdiction until the time for his crucifixion drew near.

Week 41

John 12

Day 285

Six days before the Passover at which Jesus would be crucified, he met with Lazarus and his two sisters in Bethany vs.1-2 when Mary anointed his feet with costly ointment and dried them with her hair v.3. We read of Mary three times in the scriptures and on each occasion we find her at Jesus’ feet with her actions

misunderstood (vs.3-5, 11:32, and Luk.10:39). We should follow her example and, as it were, sit at Jesus’ feet to learn his teaching, even if other people misunderstand us. Judas, the betrayer, objected to the money being spent on ointment, ostensibly speaking on behalf of the poor but in reality caring for the money as he was a thief vs.4-7. The words of Jesus: “The poor always ye have with you” v.8 are often quoted out of context, but he cared for the poor more than anyone else. Nevertheless, there is a time for everything and the period just before his death was a time for giving consideration to him, which Mary did. We should care for the poor and needy as we have opportunity, but not thereby neglecting service to God and to Christ.

The presence of Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead impressed many people v.9, with some being moved to believe on Jesus v.11 but the chief priests manifested their wickedness by scheming to put Lazarus to death to remove this overwhelming evidence that Jesus came from God v.10. Those who did believe influenced a great many other people in favour of Jesus vs.17-18 and when he entered Jerusalem v.12 the multitude cast branches of palm trees in his path, proclaiming: “Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord”

v.13. Appropriately, Jesus entered into the capital city riding on an ass, for

this was the regal mode of transport of the kings of Israel who were forbidden by God to possess horses, and in so doing fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah: “Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt” v.15 (Zech.9:9).

Jesus knew that within a week he would be crucified and, understandably, his mind was concentrated on this v.23. He was giving up his natural life but he would gain eternal life by resurrection, and the consequence of his sacrifice would be extremely fruitful v.24. He urged his disciples to follow him v.26, not in a literal crucifixion, but in a crucifixion of the flesh in a life of service to the Lord: “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” v.25. Jesus was greatly troubled by the prospect of torture and death before him but he recognised that his whole life had been leading to this sacrifice

v.27 and he submitted to God’s will and glorified his name v.28. God was glorified and his righteousness declared by the sacrifice of Christ, and sin, the great enemy of mankind and the spirit that pervades the rulers of the world, was overcome. “The prince of this world” in the person of the Jewish authorities would soon come and take him 14:30 but by his death sin, which pays the wages of death, would be destroyed - “the prince of this world would be cast out” v.31.

Jesus signified the manner of his death by the phrase: “being lifted up” vs.32-33 as he would die on the cross, but the people had no understanding that their Messiah would be crucified before resurrection and glory v.34. Nevertheless, Jesus on the cross was the means by which his people would all be drawn to him v.32, and by his death they would obtain eternal life. The prophets of old had foretold both his death and glory v.41 but they also spoke of the people’s refusal to accept the word of God vs.38-40 (Isa:6:9-10 and 53:1). Most were not even persuaded by the miracles he performed v.37 but some did believe, even among the rulers but these were afraid to admit it v.42 because they loved the praise of men more than that of God! v.43.

Jesus was the manifestation of God so that those who saw him saw his Father v.45 and when they believed in him they believed also in his Father v.44. Jesus came to save the world, and men and women will be saved from death if they believe the

words of the Father that Jesus spoke, otherwise they will be judged adversely v.47. Jesus spoke God’s words v.48 because God had commanded him what to say v.49 therefore, said Jesus: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” v.48. This is a dire warning to us to give due respect to God’s word, but Jesus did not warn only, he also encouraged his disciples by the assurance that belief and obedience to the word of God will bring everlasting life v.50.

The evening before his crucifixion Jesus, knowing “his hour was come” and that he was about to lay down his life for those he loved v.1, ate a supper with his disciples. When the meal ended Jesus gave them an example to follow by way of practical demonstration v.15. He washed all their feet, a practice common then because of the dusty roads, saying: “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet” vs.13-14. The application of this in our day is not that disciples should literally wash each other’s feet, but they should do even the most menial or degrading services for each other. Jesus said that those who do this will be happy v.17, because they will be rewarded in the day when God exalts the humble. He had twelve apostles but he did not speak of them all in favourable terms v.18. One of them would betray him, as the prophets had declared beforehand, e.g. David said: “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” v.18 (Psa.41:9).

The betrayer was Judas Iscariot who had already conspired with the Jewish authorities and agreed to deliver Jesus to them for thirty pieces of silver. Sin had moved him to betray Christ or, in the figurative language of the scriptures by which sin is personified as a false accuser, “the devil put into the heart of Judas” to betray him v.2. Jesus told the other apostles in advance of this betrayal so “that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am *he*” v.19. Jesus was greatly distressed by this betrayal v.21 and the disciples were anxious to know the identity of the betrayer so Peter prompted John, who was sitting closest to Jesus, to ask him vs.22-25. Jesus identified Judas who then became a determined adversary v.27 (“Satan” is the Hebrew word for “adversary”) and went out to complete his evil deed. But the disciples did not understand the significance of Jesus’ words to Judas or his sudden departure vs.28-30.

Jesus then spoke to the remaining apostles the many things which are recorded in the next few chapters. Firstly he spoke of their following him. He would soon, after his death and resurrection, go to heaven but they would not be able to follow him there v.33. Nevertheless, he commanded them to follow his example, especially that they should love one another as he had loved them vs.34-35. Peter expressed his determination to follow Jesus, even if it meant laying down his life for his sake v.37 but, sadly, Jesus told him that the watchman’s early morning trumpet blast would not blow before he had denied Jesus three times v.38.

The conversation between Jesus and his apostles at the last supper turned to betrayal and denial and death, generating an atmosphere full of sadness and distress, so Jesus spoke words of comfort to the apostles. He said: “Let not your heart be troubled” v.1 and reassured them. He was going away, to heaven, but in his absence he would be preparing a place for them, even his Father’s house of which they were a part, just as an architect designs his

plans away from the site. Afterwards he would return so they would be together vs.2-3. These verses are often misquoted to make Jesus refer to the disciples going to heaven, even though Jesus had told them plainly they could not follow him there, but, if fact, the comfort he gave them was that “he would come again” v.3.

Nevertheless, the disciples were to follow him, for he is “the way, the truth, and the life” by whom men and women can come to the Father. The disciples could look at Jesus, observing his character and manner of life, and see his Father v.9. He had spoken his Father’s words and done his works v.10 and he promised that the apostles would do even greater works, because he was going to the Father v.12. The explanation of this was that in losing Jesus, who was their Comforter, they would gain another Comforter in the form of the Holy Spirit which would come upon them. The Comforter was “the Spirit of truth” v.17, “the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” v.26. Of course, this could only apply to those disciples who had been with Jesus during his ministry whom the Holy Spirit could remind what he had said and done. Others do apply this to themselves, but this is impossible and is self delusion.

Jesus instructed his disciples to prove they loved him by keeping his commandments v.15, and declared that only those who do so are the ones that love him, irrespective of any claims they may make v.21. Those who do indeed love Jesus will be greatly honoured when he returns, as he said: “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” v.23. Jesus always honoured his Father, who is greater than he v.28, and was perfectly obedient to his every command. He was obedient even unto death on the cross at the hands of “the prince of this world” v.30, but sin would be overcome by his sacrifice and the world would know that he loved the Father; and as the Father gave him commandment, even so he did v.31.

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Isaiah saw visions of the glorious future still to come when Jesus will sit upon the throne of the LORD in Jerusalem. Marvellous passages of scripture tell us of the work of Jesus, both as a Saviour enduring suffering and as a great and glorious King. We read some of these passages this week.

Week 42**Isaiah 26****Day 288**

In this chapter the LORD says what he will do “in that day” v.1 when he intervenes in the world as described in the previous chapter. There will be great rejoicing in Judah v.1 when “the righteous nation which keepeth truth enters in” v.2. At that time those who trust in the LORD will be blessed v.3 and therefore we are exhorted: “Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength” v.4. The name “JEHOVAH” is “YAHWEH” in the original Hebrew and it is interesting to know why the Authorised Version records it as “Jehovah”. God’s name in the original is “YHWH”, with no vowels because Hebrew was written using only consonants, but the first English Bibles were printed in Germany using the German alphabet in which “Y” is represented by the letter “J” resulting in “YHWH” appearing as “JHVH”. Also the Jews in ancient times would not pronounce God’s name because they feared to take his name in vain, therefore to remind the reader not to say Yahweh but to substitute “Lord” they inserted the vowels of their word for “Lord” into God’s name. As a result of these two effects God’s name came through into the English language wrongly as “Jehovah”. Some people, ignorant of these facts, claim that only those who use the name “Jehovah” are God’s people, even arrogating to themselves as the guardians of this name the title “Jehovah’s witnesses”, but we will see later that YAHWEH has chosen others to be his witnesses.

The proud will be brought low in that day v.5 but those who have waited for the LORD and walked in the way of his judgments will be exalted v.8. The faithful desire the intervention of the LORD with all their being because they know that when his judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness v.9. It might be thought that if the wicked are blessed by God they will learn righteousness but God says, and experience proves, this is not so v.10. It will require God’s judgments to devour the wicked v.11 before righteousness will reign in the earth. The LORD has ordained there must be righteousness before peace, but both will certainly come v.12.

In the meantime, while the saints have waited for the LORD, they have been subject to many other rulers v.13 but, however mighty these may have been, they have all died and shall not rise from the dead: “They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise” v.14. This shows that in the resurrection not all come forth from the grave. God declares he will raise all those who are responsible to his judgment: some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Dan.12:2), the one class being made immortal and the other condemned to the second death (Rev.21:8). The

faithful look forward to the glorious future God has promised even though they first have to pass through trouble and chastening v.16. Their suffering, however, is likened to birth pains vs.17-18 which come to an end in joy. Most of God's people are dead, but his "dead men shall live" v.19. They sleep in the dust but they shall awake and arise to be

with Christ v.19. He will arise like the sun in the morning (Mal.4:2) and his healing beams will cause the earth to cast out her dead just as the dew arises in the sun's heat. This is a very appropriate figure of the resurrection of the saints for the dew is not seen during the night, but at dawn it rises in the atmosphere and reappears at the dew point as clouds. Thus the saints are now unseen in the earth and their resurrection at Christ's return will also be unseen until they appear with him in the political heavens as "clouds" (Mark 14:62).

The time of resurrection will be a time of trouble for the world (Dan.12:1-2) from which the saints will be preserved for they will be invited thus: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast" v.20. In this respect consider also 2Thess.1:5-10 which speaks of the protection Jesus will give to his disciples at this time when he is sent by God to judge the inhabitants of the earth v.21.

Week 42

Isaiah 35

Day 289

In the age to come the promised land will become a paradise, providing evidence to the nations that the God of Israel has intervened to bless his people: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" v.1. This is in stark contrast to her neighbour, Idumea, who persecuted Israel through the ages and whose land will "lie waste from generation to generation" 34:10. The Holy Land "shall blossom abundantly for them" vs.1-2, i.e. for those who "seek out the book of the LORD, and read" 34:16 who will possess the land from generation to generation as it is their lot, or inheritance 34:17, according to God's promise to Abraham and his seed. Therefore God exhorts all such, saying: "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you" vs.3-4.

When Jesus lived in Israel he used God's power to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and he healed many other disabled people of their disabilities. In the future age he will do this again on a greater scale, and the saints will co-operate with him in this vs.5-6. The faithful will walk in the way of holiness

v.8 for they are the redeemed v.9. All God's people will be brought to the land. Israel will be gathered out of the nations into the promised land and the saints will be brought out of their graves to rule them with Jesus for "the

ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” v.10.

Week 42

Isaiah 38

Day 290

Hezekiah v.1 was the king of Judah during part of the time that Isaiah prophesied to God’s people. He was a good king and faithful to the LORD but became sick unto death v.1 and wept sorely at the prospect of this imminent and early death. He prayed to the LORD for life, beseeching him as a man who had walked before God in truth and with a perfect heart, having done that which was right in God’s

sight v.3, and God heard, acceded to his request, and granted him a further fifteen years of life v.5. Furthermore, Hezekiah would see God’s deliverance out the hand of the invading Assyrians who would besiege Jerusalem but be unable to take it v.6.

Hezekiah recognised the truth about death - it is oblivion in the grave - and had no desire to go there early. This is not a truth accepted by all, for many people hope for continued existence in some form after death. However, if we acknowledge the true state of the dead we can readily accept God’s offer of salvation from death by resurrection. Hezekiah declared in his prayer to God: “The grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day” vs.18-19. The desire of Hezekiah for life was natural but he was also motivated by God’s promise to David that his royal line would never fail. Hezekiah was of that line which in due course would lead to Jesus, the promised seed of David (Mat.1:10 Ezekias = Hezekiah). If Hezekiah had died at that time the royal line would have ended, but three years after his recovery he had a son, Manasseh, who was twelve years old when he ascended the throne at Hezekiah’s death (2Chron.33:1).

Hezekiah rejoiced in his deliverance from the grave and in his praise he expressed the hope of the saints who will be saved permanently from death: “So wilt thou recover me, and make me to live” v.16 and after resurrection they will say to God: “Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back” v.17.

Week 42

Isaiah 40

Day 291

The scriptures contain great comfort for God’s people v.1 and in due course Israel will be greatly comforted in Jerusalem when her warfare is accomplished and her iniquity is pardoned v.2. They will receive this comfort when the Lord Jesus their Messiah returns, and he proclaimed this as good news when he preached the gospel to them long ago. He was introduced to Israel by John the Baptist who was the one crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the LORD v.3 (Mat.3:3). Jesus came to manifest the

glory of God before all flesh, i.e. both Jews and Gentiles

v.5. The message was that “all flesh is grass” and fades away to nothing vs.6-8 but “the word of God shall stand for ever” v.8. Peter cites this passage as proof that our natural destiny is oblivion but also that we can live for ever if we are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” 1Pet.1:23. We do this by believing God’s word and being baptized.

Jesus came to bring the people good tidings v.9 and in him they saw a manifestation of God, and at his return he will come as the “arm of the LORD” to rule for God in Zion v.10. He will bring reward for God’s people (Rev.22:12), ready to perform the work of the LORD set before him v.10. He is the good shepherd (Joh.10:11) and he will gather his sheep to him when he comes v.11. The people of Israel were given this good news through God’s prophets but they often spurned the message and put their trust in idols, therefore God challenged them to recognize his greatness as the creator and sustainer of the universe vs.12-27.

He made the heavens and the earth v.12, understands all things vs.13-14, and the nations are as nothing to him and counted less than nothing v.17. The nations are like a drop of a bucket to him v.15, and human observation has confirmed that the universe is so vast that even our planet is just a minute speck in the cosmos. Some

people attempted to make some likeness of God out of gold and silver vs.18-19 but this is impossible, and it is foolish to worship a graven image v.20. Israel should have known the truth about the Creator for he spoke to them through his prophets

v.21. Not only did he create the heavens and the earth v.22, including multitudinous stars v.26, but he also controls what takes place therein, including events among the nations vs.23-24. Israel had so much evidence of God’s existence and his actions on their behalf that their claim that he was hid from them was incredible v.27.

God has not only made himself known to his people by his word but he has also made the exceeding great and precious promise that they will be partakers of his divine nature (2Pet.1:4). He “fainteth not, neither is weary” v.28 and he will empower his saints so that they increase in strength v.29. During the Millennium young men of the nations will faint and be weary v.29 “but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” v.31.

Week 42

Isaiah 41

Day 292

God calls upon men v.1 to recognise both him and the evidence he has placed before them in his word showing he has performed the purpose he declared from the beginning v.4. This purpose is that he will manifest himself in members of the human race, initially in their characters and finally when

they are physically partakers of his divine nature. This is the significance of his name, “YAHWEH” translated “LORD” here, meaning “He who shall be”, and he says (in the original Hebrew): “I YAHWEH, the first one, and with the last ones” v.4. The “first one” is Jesus, who has already been raised to the divine nature, and the “last ones” are the saints who manifest God’s character now and will partake of the divine nature when Jesus returns.

God’s purpose is with Israel, the seed of Abraham, God’s friend v.8, a people who is his servant and whom he brought to himself in the land v.9. The people of Israel are encouraged not to fear because he will help and save them v.10, and destroy their enemies vs.11-12. For centuries the Gentiles have despised and persecuted them, treating them as “a worm” v.14 but the time is coming when, as they return to the land, they will be like “a sharp threshing instrument” and a “whirlwind” against those who seek to harm them vs.15-16. God will greatly bless both them and their land vs.17-19 and they will thereby know the Holy One of Israel has delivered them v.20.

In his word, God has provided abundant evidence of his existence and that he is in control of the nations and is developing his purpose with the earth. Therefore he calls upon men to consider this evidence and challenges those who oppose him, especially those who trust in idols: “Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods” vs.22-23. Neither men nor their gods are able to accurately tell of past events nor inform us of the future, but the one true and living God has the ability to do both these things and the scriptures are full of examples. He told men in his word what has happened in the earth from the very beginning and also what would happen

thereafter. We can examine these prophecies and compare them with both history and the state of the world today and see that events have taken place exactly as God declared beforehand. By such evidence we can be assured that God exists and that he is doing and will do all that he has promised.

Week 42

Isaiah 42

Day 293

In this chapter the LORD spoke of Jesus as his servant and what he would do in God’s service. Jesus is God’s elect, upon whom he put his Spirit, who delighted him, and who will bring forth judgment to the Gentiles v.1. Thus Jesus came to Israel preaching the good news of God’s kingdom and offering salvation, and in due course this message went out to the Gentiles also. Jesus, furthermore, was gentle with those he taught, even with the most obnoxious and hardhearted, not being riotous or quenching the little spiritual life he found among the people v.3. He was not discouraged by his rejection by most of the people for he knew that ultimately God’s purpose would be achieved in him and he would bring forth judgment in the earth v.4.

Jesus was the servant of the creator of the universe who gave life to all people on earth v.5 He was called in righteousness to give his life in sacrifice as part of the covenant God made with Israel, and he would enlighten the Gentiles v.6. He would open the eyes of the blind to see God's truth and would save men and women taken prisoner by sin and death and this, in the end, would mean their everlasting release from the grave v.7. All this accords with the LORD's purpose, declared from the beginning and to come to pass in due time v.9, to bring glory to himself v.8. Therefore men should learn of him and his purpose, and rejoice in this knowledge vs.10-12. Unfortunately, most people now take little interest in God's purpose but the time is coming when he will go forth like a man of war to destroy his enemies and save his people vs.13-16. For centuries he has held his peace and been still v.14 so that people who take no notice of his word think he does not even exist, but they will learn differently when the day of his intervention arrives.

Israel received great privileges from the LORD, including having his prophets and his Son in their midst to teach them, but mostly they shut their eyes and were blind to his teaching and deaf to his word. They foolishly turned to idols v.17 but God urged them to see and hear his word v.18. The LORD was determined to magnify his law and make it honourable v.21 and Jesus kept that law perfectly, being blind and deaf in the opposite sense - opening his eyes and ears to God's word but closing them to sin and the temptations of the world - so that he was perfect and the LORD was well pleased for his righteousness vs.19-22. Israel also were God's servant but they refused to hear and were therefore scattered by invaders v.24, yet they have remained completely unaware that this was the hand of God v.25.

Week 42

Isaiah 43

Day 294

Despite Israel's ignorance of God's purpose with them, he formed the nation for himself and he will save them vs.1-2. He is the Holy One of Israel and their saviour

v.3 and they are precious in his sight and loved by him v.4. Therefore he will bring them again from all the nations of the earth into his land so that he will be glorified in them vs.5-6. We can review the experiences of Israel throughout the ages and

see that they have occurred exactly in accordance with God's word expressed long beforehand. They were scattered out of the land precisely as he forewarned, they survived as a separated people despite persecution and enforced wanderings for over two thousand years, and some have returned to the land to form the State of Israel in preparation, though in ignorance, for the return of their king from heaven. God declared these events beforehand and thereby provided evidence that his word is the truth v.9.

To Israel he says: "Ye are my witnesses and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" v.10. Others have

arrogated to themselves the title of “Jehovah’s witnesses” while denying the witness of Israel that the LORD himself has placed before us as evidence that he, the God of Israel, is the only true and living God. Of Israel, God says: “This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise” v.21. Many have rejected the concept that Israel are still God’s people because of their wickedness and departure from him, but God himself acknowledges their faults vs.22-23 and declares that he will blot out all their transgressions for his name’s sake and will not remember their sins v.25. By the gospel, we are invited to associate with Israel through the Lord Jesus Christ so that this total forgiveness of sins may be granted to us also.

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Week 43

Introduction

This week we read of the final conversations Jesus had with his disciples, and of his death and resurrection. The words of Jesus give us vital guidance in understanding the purpose of God in him, and the record of his death and resurrection helps us to believe in the sacrifice of Christ which is essential for salvation.

Week 43

John 15

Day 295

Jesus instructed his disciples concerning fruitfulness to God, using the vine as a metaphor. He himself was “the true vine” v.1 bringing forth good grapes representative of the righteousness God requires. The Father’s desire is that his people bring forth much fruit and thereby glorify him, and if they do this they will truly be Jesus’ disciples v.8. They can only bring forth fruit if they are attached to Jesus, as branches to the vine v.4. If, for any reason, they separate from him they will wither and be fit only to be burned v.6 and if any fail to bring forth fruit to God they will be cut off v.2. However, those who are like fruitful branches will be purged to bring forth more fruit to God v.2. The purging agent is the word of God spoken by Jesus v.3, “purge” v.2 and “clean” v.3 being the same word in the original Greek. By heeding Jesus’ words and obeying them the disciples abide in Christ, and his Father listens to their prayers v.7.

The foremost fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal.5:22) and Jesus declared that his disciples can only show their love for him by keeping his commandments, even as he himself showed he loved his Father by keeping his commandments v.10. It is not enough having sentimental feelings of love for Jesus: our love for him must have practical expression in the way he instructed, i.e. by keeping his commandments. Jesus manifested the greatest possible love for his disciples by giving his life for them v.13 and he commands his disciples to love one another, even as the Father loves Jesus and Jesus loves them.

Jesus also declared that the disciples were his friends only if they kept his commandments v.14. How important it is therefore, if we wish him to count us as his friends, to learn his commandments and obey them. He was the Lord and they the servants but he exalted them to the status of friends in declaring to them the purpose of God in him v.15. If we are the friends of Jesus we also will know this purpose and look forward to its fulfilment. That purpose involves choosing many men and women to be his friends, and these friends are required to bring forth much fruit to God v.16. Being chosen by Jesus, however, may bring the hatred of the world v.19 and even persecution, just as Jesus v.20 and many disciples through the ages have suffered. Jesus had given the people of his day overwhelming evidence that he came from the Father, but they hated him vs.22-25 and fulfilled the prophecy in the Psalms: “They hated me without a cause” Psalms 35:19. The apostles would not be left

comfortless because the Father would send them the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, to teach them the truth concerning Jesus v.26. Clearly none today have this Comforter for none can declare infallible truth except by expressing the words found in the scriptures.

Week 43

John 16

Day 296

The apostles and the first disciples were put out of the synagogues and some were killed by men who were ignorant of the Father and of Jesus but believed they were doing God's will, as Jesus declared beforehand vs.1-3. He assured them they would be encouraged when this happened by the memory that he had forewarned them of the persecution v.4. They would also be comforted by the Comforter v.7 which would reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment vs.8-11. The disciples had difficulty understanding his meaning then v.12 but when the Spirit came upon them they were guided into all truth and learned of things to come v.13. Only the first disciples had this Spirit of truth which also inspired them to write the New Testament scriptures so that thereby others also could be guided into all truth and learn of things to come in the purpose of God. Who, without the scriptures, can declare God's truth and foretell the future? None can do so now, and none has done so since the New Testament was completed at the end of the first century.

Jesus told the apostles that in a little while they would not see him, and the world would rejoice but they would sorrow, and then again in a little while they would see him again and their sorrow would be turned into joy vs.16-22. Shortly, he would be taken from them and crucified, but after three days he would rise from the dead and be with them again before going to the Father. Their experience would be like a woman going through childbirth, first the pain then the joy v.21, and no-one would be able to take their joy from them v.22. He would then go to heaven and be their mediator at God's right hand so that their prayers would be favourably received vs.23-28. The disciples professed to understand him v.29 and expressed their belief in him v.30 but Jesus knew that the same night they would scatter and leave him alone to his enemies vs.31-32. He would have great tribulation, and they also would suffer tribulation in the world but with the consolation that Jesus has overcome the world v.33 by his death.

Week 43

John 17

Day 297

We are very privileged to have in our possession this prayer which Jesus expressed to his Father a short while before being taken to prison and death by his enemies. He was to glorify the Father in his death v.1 and he looked forward to the remarkable opportunity to be achieved by it. He would have authority to give eternal life to a great many men and women v.2, and he would give this life to those only who know both the true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent v.3. Clearly, therefore, it is of vital importance to study

God's word to make sure that the God we worship is the true and living God revealed therein and to ensure we know the truth concerning his Son as the Christ i.e. the king of Israel, for this knowledge brings eternal life. Jesus had given God's word to his disciples who received it gladly and believed the truth concerning him vs.6-7 and he prayed for them - not for the world, but for those who believed his word v.9.

Jesus was to leave his disciples in the world when he went to heaven and he prayed that they would be preserved from evil v.15 for the world would hate them because of their acceptance of his word. Though they would be "in the world" they would not be "of the world", and they would keep themselves separate from its lusts and wickedness vs.13-16. Only by the word of truth could they keep themselves pure vs.17-19 and Jesus' desire for them was that they would not unite with the world

but with him and the Father. God's purpose is to develop a great multitude of men and women into a perfect unity with himself and his Son vs.20-23. Sometimes people cite the fact that Jesus and the Father are one to suggest that they are coequal, but this is refuted by these words of Jesus concerning his disciples who, of course, are not equal with him and the Father: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" v.21.

Jesus did not express this prayer for those disciples only, but also for all those who in later times would believe his word recorded by the apostles: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" v.20. Thus, even today, any of us can read the scriptures and believe the truth concerning Jesus Christ and his Father in the hope that the prayer of Jesus will be fulfilled in us when he returns in glory: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" v.24.

Week 43

John 18

Day 298

Jesus went with his disciples to the garden of Gethsemane v.1, just outside Jerusalem, knowing all the things that were about to happen to him v.4, and soon the traitor, Judas, came with the Jewish authorities to take him into captivity. Jesus asked them who they sought v.4 and when informed he declared "I am *he*"

v.5. Here is another example where the translators have correctly added the word "*he*", which is not in the original, because it is required to make sense in English, meaning "I am he whom ye seek". Peter tried to save Jesus, and he cut off the ear of the high priest's servant v.10. The "sword" he used was in fact a large knife used domestically, e.g. for cutting up animals for food, and not a soldier's sword because fighting and killing are against the commandments of Christ and no disciple would carry such a weapon. Jesus miraculously replaced the man's ear, not allowing Peter's act to divert him

from laying down his life willingly v.11.

Jesus was bound and taken to the high priest vs.12-14 who examined him v.19 but gave him no justice vs.20-24. The disciples had all fled but afterwards John and Peter came to the high priest's house v.15 where Peter denied any association with Jesus vs.16-17, as Jesus had said he would. After Peter had denied Jesus three times, the cock crew vs.25-27 and he remembered what Jesus had told him in advance, and he wept bitterly, but his offence was later forgiven. After the Jews had examined Jesus they were determined to put him to death but did not have power to do so under Roman law. They took him, therefore, early in the morning, to the Roman governor v.28. Jesus was an innocent man so when the Jews were challenged by Pilate they resorted to bluster to get their own way vs.29-30, but Pilate would not be tricked v.31. Nevertheless, Jesus' declaration that he was the king of the Jews brought Pilate at last to sign the warrant for his execution.

The words of Jesus to Pilate concerning the kingdom are often misunderstood: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" v.36. This is taken to mean that Jesus' kingdom is not of this planet, but such a meaning would deny what God has declared throughout the scriptures and involve him not keeping his promise to David, king of Israel, that

the Christ would sit on his throne for ever. Jesus declared himself to be the king of the Jews and his disciples are required to believe he is, not only the Son of God, but also the king of Israel. In fact, Jesus was referring to the constitution of things in Israel at that time when the Jews rejected him: his kingdom was not of that "cosmos", but the time will come when his people will be willing (Psa.110:3) and a new constitution will be established in Israel appropriate to his righteous reign in Jerusalem over the nation.

When Pilate asked Jesus pointedly: "Art thou the king of the Jews?", Jesus affirmed plainly, declaring: "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born"

v.37. Jesus reigning as king in Israel is an essential element of the truth to which he came to bear witness, and everyone that is of the truth hears his voice, and believes it v.37. Pilate did not take time to hear the truth but still tried to save Jesus vs.38-39. The Jews, however, preferred to save the life of a murderer rather than that of their rightful king v.40.

Week 43

John 19

Day 299

Pilate had Jesus scourged v.1, as was the treatment of men before their crucifixion to weaken them, and soldiers pressed a crown of thorns on his head and clothed him in a purple robe in mock recognition of him as the King of the Jews vs.2-3. Pilate brought him before the people, emphasising he was an innocent man vs.4-5 and their king vs.13-14, but they clamoured for his crucifixion v.15, professing they had no king but Caesar v.15. Thus they

rejected their own Messiah, God's anointed king whom they also knew declared himself to be the Son of God v.7. This information frightened Pilate v.8 and when he questioned Jesus he was assured that he could do nothing against him if it was not in God's purpose v.11. Pilate consequently sought to release Jesus but soon sent him to be crucified v.16 because he feared the charge against himself of treason against Caesar v.12.

The indictment he wrote above the cross was "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS" v.19 which was copied and translated into three different languages v.20 which explains the slightly different wording given in the other three gospels. The message, however, was the same - that Jesus was the King of the Jews - but the chief priests wanted the charge changed to "He said, I am the King of the Jews". Both of these statements are true - Jesus is the king of Israel and he declared this plainly of himself as it is a vital element of the gospel of the kingdom of God which he preached.

When Jesus was crucified, a number of specific Old Testament scriptures were fulfilled: the soldiers took Jesus' clothing and gambled for his robe v.24 (Psa.22:18); they gave him vinegar to drink v.29 (Psa.69:21); they did not break his legs vs.32-36 (Psa.34:20); they pierced his hands and feet v.37 (Psa.22:16 and Zech.12:10); and, he was crucified with malefactors v.18 and buried in a rich man's sepulchre v.38 (Isa.53:9).

The only close associates of Jesus near him as he died were the apostle John v.26 and his own mother, who must have been devastatingly distressed, especially as she did not know the reason for the crucifixion in the purpose of God, although she had been forewarned of the agony (Luk.2:35). Jesus was concerned for his mother and he committed her to the care of John v.27. The crucifixion took place on the day of preparation for the feast of unleavened bread which was an holy day and a

Sabbath rest v.31 with the weekly Sabbath following the next day. This explains the apparent error sometimes put forward that Jesus could not have been in the grave for three days and three nights because there are not that many days and nights between Friday and Sunday when he rose from the dead. In fact, Jesus was crucified on the Thursday, the day of preparation, with Friday being the high day Sabbath, Saturday the normal weekly Sabbath, and Sunday the first day of the week when Jesus rose early in the morning. It is also important to note that it was Jesus himself that was in the grave v.42 because some think that, while his body was in the tomb, somehow he was somewhere else. In fact, Jesus himself was buried for three days and then he himself was brought to life again.

Week 43

John 20

Day 300

Early on the first day of the week certain women, including Mary Magdalene, came with spices to the sepulchre v.1 and found Jesus no longer there. On hearing this news Peter and John ran to the tomb vs.2-9 and like the women, were completely bewildered because they did not then know the scriptures

which foretold his death and resurrection v.9. Jesus had awoken from the sleep of death, and he met first with Mary Magdalene vs.14-16. This took her completely by surprise, but once she realised that it was Jesus, alive again, she wanted to hold him and not let him go (“touch” in v.17 means “cling to” in the original Greek). Jesus, however, told her he had not yet “ascended to his Father”, meaning he had not been transformed into the divine nature, which is the promise of God to all his saints. This clearly happened very shortly afterwards, for others were permitted to touch him later that same day.

Jesus’ body was changed instantly from our mortal, corruptible nature to immortality and incorruptibility (1Cor.15:52-54) and, like the angels, he could then move imperceptibly from one place to another, for those that are born of the Spirit are able to move like the wind (John 3:6-8). That same evening he met with his disciples, suddenly and unexpectedly, and gave them irrefutable evidence that it was he himself alive again - not a phantom or an illusion - but the same real Jesus whom they loved vs.20-23. Thomas was not present on that occasion and found difficulty believing that Jesus had actually risen from the dead vs.24-25, but he was completely convinced when Jesus came to them again vs.26-28. We have not had this privilege but we do have the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection in the witness of the scriptures, written both before and after the event, to convince us And Jesus declared: “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” v.29.

The Holy Spirit moved John to write of only some of the miracles which Jesus did, but enough was written that we might believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God vs.30-31. Unfortunately, many people have accepted a corrupted gospel and know nothing of Jesus as the Christ i.e. the king of Israel, and they view him, not as God’s Son, but as a God, coequal with the Father. It is vital, however, to believe the truth concerning Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God so “that believing we might have life through his name” v.31.

Week 43

John 21

Day 301

Jesus met again with his disciples, this time in Galilee, where he performed a miracle which represents the events to take place when he returns from heaven. The apostles fished all night v.3, and they were the ones appointed by Jesus to be “fishers of men”. Without Jesus they caught nothing so he helped them fill the net with fish v.6 and, likewise, by obeying his command they have caught a great multitude of men and women in the gospel net. These will be brought to Jesus in the morning when the night of the world’s history comes to an end. Jesus performed a similar miracle at the beginning of his ministry, but on that occasion the net broke (Luk.5:6) to represent the fact that not all who are called are faithful and will be chosen. But on this final occasion all the fish were brought safely to shore because they represent the redeemed who will be accepted by Jesus and will eat a meal with him in the kingdom of God v.13 (Luk.12:37).

After the meal, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him vs.15-17 and Peter was greatly distressed because this echoed his threefold denial of Jesus

a few days earlier. Peter did truly love Jesus and was forgiven for his denial because he was completely repentant and was thereafter a fervent and courageous servant of the Lord. He did feed Jesus' sheep as the Lord instructed v.17 and followed him v.19 even to death by crucifixion vs.18-19. Peter asked what would happen to John, but Jesus said he was not to know but if it was Jesus' desire for him to remain alive until he returned then this would happen v.22. These words were misunderstood by others v.23 but, although John did not remain alive until Jesus' actual return from heaven which has not yet occurred, he did live to a great age and to the end of the Mosaic era of which Jesus spoke so much, and he wrote the final message received from Jesus which forms the Book of Revelation.

John could have written much more in his Gospel than he did, then all the libraries of the world at that time could not have contained all the scrolls required v.25. We should be grateful to God for inspiring John to write what he did because by believing his words we can have life through Jesus' name.

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Week 44

Introduction

After his resurrection, Jesus showed his disciples from the Old Testament scriptures that the suffering he had endured, including his crucifixion, and the glory to come when he will sit upon the LORD's throne in Jerusalem over Israel were foretold by God (Luk.24:25-27). It is very likely that he directed their attention to some of the chapters we read this week for so many of them clearly specify the suffering of Christ and the glory to follow. This provides evidence that the scriptures are truly the word of God and gives us a glorious hope for the future.

Week 44

Isaiah 45

Day 302

In this chapter Isaiah spoke of a world ruler who would live about two hundred years after this prophecy was given. God knew that the Jews would increase in wickedness, be led captive to Babylon, and remain there for seventy years. The Babylonians would be overthrown by the Medo-Persians after which a king of Persia, named Cyrus, would decree that the Jews could return to their land. The actual event is recorded in Ezra but here God speaks of Cyrus long beforehand as if he was alive in the days of Isaiah. God would raise up Cyrus, establish his dominion over Persia and the whole Middle East, and cause him to show favour to Israel vs.1-4. This shows how we can read history and see the hand of God at work, not only long ago, but also in our own times, for example, when the LORD has again controlled events in the world to cause his people of Israel to return to the land. The British foreign secretary made a similar declaration concerning Israel and the land in 1917 after the British army had gained control of it, saying that the Jews could have a national home there. Cyrus did God's will without realising it v.5 and this is a demonstration that the LORD is in complete control of the earth. He has created all things so that the conditions in the earth are according to his purpose.

People rejected the truth that God creates evil v.7 and invented a god of evil called "the Devil" and "Satan" but there is no other supernatural power than the LORD

v.6. As our Maker, he is the Potter, we the clay, and he may do with us whatever he desires v.9, and his word tells us of his will so we can conform our lives to it. Although there is much evil in the earth, it will ultimately be eradicated. God desires righteousness to flourish v.8, and our wisdom is to do righteousness in these evil days so that when Jesus comes to establish righteousness in the earth we may be invited to live and reign with him.

God declared in advance what he will do with Israel v.11 and he specifically raised up Cyrus to fulfil his will with his people vs.11-14. It seems that the LORD is a God who hides himself v.15 so that many doubt whether he exists, but there is abundant evidence in the scriptures of his existence. He created the earth for a specific purpose, i.e. to be inhabited v.18 and ultimately this

will be by people who are all righteous and immortal. His purpose is with Israel who will be saved with an everlasting salvation v.17 and all of us are invited to become “Israelites indeed” in Christ. God has spoken openly, calling upon men to seek him v.19 and be saved

v.22. His word has gone forth in righteousness and it will accomplish its purpose without fail so that unto him “every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” v.23 and all Israel shall be made righteousness in the LORD and shall glory v.25.

Week 44

Isaiah 53

Day 303

The questions: “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?” v.1 foreshowed that people generally would not believe the gospel. The preaching of the gospel was prophesied in this section of Isaiah, and the apostle Paul quoted chapter 52 verse 7 concerning the bringing of glad tidings, showing that rejection of the gospel was anticipated (Rom.10:15-16). This chapter should really begin at chapter 52 for verses 7-15 speak of Christ and his proclamation to the people but, say the apostles: “Who hath believed our report?”

The apostles proclaimed Jesus was “the King of Israel” and “the Son of God” but men saw no beauty in him v.2 and despised and rejected him v.3. However, the purpose of God included, not only the glory to come, but also Christ’s suffering for sin on our behalf, e.g. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” v.6. These verses describe in the most poignant terms the suffering of Jesus on our behalf: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” vs.4-5.

As the New Testament confirms, Jesus willingly accepted the excruciating agony of the cross to save us, entering no protest but remaining silent before his tormentors

v.7 (Acts 8:32-35). He had no natural children for he was cut off out of the land of the living so that none could declare his generation v.8, yet when the LORD made his soul an offering for sin he saw his seed v.10. The explanation is that God’s purpose involves a great many men and women being counted as Christ’s seed, even though they have no blood relationship with him. By belief and baptism they are born again and are constituted “in Christ” and are the children which God has given him (Heb.2:13). He bare their sins and made intercession for their transgression, pouring out his life unto death v.12, and because he did this in obedience to his Father, God promised to “divide him a portion with the great” v.12 and in due course Jesus will be the ruler of Israel and the world.

God extends his offer of eternal life to everyone who will hear his word and believe, and no money is required v.1 so everyone can take advantage of it. However, people generally spend their money on other things which, in the end, do not satisfy v.2 and then they die. If we incline our ear to God's word we shall live for ever because he will then include us in the covenants of promise he has made, e.g. to David and his seed v.3. Paul cited this verse to prove that the righteous, having been raised from the dead, will no more return to corruption (Acts 13:34). Jesus, as the seed of David, will be a leader and commander to the people and all nations will submit to him when he comes in glory vs.4-5. God promises we can live and reign with Jesus when he returns to sit on David's throne, therefore we should believe and obey while we have the opportunity. If we delay, it may be too late: certainly death extinguishes all opportunity for those who have not responded to the word of God. Therefore: "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous

man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" vs.6-7.

The purpose of God is marvellous and completely different from what men and women expect naturally, for his thoughts are above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways v.8 even as the heavens are higher than the earth v.9. He has sent forth his word to develop men and women who are obedient to his will, and the word will accomplish this purpose v.11. Just as the rain falls and returns by evaporation, causing plants to flourish in the earth v.10 so the word of God sent into the earth develops righteousness, and ultimately the earth will be filled with people who will be "trees of righteousness" (Isa.61:3). Instead of people being like thorns and briers they will be like fir and myrtle trees to the glory of God's name v.13, and to those who respond faithfully to his word, God says: "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills [the nations, great and small] shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" v.12.

The Redeemer shall come to Zion (59:20) and this chapter speaks of the transformation in the fortunes of Jerusalem when Jesus returns to her as king. For so long the darkness of ignorance in things divine has covered the earth and the people have been in gross darkness v.2 but the LORD will arise upon Jerusalem as a great light v.1 and the Gentiles will come to her to be enlightened v.3. Jerusalem's children, who are the people of Israel, will return to her from all parts of the earth vs.4-8. Britain has an important part to play in this for the LORD long ago singled her out as "Tarshish" to bring the Jews back to the land v.9. Bible students have therefore watched the development of Britain to observe how she would perform the work outlined

for her more than two thousand years ago. It was no accident that Britain took the Holy Land from the Turks at the end of the first world war and issued a declaration that she would aid the establishment there of a national home for the Jewish people. Thereafter, Britain was granted the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine, protected it from the Nazis in the second world war, and administered it until the State of Israel was established in 1948. Guided by God's word, we can also look for Britain being the first nation to respond to Christ's call to return all Jews to the land.

Jerusalem will be rebuilt v.10 and all nations will submit to the authority which emits from her vs.11-12. Jesus will rule from Jerusalem with a rod of iron and no nation will be able to resist his will. Jerusalem and her people have often been afflicted, but the attitude of the nations will change dramatically when the city is exalted v.14. The treasures of the Gentiles will be brought to her v.16, her rulers will be righteous v.17, and the LORD will make her glorious vs.13-14. She has suffered violence throughout history but this will cease and never occur again v.18. Jerusalem will be glorious and filled with the brightness of the LORD vs.19-20. Her people will be "all righteous" and inherit the land for ever so that the LORD is glorified v.21, and he will make Israel a strong nation v.22.

Week 44

Isaiah 61

Day 306

After his baptism, Jesus returned to Nazareth, went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and began to read this chapter but stopped suddenly in the middle of verse 2, saying: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" Luk.4:16-21. The first verse and the first clause of verse 2 describe his preaching the gospel by the Spirit of God. Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at his baptism and thereafter he released people from their burdens and proclaimed the acceptable year of the LORD. Now is the time when we can respond to the gospel and make ourselves acceptable to God, but when Jesus returns it will be a time of vengeance and of reward, as described in the rest of verse 2 and verse 3 which Jesus did not then read out to the people because the fulfilment was long in the future. He will come in the day of vengeance when the wicked will be punished, but he will bring joy to the faithful whose natures will be made beautiful and they will be planted permanently in the earth as trees of righteousness to the glory of the LORD v.3.

The land of promise will also then be transformed v.4 and God's people exalted v.6. Israel have been greatly shamed during the centuries but they will have double blessing when they again dwell in the land and will experience everlasting joy v.7. The LORD who loves judgment will direct their work in truth and make an everlasting covenant with them v.8 so that they are of such a character and recipients of such great blessings that the Gentile nations will acknowledge they are the blessed of the LORD v.9. In verse 10 the Spirit again expressed beforehand the thoughts of Christ in which he contemplates the joy set before him. He is the bridegroom and the

saints his bride who, like him, will be clothed with the garments of salvation. The saints, therefore, can also look forward to the same joy with certainty for, just as he causes the plants to spring forth out of the earth, the LORD will “cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations” v.11.

Week 44

Isaiah 62

Day 307

Jerusalem is central to the purpose of God and he will not rest until the city is exalted in the earth and his righteousness goes forth therefrom v.1. The Gentiles will then see his righteousness and glory v.2, and Jerusalem will be the jewel in the crown v.3. The status of Jerusalem will be completely changed. It will have a new name: “The LORD is there” v.2 (Ezek.48:35). It will no more be “Forsaken” or “Desolate” as in the past but will be called “Hephzibah” i.e. “my delight is in her”, and “Beulah” i.e. “married”. Jerusalem and the promised land will prosper and flourish during the Millennium and this is expressed by God using as a figure the marriage of Hezekiah, the king in Jerusalem at the time, and his wife, Hephzibah, for the LORD will delight in his land as Hezekiah delighted in his wife v.5.

The saints who love the LORD and look for the fulfilment of his purpose are commanded to be like watchmen v.6 and pray for Jerusalem ceaselessly until he makes her a praise in the earth v.7. The LORD has sworn he will do this v.8. He will prepare a way for his people to return v.10 and send a call throughout the earth for them to come to the land, for the Lord Jesus will be there as their king and saviour v.11. He will come with a reward (Rev.22:12) and will have a great work before him v.11 the result of which will be that Israel will be acknowledged by the nations as “The holy people, the redeemed of the LORD” v.12.

Week 44

Isaiah 65

Day 308

Israel were God’s chosen people to whom he gave his word and sent his prophets to guide them in the way of righteousness, but they would not hear and turned to wickedness and idolatry, provoking the LORD to anger vs.1-7. Nevertheless, he would not cast off Israel for ever but would preserve a remnant who would return to his land and dwell therein when he causes it to flourish vs.8-10. The LORD promises to bless his faithful servants and he contrasts their destiny with that of those who wickedly departed from him and forgot his holy mountain v.11. They had done evil before the LORD and therefore they suffered punishment vs.12-15, but his faithful servants will eat the good of the land and sing for joy of heart vs.13- 14.

The time will come in the purpose of God when all the former troubles will be forgotten and all people will bless themselves in the LORD v.16. He will create a completely new political and ecclesiastical constitution in the earth - new heavens and new earth v.17 - with Jerusalem as its capital which will be filled with joy and rejoicing v.18. The LORD will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in his people. No suffering will come to her again v.19, and he calls upon us to

be glad and rejoice at the prospect of this new creation v.18. The apostle Peter cited this passage and declared of Christ's disciples: "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" 2Pet.3:13-14.

In the beginning, as recorded in Genesis, people lived much longer than now, and this will also be the case in the future. A person dying at the age of one hundred will be considered a child v.20, suggesting a lifespan of approximately seven hundred years. The saints, however, who will rule with Jesus will not die at all as they will be immortal. Israel have suffered a history of affliction with Gentiles robbing them of their houses, lands, and produce, but this will never happen again

v.22. They will no longer labour in vain or bring forth for trouble for they will be acknowledged as the blessed of the LORD, and he will respond to their appeals immediately vs.23-24. Another remarkable change, and also a return to the natural state of affairs in the beginning, is that even the animals will not hurt each other in God's holy mountain for "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock" v.25. God has the power to solve all the problems of the earth and through Jesus he will do so, bringing righteousness, peace and blessing to mankind and transforming the environment of the earth for his glory.

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