

FRIENDS OF THE NAZARENE©

An on-line Biblical Studies Magazine

“They Follow the Lamb No Matter Where He Goes”

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Nazarene Saints Publishing© is a Bible research group for a better Scriptural understanding. We are dedicated to the preservation and publishing of Christian writings which aid *Friends of the Nazarene*© to "follow the Lamb no matter where he goes." (John 15:14; 3 John 14; Revelation 14:4) The *Friends of the Nazarene*© are a spiritual community of Messianic Christians. We are apologists dedicated to the defense of the truth that "God is One" and not three. The Bible is our creed. We view this "God-breathed" Book as inspired alone, while the thoughts of men about it are not. We wish to show respect for our multitude of Christian brethren. (1 Peter 3:15)

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A “DIFFERENT CHRIST”

“This Jesus”

Once there was only one Jesus. It was that Jesus from Nazareth, son of a carpenter. Later, because there were many Jews named “Jesus” [or, Joshua], one inspired writer actually refers to “the Jesus” to draw a distinction with all those others named “Jesus.”

After his miraculous three year ministry and then hanging from an execution Tree, there was no question who this Jesus was, because there was a sign over his limp head with his name on it –

“Jesus, King of the Jews.” [Matthew 27:37] After his notorious resurrection and reappearance among his disciples, it was clear this was the same “Jesus” and not a different one, an imposter. [Luke 24:13-31; John 21:4-12]

At the ascension of the Nazarene the angels referred to him as “this Jesus.” [Acts 1:11] During his Pentecostal speech to international Jews, Peter also refers to “this Jesus.” [Acts 2:32, 36] Later, when Paul began to preach, it was “this Jesus.” [Acts 17:3] Paul, likely the writer of *Hebrews*, assured the Jews that “this Jesus” would not himself change “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” However, would some arrive and introduce “a different Jesus” or “another Jesus” – different from the one reported in the Gospels?

A “Different Jesus”

Yes, Paul writes of those “ministers of Satan” who would bring “a different Jesus.” He does this when writing to the congregation in Corinth:

*“The god of this Period of Time has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that the illumination of the glorious good news about the Christ may not beam forth. ... Indeed, if another arrives preaching **a different ‘Jesus’** – not the One we preached – or a different spirit – you receive them; or, **a different ‘Gospel’** than what you accepted, you easily tolerate such. ... Such persons are pseudo apostles, deceitful workers, refashioning themselves into Christ’s apostles. And no wonder, for Satan himself continues to transform himself into an ‘angel of light’. It is not great thing, then, if his servants also continue to refashion themselves as ministers of righteousness.”* [2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; 11:4, 13-15 NSR; KNX]

Clearly, the future Church could expect different forms of Jesus – “a different Jesus” as part of “a different Gospel.” After two thousand years, now entering the 3rd Millennium, there have come to be many different types of Jesus different from that Jesus of the Gospels. What are some of these?

A JESUS PART OF A TRIUNE GOD. It took only several decades to elevate that Jesus from Nazareth into “God.” No where does the real Jesus ever claim to be God, and when his Jewish opposers accuse him of such, he gives an answer it would be impossible for God to give: “*I can do nothing of myself.*” [John 5:19-38; 10:30-36] Not once “during the days of his flesh” was Jesus ever characterized as God. Indeed, he was described as being “less than God.” [See notes on Hebrews 2:7, 9 and Psalm 8:4 in Nazarene Commentary©.]

Though it is true that in his pre-existence and his post resurrection, the designation “god” [or, divine] is used of the one who became Jesus. [John 1:1, 18] This was in harmony with the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 which addresses the glorified Messiah as “Mighty God.” The word “god” was used with a wider application than it does today. [See Nazarene Commentary© and *Error of the Trinity.*]

As the decades past it was not long before what later evolved into the Trinity became Church dogma under the rule of the pagan Roman emperor Constantine. Today the major sects of Christendom no longer believe in the Jesus of the Gospels, but rather a divine person as a part or mode of a Triune Godhead. This Jesus has become a Greek Jesus after the manner of Pythagoras and Aristotle: “For, as the Pythagoreans say, the world and all that is in it is determined by the number three, since beginning and middle and end give the number of an ‘all’, and the number they give is the triad [Greek *triados*; English = “trinity”]. And so, having taken these three from nature as (so to speak) laws of it, we make further use of the number three in the worship of the Gods.” (*Aristotle, On the Heavens, Book I, 1*)

THE SOCIAL OR POLITICAL JESUS. Another “Jesus” which has prominently developed in the 20th Century is the “social” Jesus as part of the Social Gospel. This modernist view rejects the claims of Jesus while holding to some of the key principles of the Jewish teacher. While hardly believing in Jesus himself, they use this new Jesus for social reform or revolution. In the process others come to hate Jesus because he is associated with some of the evils of political and so-called humanitarian agendas.

THE MONEY JESUS. In the last few decades another – a different Jesus – has raised its head. This is the Jesus of the so-called Prosperity Preachers. One cannot watch the TV religious channels without hearing a well-coiffured preacher in a thousand dollar suit trying to prove from the Bible that God wants you to be rich. Essentially the message is: “If you give to me God will bless you.” He emotionally waves his hands with gold rings and an expensive Rollex watch. He drives, or is driven in, a luxury automobile. He lives in a million-dollar mansion. Often he has a Lear jet at the ready.

A jet pilot for such a Get-Rich-Preacher confessed to this author that he had flown the evangelist to Mexico to meet with “kept women” at his disposal. There they indulged in “day-time luxury” with “eyes full of adultery.” [2 Peter 2:13, 14] He then flew back to California and continued his TV appeals for more money.

Unfortunately these scam artists use another Jesus to make their point.

They ignore that the real Jesus taught a non-materialistic, simple way of life in God’s service. Jesus taught it was not possible to serve both God and Riches. [Matthew 6:10, 19-34] The Nazarene taught his own disciples to “sell everything they owned and give to charity.” [Luke 12:32, 33] Any who claim to be of such a “little flock” are duty bound to follow the example of the apostles. [Acts 2:44, 45; 4:32-37] [Compare the article “*Who is the Little Flock?*” in Nazarene Commentary©.

THE CORPORATE JESUS. The above is often associated with this different Jesus – the Jesus of the corporate conglomerate. Some religious organizations have become so big and powerful they own expensive real estate worth billions of dollars through out the world. Most of their followers have no idea how much money has been contributed — or extorted — to develop such possessions. While claiming to be of the “Little Flock” they ignore the Lord’s command, “*Sell all your possessions and give charitable gifts to the poor.*” [Luke 12:32, 33]

These sects are also characterized by a frightful control over the lives of their flocks. The flock is periodically solicited for contributions and often dunned for failure to make payments. While the majority of the flock live below medium income with many actually very poor, the religious hierarchy lives in a style far above the average church goer.

THE SHOW BUSINESS JESUS. The manager for Jimmy Swaggert once confessed to this writer: “It is nothing more than show business, that is all it is. Show business.” Anyone who watches the TV evangelists — with their multi-million dollar investments in space satellites — will see music, music, music, and more music. This ranges from rap-music to screaming gospel music. Not content with this, some have special productions such as the muscle-men for Jesus who demonstrate God’s spirit by blowing up hot-water bottles until they burst. Or, crushing blocks of ice and concrete with their foreheads just as martial artists do. Where one finds this in the Gospels is a real puzzlement.

THE INSPIRATIONAL JESUS. There is a multi-million dollar business motivated by profit to produce more “inspiration music and literature” hundreds of larger than the Bible itself. This fosters adherents who spend more time reading inspirational work in a variety of forms, while having never read the Bible once. One may go into a “Bible” and see it filled, not with Bibles, but inspirational music CDs, inspirational cards, inspirational books, etc., etc., etc. Though these are

not necessarily harmful, they are if they distract the average Christian from reading his or her Bibles.

THE GAY JESUS. If the above was not enough to demonstrate the many different gospels, is the modern attempt to convince the world that Jesus was homosexual — the reason he was surrounded mainly by men. There are gay clergy with gay churches producing their own gay literature. This “different Jesus” is so strong that it has become “politically incorrect” to even mention such.

FOLLOW THE REAL JESUS. Jesus of Nazareth called, *“Come follow me.”* By reading the Gospels several times the genuine disciple of the Nazarene will discover the real Jesus and avoid the counterfeits. The real Jesus will always walk in uncompromising truth, a blameless and virtuous life-style, a love for even enemies, a strong stand against hypocritical religious leaders, and a burning devotion to God. The real Jesus calls out:

*“Come to me all those burdened by toil
and I will refresh you.
Pick up my yoke and learn from me,
because I am meek and humble in heart.”*
[Matthew 11:28, 29 NSR]

==== END ====

“BEHOLD, A RED HORSE!”

“I did not come to put peace on earth – but a sword!” [Matthew 10:34]

Revelation 6:3 *And when the Lamb opened the Second Seal I heard the Second Living Creature, saying: “Come!”*

Revelation 6:4 *A fiery-red horse came forth.*

*It was granted to the one riding
to remove peace from the earth.*

A great sword was given him

so they will slaughter one another. [Nazarene Saints Rendering (NSR)]

A rabbi was asked why he did not believe Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. His answer was: “When Messiah comes there is to be universal peace. Since there is no universal peace, Messiah has not come. Jesus was not the Messiah.” Such sincere Jews are not mistaken in looking to the Messiah to bring such universal peace. For the Hebrew Bible foretells such universal peace.

The Psalmist declared: *“O God, give the King [Messiah] your judgments, and your own justice to the royal son. [Messiah] will judge Your People impartially and Your poor ones with equity. The mountains [of God] will bring peace to the people. ... [King-Messiah] will descend like refreshing rain upon green meadows. ... During his reign the righteous will flourish and there will be an abundance of peace as long as the moon endures.”* [Psalm 72:1-3, 6, 7]

The Prophets foretold: *“They shall beat their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation will not raise sword against nation. Neither will they learn war any more.”* [Isaiah 2:4] *“And [Messiah’s] name shall be Prince of Peace.”* [Isaiah 9:6] *“They shall not hurt or ruin in all My Holy Mountain.”* [Isaiah 11:9]

Such godly Jews erred, however, in that they did not discern that earth-wide peace would not come immediately upon the beginning of Messiah’s reign. For the Psalm foretold: *“Yehowah said to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand UNTIL I MAKE ALL YOUR ENEMIES a stool for your feet.’”*

[Psalm 110:1] A 1st Century rabbi quoted and applied this psalm to Jesus the Nazarene upon his ascension to heaven. He wrote: *“For he must reign until the last enemy is subdued. ... Of course, we do not yet behold all things subjected under his feet. However, we do behold Jesus crowned with glory.”* [1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 2:8, 9; 10:12, 13]

Indeed, it was Daniel the prophet who saw in his vision: *“I beheld someone like a human being arriving with the clouds of the sky. And he arrived and approached the One Most Venerable. The [angels] brought him near [to God]. And he was given a realm and dignity and a rulership.”* [Daniel 7:13] Just so, the early Christians believed Jesus of Nazareth began his reign upon his ascension to heaven. In fulfillment of Psalm 110:1, Paul writes about the degree of Christ's kingly authority upon his ascension to heaven:

“I also wanted you to realize the supreme magnitude of His power operating through we who believe. This power results from the highly controlled energy exercised when The God raised the Christ from the dead, ‘enthroning him at His own right hand’ [Psalm 110:1] in the celestial realms. Christ reigns over every government, authority, dynasty and lordship. His entitlement ascends above every title ever given. This is so, not only now in this period of time but also in that New Age in the future. The God of our Lord ‘subordinated the entire universe beneath Christ’s feet’. [Psalm 8:4, 5] The Father gave him complete control and leadership over his Body.” [Ephesians 1:19-22 NSR Paraphrase]

Thus, universal peace was not to come to earth immediately upon the beginning of the reign of Messiah. According to Psalm 110:1 Messiah must rule waiting until his Father finally subjected every enemy beneath Christ's feet.

This is in harmony with the apocalyptic vision John saw as the Lamb opened the first Seals of the Small Bible. The first seal revealed the enthroned and triumphant Messiah ready to ride forth to “complete his conquest.” This process of subjugation would parallel the ride of the second red horse. This horseman was seen “taking peace away from the earth so that they would slaughter one another.” [Revelation 6:3]

In order to take peace away from the earth, there must be a period of time in human history when there was a relative degree of peace throughout the Biblical world. Not accidentally, nor coincidentally, did Christ ascend to heaven to begin to rule in one of the few periods of peace in the last two thousand years – the *Pax Romana*.

This prediction of war parallels Jesus' own at Matthew 24:6, 7. Christ must rule “among his enemies” (Psalm 110:1; 1 Corinthians 15:25) and these can expect centuries and millenniums of war after war. History since 33 AD is replete with the suffering of war. Such a prediction might seem impossible given the current *Pax Romana*. It has been estimated that in the last two thousand years there have been 200 years of peace during the *Pax Romana*. In the year 1997 there are an estimated 100 conflicts world-wide. Compare the “war” in Daniel 9:26.

Christ cannot be blamed for two thousand years of war and slaughter. He does not use his “sword” against innocent victims. He will finally use his triumphant sword on the battlefield of Armageddon. (Revelation 16:14-16; 19:15, 19-21)

20 million were slaughtered in the Great War and 50 million in WW II. The numbers in all the wars for two millennia must be staggering. This “slaughter” is blamed on Babylon the Great, not the King Jesus Christ. (Revelation 18:24)

Thus, the apocalyptic red horse of Revelation 6:3, 4 proves that following the enthronement of Messiah in fulfillment of Psalm 2 and 110, not peace, but war can be expected. What else would run parallel with the reign of Messiah since 33 A.D.? Compare the article, *“Behold, a black horse!”*

==== END ====

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE:** World-wide many Christians will observe the annual celebration of the Lord's Supper on April 18 or 19. Among these will be many small house church groups and many other individual Christians without a local fellowship. These may well observe the Memorial alone and we are confident our Lord is with them just as he is with larger groups. Below are a number of places where the Memorial will be celebrated.

Southern California *Friends of the Nazarene* will meet April 18 at 7 PM at yet an undisclosed location. If you wish to attend this commemoration of Christ's death write Mark Miller 250 D South Lyon #521 Hemet, CA 92543; or, call [909] 925-9140. The Memorial will be conducted by Luis Padilla, including the talk, "*Proclaim the Death of the Lord.*" That same week there will also be a baptism for those wishing such, and a Bible Discourse on Sunday, 10 AM, "*Follow the Lamb – Who Will Lead Mankind in the 3^d Millennium*" by Mark Miller.

Almeria, Spain -- Memorial April 18th. Sunday, April 23 the Bible Discourse "*Follow the Lamb – Who Will Lead mankind in the 3^d Millennium*" will be given by Ralph Slaney. Any interested would need to write in advance to: *Friends of the Nazarene*, Ralph Slaney, Apartado de Correos 669, 04080 ALMERIA, SPAIN. Telephone: +34 649 869 122 (Spanish speaking); +34 686 456 704 (English speaking).

Nashville, Tennessee - (615)731-2162. At present there is a small group of three families in Nashville, Tennessee. (615) 731-2162 for any who may wish to meet with us. At present we have not cemented our plans. **Betty & John Lawrence** twomaineiacs@att.net

San Francisco Bay Area -- I am planning on hosting a memorial observance at my home this year, on April 18. You can include that in your newsletter. The location is in the San Jose area. The number where I can be reached is (408) 296-6465. Callers should ask for Chris and mention it is "regarding the Memorial."

NOTE TO "FRIENDS" – IF YOU WISH YOUR MEMORIAL ANNOUNCED IN THE APRIL ISSUE PLEASE SEND THE INFORMATION.

- **NEW *Friends of the Nazarene* MEETING IN HEMET, CALIFORNIA:** The Friends of the Nazarene in southern California began their first regular weekly *Discussions and Devotions* group meeting, February 27. The Bible Discourse was given by Mark Miller on the subject, *Behold, a White Horse!* The Q&A "Search the Scriptures" portion on the week's Bible reading Matthew chapter 5 was conducted by Luis Padilla. The Bible Discourse for March 5 is a Q&A on *Nazarene Principles 1 and 2*. The Q&A on *Search the Scriptures* will be on the weeks Bible reading Matthew chapter 6.
- **THIS ISSUE OF *FRIENDS*** is being produced in a hard copy form in a new format with B&W photos. It is about 22 pages long and will be available for the cost of reproduction and mailing -- \$3.00.

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WHAT IS THE "REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST"?

The Bible's last book, called *Revelation* or *Apocalypse*, has awed Christians for two thousand years. Most consider the entire book of 22 chapters as the "revelation of Jesus Christ." But, is that the case? A closer look may demonstrate that the true "revelation of Jesus Christ" begins with chapter 6. Why do we say this?

Introduction

Revelation 1:1 opens the book by saying, according to the literal Greek, "*A revelation of Jesus Christ, which The God gave to him to show his slaves those things bound to occur suddenly.*" What was this *apocalypsis*? And, when did The God give it to Jesus?

The first few words are clearly not those of Jesus Christ, but rather the beloved apostle John writing to seven congregations in Asia Minor. [Revelation 1:1-7] Did Jesus direct or speak these words directly? Not according to the introduction to Revelation: "*And [Jesus Christ] sent forth his angel to show his slave John in signs.*" [Revelation 1:1] Through Revelation this Angel speaks for both The God and His Son Jesus Christ.

In Revelation 1:8 this apocalyptic Angel speaks for God Almighty. John then speaks and relates his hearing this Angel instruct him to write seven epistles regarding what he sees as a testimony to Jesus. [Revelation 1:9-11] John then describes what he sees in a vision of "a Son of Humankind" walking among seven lampstands with seven stars in his hand. The Angel speaks for Jesus Christ and John is told to record: a) those things which have already happened; and, b) those future things. [Revelation 1:12-20]

Seven Letters to Seven Stars

What follows is part of those things that are contemporary with John: seven letters written to seven stars. [Revelation chapters 2 and 3] These letters are not strictly directed to the congregations, but rather to the seven stars. Each begins with an address to this "star." The Greek is in the singular "you," meaning an individual star. It is most likely that, following the example of the Jewish synagogue, these "stars" were the presiding officers of those congregations. That is, each of the presbyters or church presidents of the Christian congregations.

The plural "YOU," likely referring to the whole congregation only occurs in Revelation 2:10, 23 though the Christian epistles conclude with a common address: "*Let the person who has an ear listen to what the Pneuma says to the [seven] congregations.*" Therefore, the bulk of the Christian epistles is specifically directed to the Presiding Minister of the congregations. So, in the first case of the Presiding Minister of Ephesus, it is – not the congregation – but the "star" who has "left his first love." [Revelation 2:4]

Likely John saw to it that these seven epistles were sent out to the seven congregations with their seven presiding Stars. It is also likely that the rest of Revelation – from chapters 4 to 22 – was copied seven times [or more] so that each of these congregations received the entire book of Revelation.

A Vision of the Celestial Throne Room

Revelation chapters 4 and 5 are not part of the "revelation of Jesus Christ which The God gave to him." These relate the experience of the apostle John's visionary exaltation to heaven itself. In this John sees the Throne and the One sitting on the Throne – God Almighty [the Alpha and Omega, or *The One Who Was, The One Who Is, and, The One Who Is Coming*]. [Revelation chapter 4] Chapter 5 is the most interesting for in it we can see when Jesus Christ first receives the actual "revelation which The God gave him."

With a clear vision the elder disciple beloved of the Nazarene describes what he sees:

RV 5:1 *Then I saw in the right hand of the enthroned One
a Small Bible written on both sides of the pages.
It was sealed shut with 7 Seals.*

RV 5:2 *I saw a strong angel heralding in a great voice:
“Who is worthy to open
and read the Small (Apocalyptic) Bible
and to break its Seals?”*

RV 5:3 *And no one was able to open the Small (Apocalyptic) Bible
nor any able to look into it,
not in heaven or on earth or under the ground.*

RV 5:4 *I began to weep greatly
because no one worthy was found
who could open the Small (Apocalyptic) Bible
and examine it.*

RV 5:5 *And one of the Presbyters said to me:
“Weep not. Look! the Lion of the tribe of Judah,
the root of David,
has conquered to open the Small (Apocalyptic) Bible
and unlock its 7 Seals.”*

RV 5:6 *I saw in the middle of the Throne-room,
among 4 Living Creatures and the Presbyters,
a Lamb as though slaughtered stood.
The Lamb had 7 horns and 7 eyes.
The eyes are the 7 spirits of The God
which have been sent forth in all the earth.*

RV 5:7 *Then the Lamb immediately approached
and took the Small (Apocalyptic) Bible
out of the right hand of the enthroned One.*

[For details on the verses above see *Nazarene Apocalypse* in Nazarene Commentary©.]

It seems fair and clear that it is here at this moment when The God gave to Jesus Christ the “revelation.” The vision is surely parallel to Daniel 7:13 when “someone like a Son of Humankind” arrived in heaven to gain entrance to the Celestial throne-room in order to receive his kingly throne. [Ephesians 1:19-22; Hebrews 2:8, 9; Revelation 3:21] This would be consistent with the picture of Jesus as a “slaughtered lamb.”

The Actual “Revelation of Jesus Christ”

If we accept the above as a reasonable approach then the actual “revelation of Jesus Christ” begins when the glorified Nazarene first opens the “small Bible.” Thus the real Revelation begins with Revelation 6:1, “*And when [the Lamb] opened the first Seal ...*” Thus, the Revelation is thereafter divided into three to four parts: a] the Seven Seals (chapters 6-9); b] the Seven Trumpets (chapters 10-13); and, c] the Seven Plagues (chapters 14-19). A fourth section involves the finale of the Messianic King’s millennial reign with his Bride. (chapters 20-22) [Compare the article *Seal Not the Book!* In Nazarene Commentary© CD-ROM.]

This Small [apocalyptic] Bible with its Seven Seals is the only Christine epistle we have from Jesus Christ, written and composed after his ascension to heaven in 33 CE when he first received what he had not possessed before – “a revelation of Jesus Christ which The God gave him.” [For more details see the complete work *Nazarene Apocalypse*© in the *Nazarene Commentary*© CD-ROM.]

==== END ====

PROCLAIM THE DEATH OF THE LORD “UNTIL HE ARRIVES!”

OUR LORD'S COMMANDMENT TO OBSERVE HIS DEATH.

Though our Lord as an obedient Jew celebrated numerous "holy conventions" he gave only one command to his disciples regarding the observance of his death. While celebrating the Passover by eating unleavened bread and drinking red wine, the Nazarene turned to his apostles and told them: *"Keep doing this in remembrance of me."* (Luke 22:19 NWT) Some decades later Paul was to write: *"For as often as you eat this loaf and drink this cup, you keep proclaiming the death of the Lord, until he arrives."* (1 Corinthians 11:26 NWT) This simple celebration of partaking of bread and wine has been called "The Lord's Supper," or, "the Eucharist," or, "Memorial," or, "Holy Communion." But, what was the reason and background to this newly introduced emblematic supper?

MESSIAH'S DEATH AS A SIN OFFERING FORETOLD.

The Prophets foretold a Jew would be killed by slow death involving his heart, hands and feet. This Jew is surrounded by violent oppressors, and some of them will cast lots on his clothing. Many scholars, including physicians, state that the inspired hymn of Psalm 22 describes a man dying on an executioner's stake or tree. Psalm 22:1, 6-10, 14-18 reads in part:

"My God, my God why have you forsaken me? ... In you our ancestors put their trust. ... I am a worm, not a man, scorn of mankind, contempt of the people: all who see me jeer at me, they sneer and wag their heads, 'he trusted to Yahweh, let Yahweh set him free! Let Him deliver him, as he took such delight in Him.' ... It was you who drew me from the womb and soothed me on my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, from the womb I have belonged to you. Trouble is upon me, and no one to help me! Many bulls are encircling me. Lions ravening and roaring open their jaws at me. My strength is trickling away, my bones are all disjoined, my heart has turned to wax, melting inside me. My mouth is dry as earthenware, my tongue sticks to my jaw. you lay me down in the dust of death. A pack of dogs surrounds me, a gang of villains is closing in on me as if to hack off my hands and my feet. [Note: LXX: "they pierced my hands and my feet"] I can count every one of my bones, while they look on and gloat, they divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." (New Jerusalem Bible)

This messianic Psalm was attributed to King David of Israel and was composed a thousand years before the torturous death of Jesus the Nazarene. The Gospel of Matthew records the Christ calling out at his death, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46) The Beloved Apostle reports how the soldiers handled the garments of the Nazarene: *"Now when the soldiers had impaled Jesus, they took his outer garments and made four parts, for each soldier a part, and the inner garment. But the inner garment was without a seam, being woven from the top throughout its length. Therefore they said to one another: 'Let us not tear it, but let us determine by lots over it whose it will be.' This was that the scripture might be fulfilled: 'They apportioned my outer garments among themselves, and upon my apparel they cast lots.' And so the soldiers really did these things." (John 19:23, 24 NWT)*

A SIN OFFERING.

Not only the manner of Messiah's death was foretold but the reason was made very clear. Seven hundred years before the death of Jesus, Isaiah foretold. This prophetically portrays a Jewish man rejected by his own people and records the foretold events from their standpoint:

"Like a sapling (Messiah) grew up before Him (Yahweh), like a root in arid ground. he had no form or charm to attract us (Jews), no beauty to win our hearts; he was despised, the lowest of men, a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering, one from whom, as it were, we (Jews) averted our gaze, despised, for whom we (Jews) had no regard. Yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing, [Note: "he was being pierced for" (NWT)] ours the sorrows he was carrying, while we thought of him as someone being punished and struck with affliction by God; whereas he was he was being wounded for our rebellions, crushed because of our guilt; the punishment reconciling us fell on him, and we have been healed by his bruises. ... Ill-treated and afflicted, he never opened his mouth, like a lamb led to the slaughter-house. ... Forcibly, after sentence, he was taken . . . cut off from the land of the living, at his having been struck for his people's (Jews) rebellion? he was given a grave with the wicked, and his tomb is with the rich. ... (Yahweh) gives his life as a sin offering. ... After the ordeal he has endured, he will see the light and be content. (Yahweh speaks): 'By his knowledge, the upright one, My servant will justify many by taking their guilt on himself. Hence I shall give him a portion with the many . . . for having exposed himself to death and for being counted as one of the rebellious, whereas he was bearing the sin of many and interceding for the rebellious.'" (Isaiah 53:1-12 NJB)

Phillip the missionary read and applied this prophecy to Jesus. (Acts 8:32, 33) Peter himself was to quote from these words and apply them to the Christ. (1 Peter 2:24) Peter also applies the sixteenth Psalm to the resurrection of Jesus. (Acts 2:24-34; Psalm 16:8-10) So, hundreds of years beforehand the prophets foretold the death of the Messiah as a Sin Offering, or Sin-bearer, to bring a "righteous standing to many."

PASSOVER.

This whole idea of a sacrifice as a sin-offering was dramatically portrayed in the deliverance of the he from Egypt. Exodus chapter 12 records the historical events when Yahweh delivered His people from slavery. The splashing of the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the door posts was to point forward to a greater Passover Lamb. (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; Revelation 5:6)

Peter alludes to this "lamb" of the Passover when he writes: *"For you know that the price of your ransom from the futile way of life handed down from your ancestors was paid, not in anything perishable like silver or gold, but in precious blood as of a blameless and spotless lamb, Christ."* (1 Peter 1:19 NJB) Paul does the same: *"For our Passover as been sacrificed, that is, Christ; let us keep the feast, then with none of the old yeast and no leavening of evil and wickedness, but only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."* (1 Corinthians 5:7, 8 NJB)

Beginning around the year 1513 BCE the Jews were to celebrate annually this deliverance by keeping the Passover as commanded by Yahweh:

"On the tenth day of this month they are to take for themselves each one a sheep for the ancestral house, a sheep to a house. ... And it must continue under safeguard by you until the fourteenth day of this month [Nisan 14], and the whole congregation of the assembly of Israel must slaughter it between the two evenings.[from sunset to dark] ... And they must eat the flesh on this night. They should eat it roasted with fire and with unfermented cakes along with bitter greens. ... And you must keep the festival of unfermented cakes [Passover], because on this very day I must bring your armies out from the land of Egypt. And you must keep this day throughout your generations as a statute to time indefinite.' ... And it must occur that when you come into the land that Jehovah will give you, just as he has stated, then you must keep this service. And it must occur that when your sons say to you, 'What does this service mean to you?' then you must say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Passover to Jehovah, who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when he plagued the Egyptians, but he delivered our houses.'" (Exodus 12:3, 6, 8, 17, 25-27 NWT)

So, for over 1,500 years the Jews kept this memorial Passover until the arrival of the Messiah. As an obedient Jew Jesus the Nazarene kept this feast and the night of his arrest he said to his disciples: *"I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."* (Luke 22:14, 15 NWT) So, this was about the 1,546th observance of the Passover as God had commanded Moses. How fitting an occasion for the Nazarene to introduce another emblematic meal to take the place of the Passover.

KEEP DOING THIS AS A MEMORIAL OF ME.

Three Gospels record the institution of the Lord's Supper. Combining all three accounts they read: *"As they continued eating, Jesus took a loaf and, after saying a blessing, he broke it and, giving it to the disciples, he said: 'Take, eat. This means my body which is given in your behalf. Keep doing this in remembrance of me.' Also, he took the cup -- in the same way after they had the evening meal -- having given thanks (eucharistias), he gave it to them, saying: 'Drink out of it, all of you; for this cup means the new covenant, my blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out in behalf of many for forgiveness of sins.'" (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19, 20)*

Showing this command to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ was still an ongoing celebration decades later, Paul wrote: *"For I received from the Lord that which I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was going to be handed over took a loaf and, after giving thanks, he broke it and said: 'This means my body which is in your behalf. Keep doing this in remembrance of me.' he did likewise respecting the cup also, after he had the evening meal, saying: 'This cup means the new covenant by virtue of my blood. Keep doing this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this loaf and drink this cup, you keep proclaiming the death of the Lord, until he arrives."* (1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NWT)

In First Corinthians chapter eleven Paul deals with certain divisive matters within the congregation. Possibly the Corinthians decided to make the Lord's Supper something a little more elaborate with considerable drinking, for Paul says, *"When you come together to eat (the Lord's Supper), wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home."* (1 Corinthians 11:33, 34 NWT) So, it is difficult to see this simple celebration as something like an agape feast. (Jude 12 = agapais) But, when and how often should the Lord's Supper be celebrated?

"AS OFTEN AS YOU DO IT."

Paul himself gives no details on the question of when and how often to keep the Memorial or Eucharist. It is likely the tradition was so well fixed by custom that he did not need to discuss these matters. Today various churches celebrate "communion" daily, weekly on Sundays, or once a month, as on the first Sunday of each month. Others keep the Memorial annually on Nisan 14. The date is determined generally by the full moon nearest the Spring equinox on or near the Jewish Passover.

Given the setting of the original emblematic meal instituted by Jesus as well as the Jewish custom to celebrate religious festivals yearly, it would seem the Christian "Passover" might well have been annually also. There is nothing in the Christian Bible to indicate this but there is a strong early tradition which indicates the first Christians annually kept Nisan 14 as the proper evening for the Lord's Supper.

The Third Century Christian historian Eusebeias records a division which developed regarding Easter: *"It was at that stage (189 AD) that a controversy of great significance took place, because all the Asian dioceses thought in accordance with ancient tradition they ought to observe the fourteenth day of the lunar month (Nisan 14, the day of the Passover full moon) as the beginning of the Paschal festival -- the day on which the Jews had been commanded to sacrifice the lamb: on that day, no matter which day of the week it might be. ... All of these kept the fourteenth day of the month as the beginning of the Paschal festival, in accordance with the Gospel. ... Anicetus could not persuade Polycarp not to keep the day (Nisan 14), since he had always kept it with John (the apostle) of our Lord and the other apostles with whom he had been familiar. ... We may*

point out to you they keep the feast on the same day (Nisan 14) as we do, for we send letters to them and they to us, to ensure that we keep the holy in harmony and at the same time." (The HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, Eusebius, pp 229-234)

M'Clintock and Strong agree: "The churches of Asia Minor celebrated the death of the Lord on the day corresponding to the 14th of the month Nisan, on which day, according to the opinion of the whole ancient Church, the crucifixion took place." Historian J. L. von Mosheim wrote: "The Christians of Asia Minor were accustomed to celebrate this sacred feast, commemorative of the institution of the Lord's supper, and the death of Jesus Christ, at the same *time* when the Jews ate their Paschal lamb, namely on the evening of the *fourteenth day* of the first month [Nisan]. . . . They considered the *example* of Christ possessing the force of law." Therefore, the evidence seems to strongly favor an anniversary on Nisan 14. This date is calculated by the full moon nearest the Spring equinox, March 21 and generally agrees with the Jewish Passover.

"UNTIL HE ARRIVES."

However "often" the Lord's Supper was to be kept, the commemorative meal should continue on the part of Nazarene Saints "until Christ arrives" in his foretold Parousia. If Christ had returned already, then the Supper should cease. Since the King has not returned, Christians ought to continue to observe the death of Jesus by keeping the Lord's Supper.

SECOND CENTURY DESCRIPTION:

Justin Martyr Chapter LXV.-Administration of the Sacraments

"But, we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptized [illuminated] person, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine, and he talking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgiving, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. This word Amen answers in the Hebrew language -- so be it. And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.

Chapter LXVI.-Of the Eucharist.

"And this food is called among us the Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, and both flesh and blood for our salvation. ... For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, said, 'This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body; and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, he said, 'This is My blood'; and gave it to them alone."

GATHERING TO EAT THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Paul knew Jesus had instituted the emblematic meal after sundown on the Jewish Passover, Nisan 14. Therefore, Paul calls it deipnon or "supper," that is, a meal held in the evening, even as Jesus had done. (1 Corinthians 11:20 KJV, NEB) Paul stresses the simplicity of the affair in his description and warning to the Corinthians. It is not a physical "meal" but a spiritual one in which the "partaker" communes or shares with fellow Saints and with God. Paul had written earlier: "The blessing-cup which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ; and the loaf of bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? And as there is one loaf, so we, although there are many of us, are one single body, for we all share in the one loaf." he calls this "the Cup of the Lord" and the "Lord's table." (1 Corinthians 10:16-22 NJB)

Today, indeed, "there are many of us." This "us" is now divided into schisms and heresies even as it was in Corinth. In the introduction of his letter, Paul had stated the problem which existed then as well as today: *"But, brothers, I am encouraging you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to speak the same thing and not have schisms among you but make adjustments in the same mind and in the very same opinion. ... The Christ has been divided."* (1 Corinthians 1:10, 13 NSR) In the same context of the Lord's Supper Paul mentions this problem of sectarianism and the reason for it: *"When you do gather in meeting it is not for the better but for the worse. First, when you do gather for meeting I hear schisms [divisions, cliques, factions] exist among you. ... For it is binding there must be heresies [sects, differing groups, divisions] so those approved among you may be manifest."* (1 Corinthians 11:17-19 NSR)

Paul's statement that sects or schisms (heresies) must exist to manifest the approved echoes the Nazarene parable of the Wheat and the Tares. (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43) According to Jesus his own "kingdom" was to become divided by wheat and weeds. These "sons of the Kingdom" and "sons of the Devil" are to "grow together" (syn-auxanenethai) until the angelic harvest upon the Parousia or Return of the Master. Thus, throughout the centuries, the millenniums, within the "kingdom of the Son" the Lord's Supper has been observed even as the Jews observed the Passover. However, this Holy Eucharist has been celebrated in ways which reflect this disunity. How can Nazarene Saints at this time "partake" (1 Corinthians 10:21 KJV, RSV) in a manner which the Lord would approve?

PARTAKING WORTHILY.

Paul includes such an exhortation in the context of his discussion on the proper way to observe the Lord's Supper. There is a worthy and unworthy way to partake. To partake worthily Paul exhorts a certain disposition and attitude: *"Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty regarding the Body and the Blood of the Lord. But, let each person examine self and then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For the person eating and drinking without discerning the Body eats and drinks self-judgment."* (1 Corinthians 11:27, 28 RSV) It seems clear that this self examination has to do with a proper regard for what the emblems symbolize: the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus. So, we come back to faith as the main criteria of a worthy celebration.

Regarding the attitude of the forerunners of modern Baptists, the Anabaptists, one historian wrote concerning their attitude toward the Lord's Supper: "To them it was the most solemn act in which a Christian can participate, involving the renewal of the believer's covenant to devote his life unreservedly to Christ's service." (R. J. Smithson)

No doubt such a celebration in commemoration of our Lord's death may include hymns (Matthew 26:30) and prayers of blessing along with the partaking of unleavened bread and red wine. The night of Jesus' last Passover he spoke at length with his disciples. (John chapters 13-17)

There could be nothing wrong with a talk which dealt with the meaning of the Lord's Supper as well as subjects like those chosen by the Nazarene: humble service, love, separation from the world, and unity. On the other hand, if one is alone then one may wish to read Psalms 22 and 116-118 (the subject of the Passover hymns) or Isaiah 53 and John 13-17. Prayerful meditations

which arouse deep faith in the Sin-offering of Christ will enhance the spiritual atmosphere of this sacred moment.

Contemplating on what the Sin-offering of the Christ has done and will do for you should provide an intense spiritual evening. By the grace of the Father through His Son your sins have been forgiven. (Romans 5:1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 16-19; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 2:13; 3:13) The burden of guilt has been lifted and your conscience cleansed. (Acts 2:38; Hebrews 9:11, 12, 14, 15, 24, 26, 28; 10:1-3, 14, 19-22) As a result of your repentance, conversion and faith you stand before the Throne of Grace in that same state Adam enjoyed before the Fall --- in that same condition as the Son rose from the baptismal waters. A transcendental "peace" settled on you as you came to have "no consciousness of sins anymore." your hearts were "sprinkled from a wicked conscience and (your) bodies bathed with clean water."

With this cleansed and perfected state a breathtaking hope has settled down on your regenerated heart and mind. As Paul writes: "you may receive that inner illumination of the spirit so that you may know what is the hope which His call to you inspires." (Ephesians 1:18 PME, WEY; compare also Romans 8:24, 25; Colossians 1:5, 27; 4:4; 1 Peter 1:3, 4, 13) This "one hope" (Ephesians 4:4) of a heavenly inheritance contains within itself the over-powering and awesome prospect of seeing our God as well as His Son. (1 John 3:2, 3; Revelation 22:4) During the Lord's Supper meditate on this glorious hope and discern within the loaf and the cup the power of His grace and the depth of Christ's love.

The Jews generally celebrated the Passover as family groups. So, whether to celebrate alone, with a small group, or among a larger Christian association it is a personal decision. But let each one "discern the Body" in these emblems by faith. Let each saint prayerfully examine or scrutinize his own Christian character, the depth of his faith, and the godly works which come from such faith. The God of our Lord Jesus bless your genuine hearts and the loving spirit you show during this holy season. Amen.

[NOTE: In the year 2000 AD the *Friends of the Nazarene* and others will celebrate the Lord's Supper April 18/19. If you wish to celebrate the Memorial with the *Friends of the Nazarene* in southern California please call [909] 925-9140 as space is limited. See ANNOUNCEMENTS in the March issue of *Friends* for other locations in the world.]

==== END ====

OUR LORD TAUGHT THE "RAPTURE"

Our Lord Jesus once left his human footprints on the beaches of Galilee. He taught his closest disciples that he would return to heaven. However, he made the promise that he would Return again and then "receive them home to himself." The Nazarene teaches this promise in John 14:1-3 - "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in The God. Trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many abodes. If it were otherwise I would have told you. For I am going away tgo prepare a place for you. Also, if I should leave and prepare a place for you, I am coming again I will receive you home to myself [PARALEMPHOMAI] so that where I am you also will be."

This is not the first time Jesus had used the word PARALEMPHOMAI. He had used it just a short time before when telling his apostles about his future Return or Parousia. In Luke 17:34, 35 [as well as Matthew 24:39-42] Jesus uses the same word he does later on Passover night with his apostles - PARALEMPHTHESETAI - when he promises that at his Parousia when two sleeping

in one bed, one would be “taken along” and the other abandoned. One of two women at work would be “taken along” and the other abandoned.”

This PARALEMPHOMA is very much related to the same word to describe the rapture [being caught away] and ascension of the Lord Jesus Acts 1:9-11 – ANALEMPHTHEIS. Some believe this ascension of the Lord in the clouds is the same event described later in Revelation 12:5 when the Celestial Woman receives home to herself her Son by his being “raptured.” There the Greek word is HERPASTHE. This word means to be snatched quickly, or in Latin, raptured. Our Lord was himself raptured off this earth into the clouds of the sky. Would any of his future disciples also experience such a rapture? Note what Paul taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and that he claims this was the “word of the Lord” and should be a source of encouragement among Christians.

[Reproduced from the Nazarene Commentary© on 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.]

The Word of the Lord

1 Thessalonians 4:15 For this we declare to you ***by the word of the Lord***, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. **1 Thessalonians 4:16** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; **1 Thessalonians 4:17** then we who are alive, who are left, ***shall be caught up together with them in the clouds*** to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. **1 Thessalonians 4:18** Therefore ***comfort one another with these words***. [Revised Standard Version]

We declare to you by the word of the Lord: What may Paul mean as the source of what he is about to declare? It is possible he has a revelation on the matter. We note how the *New Jerusalem Bible* renders this: “*We can tell you this from the Lord's own teaching ...*” If this be a correct view then we can find within the teachings of the Nazarene two groups of Saints, one living and one dead, and at some future moment will then benefit by being raised. We do discover this in John 11:25, 26, “*I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live [a] by a resurrection] and whoever lives [living] and believes in me will never die [b] a living person who escapes death.*” (NJB)

This may be understood to an allusion to Daniel 12:1, 2 where two such groups are seen: a) one awakened from sleep; and, b) another group rescued from a great oppression. Paul reveals such a mystery later to the Corinthians when he again mentions such a mystery -- 1 Corinthians 15:50-52. Is it possible this mystery was revealed to Paul (an inspired understanding of Daniel 12:1, 2 and John 11:25, 26) prior to the time of writing to the Thessalonians and thereafter the Corinthians? If we accept the view that Paul was aware of that teaching revealed in John 11:25, 26. The book of Daniel (including Daniel 12:1, 2) was to be sealed to the end-time or last days of Jerusalem. (Daniel 12:9) Paul is living at that precise time and may be among the first to gain such “knowledge.” (Daniel 12:4)

For more details see *Nazarene Principles*©, *Nazarene Apocalypse*© (*Nazarene Commentary* ©2000) under 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

The End-time Saints

We who are alive: Some make the error that this means those living Christians in Paul's day. Paul's use of “we” may be editorial and refer to certain Christians in general. Note “we” in 2 Corinthians chapters 4 and 5. Paul may refer to “the living” of John 11:25, 26.

Who are left until the coming of the Lord: Here the Greek PAROUSIA is used. Some render

"left until" as "survive." (CON, NW) This is misunderstood by the Thessalonians (and others) that some of them would live until the Parousia. This becomes a problem and is answered in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2. These would be the end-time Saints of Daniel 7:22 (Daniel 12:1) alive at the historical moment of Christ's Return.

Shall not precede those who have fallen asleep: The living (surviving) Saints will not go before the dead Saints. How does Paul know this order of events? This is the order in John 11:25, 26 -- first the dead believers are resurrected; and, then those alive never die. 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52 suggests similar order: "*We shall not all die. ... for the Trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised and we will be changed.*" Paul states here that this is a sacred mystery and infers he knows it by revelation.

It is interesting to note that in the context of judgment there is a common phrase, "the living and the dead" -- with but one exception (Romans 14:9) -- the "living" noted first. (Ruth 2:20; Acts 10:42; 1 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5) When the Lord arrives for judgment there are two groups: the living and the dead. For reasons explained elsewhere in *Nazarene Commentary* ©2000 there are good reasons to suggest the living end-time Saints receive their judgment in the flesh while the dead Saints must be raised to the *parousia*-judgment. (Revelation 7:1-4)

The Lord himself will descend from heaven: The Hebrew Bible has numerous examples of Yehowah descending to the earth, often in the form of His representative "Angel of Yahweh." How does Paul know the Lord Jesus will return to earth by descending from the Sky. (The word "heaven" often means "sky.") He surely could have learned John 14:1-3 and Acts 1:9-11 from other disciples. Surely in his close association with the Jewish physician Luke he would have learned of the episode recorded at Acts 1:9-11. On the other hand Daniel 7:22 may strongly infer that the "Lord" will leave the celestial realms as described in Daniel 7:13, 14 and "arrive" toward the Saints to deliver them from the Small Power. Compare John 6:64 and Ephesians 4:9, 10.

A cry of command: May this "command" be that voice mentioned in John 5:28 and John 11:43. By comparing the Greek of Revelation 18:4 [EXELTHATE] with that of Isaiah 49:9 [EXELTHATE] (also Isaiah 48:20) we may think this would be the command, "*Come out!*" Actually we need not guess at this for we have the actual words in Revelation 11:12, "*COME ON UP HERE!*"

The archangel's call: Some see this an inference that the name "Michael" belongs to the heavenly Lord. (Compare Daniel 12:1 and Revelation 12:7. Note the phrase "his angels" at Matthew 25:31 and Revelation 12:7. It is worthy of note that Michael the archangel speaks twice in the Bible and in both cases it includes, "*Yehowah rebuke you, Satan!*" (Zechariah 3:2; Jude 9) This descent of the Lord Jesus is a historic moment in his conquest over the Devil. (Hebrews 2:14) Note the call Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 15:55, "*Death, where is your victory?*"

With the sound of the trumpet of God: Compare Matthew 24:30-31, 1 Corinthians 15:50-51 and Revelation 11:15, 18. What must this sound be like?

The dead in Christ will rise first: That is, those "believers" of John 11:25. The Christian dead are only raised or resurrected upon the Return of Messiah. (1 Corinthians 15:23; Matthew 24:30, 31) Thus it is called the "first resurrection" at Revelation 20:4, 6.

Then we who are alive, who are left: Those rescued or delivered at Daniel 12:1, 2. Those Christians alive and still waiting expectantly for the Return of Christ -- the end-time Saints. These are described in Revelation chapter 7 as symbolically a large crowd of 144,000 who "come out of the great oppression" to serve God in His celestial Temple. For details see *Nazarene Apocalypse*© in *Nazarene Commentary* ©2000.

The Mystery of the Rapture

Shall be caught up: The Greek is a very long word worthy of special note: HARPAGESOMETHA, meaning literally, “we will be snatched.” Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #726 suggests, “carry off by force,” claim for one's self,” or “to snatch out.” This is something that happens suddenly, even violently as a rape. Indeed, it is possible the first handful of letters in the Greek is corrupted into Latin as “rape.” Jerome in the fourth century used such a related word in his Latin *Vulgate* resulting in something closer to “rapture.” And so the source in English for the teaching of the Rapture. One may reread Daniel 7:22, Daniel 12:1, John 11:26, 1 Corinthians 15:51 and see the Rapture there.

Together with them: Actually the Greek is seldom captured by most translators: HAMA SYN which literally means “at the same time together with.” In affect this says, “simultaneously together.” Can anyone argue that the resurrection and rapture of the Saints stretches over a whole generation or time, or more, over many centuries of time?

In the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: Two words seem to make it clear where the Lord is located at this moment: in the atmosphere or the sky -- “clouds” and “air.” This “meeting” is described in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 as EPI-SYNAGOGES [= a higher gathering]. The image echoes Acts 1:9-11. Note how this is repeated in Revelation 11:12, “*And they heard a great voice out of the Sky say to them: ‘You, ascend to (us) here!’ And they ascended into the Sky in the cloud.*”

We shall always be with the Lord: One of the two great expectations of the Christian Church. The other is mentioned at Revelation 22:3, 4. This is the only hope offered by invitation to all Christians. (Ephesians 4:4)

Words of Comfort Until the Parousia

Comfort one another with these words: This portion of Scripture has been among the most comforting to the Saints throughout nearly two-thousand years. It has not lost a bit of its thrilling expectation and grows more powerful with each passing day. It is a text read at the memoriums of millions those Christians who have fallen asleep. One ancient memorial said: “Sleep, dear friend, a temporary rest is granted you.”

==== END ====

WHAT SOLUTION TO THE WORLD'S JUSTICE PROBLEMS?

(by Ralph Slaney in Almería)

A Desperate Situation

During the early part of February this year a tragic event took place. In a small town in the south of Spain a young woman was walking through a local market at about 11 am. when she was witness to a petty robbery. Encarnación López was struck in the stomach by a knife toting Moroccan. She died shortly afterward in the arms of her mother. The man was an immigrant worker on one of the local plantations. He was later arrested on suspicion of murder.

This however was the second event of its kind within a week. Earlier a local Spanish man had a dispute over the throwing of stones at a dog during which a Moroccan immigrant worker stuck him down and killed him. A bystander going to the assistance of the dying man was also assailed upon by the murderer and himself killed. The police have also arrested this murderer.

These events coming close on the heel of each other have given rise to anti-Arab feelings which have escalated to running street battles, riots and protests. Despite massive police reinforcements shops and houses belonging to other north Africans have been set on fire or otherwise wrecked. At one stage a mob of over 5,000 local people were involved. The main autovia was stormed by the crowds and the passage of traffic on this major trunk road, which passes the town, connecting all the major cities along the south and east coast to France from Gibraltar was barricaded by burning tyres. Some immigrants were pulled from their cars only to see them destroyed before their very eyes.

The protests, despite the police presence has stated to spill over into the neighbouring towns of Roquetas de Mar and Santa María. A larger than usual police presence was also to be seen in the nearby provincial capital city of Almería.

(The situation at the time of writing 8th. February can only be said as very uncertain with the police requested to protect the immigrant population with all the major politicians calling for tranquillity. What will result we are yet to experience.)

What Went Wrong

In retrospect it can be seen that with heightened prospects by African workers to improve their otherwise meagre existence, conditions in their own country being far from ideal, it must come as a shock to still be paid poorly and have to live in primitive conditions. Made to queue for long hours to acquire the government papers that allow them to work in the field or under the stifling plastic green houses. All of these things add to the frustrations and depression of living away from their families.

Yet without these workers the local economy would in all probability fail as there would be insufficient hands to cultivate and harvest the ever increasing agricultural industry in this part of Europe.

But can a government or country allow crimes like murder go by without some sort of retribution? Can individual criminals be seen to receive less punishment than the victim's relatives and friends receive pain, with no means of compensation?. All these, and many more questions are raised at such tragic times. For many there seem no solutions.

Yet it can be envisioned that with proper conditions afforded not just the immigrant workers, as if they should be treated differently, but for all people living together a peaceful and happy lives could be lived. Sufficient food and housing and justice for all. That crime does not go unpunished, with proper sentences that equate to the violation of the law. This would go along way to ease racial and political injustice. May the people of El Ejido come to terms with what has happened and return to peaceful lives. Return indeed, for up to now like most Spanish people, they have been a very tolerant and welcoming people.

God's View-point for a Permanent Solution

Right from the beginning of the human society it has been necessary to provide man with certain basic needs. God provided Adam and Eve with a fine start in the renowned Garden of Eden. And even when they rejected His rule he demonstrated the deep-seated quality of care by providing them with some initial clothing. Thereafter ensuring that mankind was able to make its way upon the Earth, providing sunshine and water and an Earth capable of providing food, despite their abandoning the directives of their Creator.

God inspired Solomon to write that a sentence against a bad work, that is not exercised swiftly, causes the heart of a man to become worse. [see Ecclesiastes 8:11] This delay of justice, when experienced by an innocent witness, particularly a friend or relative of the injured, and upon seeing no appropriate reprisal, can lead to mental corruption. He may become consumed by

hated or even take the law into his own hands. This usually only adds to the evil, generating hate and revenge.

During the age of the early Israelites God provided them with His Law. While it was adhered to conditions flourished, yet as they drew further from it they suffered greatly. Take for example the famous reign of King Solomon. For forty years he reigned, yet only for part of it did the people rejoice. God blessed Solomon greatly. He was given wisdom, power and wealth far beyond that of any humans then living. So great was his situation that the visiting Queen of Sheba declared that "she had not been told the half of it." With so much going for Solomon it is hard to believe that he caused his own demise by rejecting his patron for the false gods of his multitude of wives. So great was the reversal of the conditions that following his death the civil unrest resulted in catastrophe for the united kingdom of Israel with a rift splitting the kingdom apart. Never again was Israel to see a united kingdom. [see 1 Kings 10:1 to 1 Kings 12:20]

Why is it that man always finds himself at war, suffering starvation, living under pitiful conditions? Simply, he has ignored his Creator. *"They have acted corruptly towards him; to their shame they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation. Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?" (Deuteronomy 32:5-6 NIV = New International Version)* Not only has mankind acted in an unwise and foolish manner but he seems bent and determined not to accept God back into their lives.

What should stimulate a Christian's heart as he becomes acquainted more thoroughly with his hope of eventually seeing his Creator God is the realization that God forces nobody to do good or to do bad. The Christian like all other humans are free moral agents. The accomplishing of good and evil is for each individual to decide, and then to direct his life in accordance with his deliberate intentions. The fact is that each individual must decide his given cause. God neither tempts or directs that a particular person does evil, in fact: *"Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed."* (James 1:14 NIV) In which ever way an individual acts in this life, that is how God will judge him. This thought is encapsulated in the Revelation at chapter 22 verse 11: *"Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."* (NIV) For the Christian who continues to fight the fine fight a magnificent reward is in store. The opportunity of endless life in the service and presence of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in his heavenly realm. Then, when the New Jerusalem descends to the Earth in preparation the Messianic rule they will also become benefactors on behalf of their God and Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to bring a glorious new world of opportunity the Earth's inhabitants as kings and priests. Therefore lift up your heads, lift up your voices and give praise and thanks to your Creator for all the good things He has provided and will yet provide.

As for justice it will be a centre-point of the Messianic age echoing the prophet Isaiah: *"This is what the LORD says: 'Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed.'" (56:1 NIV)* The book of Micah in chapter 4 verse 4 also gives us an appealing vision which could well describe Earth under God's Kingdom: *"Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig-tree and no-one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken."* (NIV)

So while we wait for our hope we can pray for the afflicted in our present time and also pray that the world leaders may have wisdom and compassion in dealing with them, we also can store up in our hearts the desire to help humanity, and most certainly help where we are able right now. For the time will come when all honest-hearted Christians will join with the Lord Jesus Christ to bring joys beyond imagination to the people of the Earth.

==== END ====

“AGREE TO DISAGREE” – A Biblical Principle? *“You should all speak in agreement.” [1 Corinthians 1:10]*

Nearly two-thousand years ago, the apostle Paul wrote, *“The Christ is divided.”* [1 Corinthians 1:13] He continued to explain the reason God permits such divisions: *“For it is a necessity that heresies exist among you that the approved may become manifest.”* [1 Corinthians 11:19 NSR] As the 3rd Millennium begins Christianity is fractured into over 20,000 sects and organizations, not counting isolated house churches independent of the major denominations.

Because of this severe splintering of Christianity, some groups have developed a cafeteria style organization. Some of these claim no creed or belief system at all. Either verbally or in practice they have one particular credal statement: “to agree to disagree.” As a result their groups have no doctrinal barriers to fellowship. They insist this is a mark of true Christianity motivated by a love that tolerates any belief.

As a result some in these groups may believe one thing, while others hold to opposite, or even contradictory, views. Many have been attracted to such an open and free liberalized form of Christianity. Some would reduce Jesus Christ to one single principle – “love one another.”

As appealing as this position is to many who are tired of the doctrinal divisions and arguments in Christianity, what does the Bible really teach? Is the principle to “agree to disagree” something one can identify with Christ and his inspired disciples? In other words was the early church a loose fellowship of house churches, each with independent and divergent doctrines and beliefs? Or, was the primitive Nazarene community marked by a doctrinal unity despite wide spread house churches?

Let us examine, first what the Bible says in general and then specifically what Jesus taught. Also, how did Paul, Peter, Jude and John view these matters. Did they all “agree to disagree”?

Bible Counsel to Agree

First, we must observe that the phrase “agree to disagree” does not appear in the Bible. It is not a specific Scriptural teaching. Rather than put for the idea of “agree to disagree” the Bible simply encourages “agreement.”

The Hebrew Bible itself laid the foundation for agreement among worshippers of Yehowah. Proverbs 14:9 states this principle: *“Among the upright ones there is agreement.”* [NWT] In effect, this would seem to mean that the upright, or righteous, would be marked by “agreement.”

One of the Hebrew prophets suggested the very same thing when Yehowah asked: *“Can two walk walk together, except they be agreed?”* [Amos 3:3 KJV]

The Christian Bible agrees with these principles. The inspired writings of the Nazarene’s disciples stated the same – true worshippers must be in agreement. When we examine Jesus, Paul, Peter, Jude, and John we will see than rather state the principle “agree to disagree,” they disagreed with others who worshipped the same God. First, what about the Nazarene? Did he accept everyone despite their doctrinal beliefs? Did he simply follow the rule “agree to disagree”?

Did Jesus “agree to disagree”?

No where does Jesus utter any words that come even close to “agree to disagree.” Jesus was a Jew and a member of the congregation of Israel. He weekly attended the Jewish synagogue. He was present for annual conventions such as Passover and Pentecost. Just like Christianity today,

Judaism was divided into several schisms. Two of these – though having contradictory views – did work together on some matters affecting the whole nation of Israel.

For example, the Sadducees did not believe in angels or the resurrection, while the Pharisees did. The Sadducees only accepted the first five books of Moses and rejected the rest of the Hebrew Bible, while the Pharisees accepted the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. Did Jesus embrace these divergent views urging that they all find unity by “agreeing to disagree”?

In one confrontation when the Pharisees brought accusations against the disciples of Jesus – rather than argue “to agree to disagree” -- the Nazarene quoted Isaiah 29:13 against them: *“This people [Israel] honors me with their lips but their heart is distant. Their worship is worthless because they teach human commandments as doctrine.”* [Matthew 15:9 NSR] So, rather than telling his disciples: “Look, let us love one another and try to get along. Let us agree to disagree,” he told them some very much different. Matthew 16:11, 12 records the disposition of Jesus: *“Be alert regarding the ‘leaven’ of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ ... That is, the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”* [NSR]

On another occasion – rather than strive to get the Jewish teachers to “agree to disagree” – Jesus spoke most boldly against them: *“If you abide in my Word, truly you are my disciples, and you will then know the Truth and the Truth will see you free.”* And, then, *“You [Jews] refuse to listen to my Word. You originate from your father, the Devil. You prefer to do the wishes of your father. That one was a murderer from the beginning, and he did not remain steadfast in the Truth, because there is no truth in him.”* [John 8:31, 32, 43, 44 NSR] True freedom or liberation could only be achieved by remaining within the doctrinal system the Nazarene taught.

Near the end of his ministry -- when the Jewish clergy began to attack Jesus more publicly – the subject of the resurrection came up. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. Jesus did. Did Jesus make every effort to find harmony with this divergent view, encouraging the principle to “agree to disagree.” Absolutely not! Rather, he bluntly contradicted them and charge them: *“Not knowing the Scriptures or the dynamism of The God, you are mistaken.”* [Matthew 22:29 NSR]

Shortly after Jesus challenged the Jewish leadership by a question regarding Psalm 110:1, *“What is your opinion about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”* When they answered, “David,” he then asked after quoting Psalm 110:1, *“So, if David calls Messiah ‘Lord’ how can Messiah be his son?”* [Matthew 22:41-46 NSR] Rather than create harmony, he deliberately caused division and silenced these religious teachers who worshipped Yehowah. He could have just as easily appealed to love and a common faith, encouraging the rule “to agree to disagree.”

However, what about the disciples of Jesus? Had they learned that “truth was relative” and that “each person must find their own truth”? Had they been taught that love is the only single element that matters and that this should move the whole Church “to agree to disagree”?

Did Paul “agree to disagree”?

Paul’s ministry is strongly portrayed in Doctor Luke’s history *The Acts of the Apostles*. Twice in Paul’s travels the subject of the resurrection becomes a burning issue. Both the Greeks and some Jews believe in the immortality of the human soul and thus rejected the idea of a resurrection. Did Paul compromise and find a way to unity between the two doctrines? Or, did he appeal to a rule such as “to agree to disagree”? The answer is, No. [Acts 17:32; 24:15]

Indeed, in virtually every one of Paul’s epistles he either encourages Church agreement or warns of those who would teach contrary to the traditional doctrine received by the Church. To the Romans he encourages: *“However, I exhort you, brothers, to watch those who cause divisions*

and scandals against the teaching which you learned and turn away from them." [Romans 16:17 NSR]

To the Corinthian church he wrote: *"I beseech you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, that there be no schisms among you. But, rather, that you be fitly jointed together in the same mind and in the same opinion."* [1 Corinthians 1:10 NSR] No where in his writings to Corinth does he once say, "Brothers, though we disagree, out of love, can we not 'agree to disagree'" Almost a year later Paul's beliefs have not changed, for as he concludes his second inspired epistle, he writes: *"Continue to be readjusted. Be of one mind."* [2 Corinthians 13:11 NSR]

Not only does Paul not tolerate divergent views, but warns against those men within the Church who were actually agents of the Devil. Note his strong language:

"However, I fear that just as the Serpent completely seduced Eve by its craftiness, your minds may also be perverted from the single-mindedness and purity that are due the Christ. For, indeed, if another comes and preaches a different Jesus than the one we preached – or, another spirit than what you accepted – or, another gospel than what you received – you tolerate such [a teacher]. ... Such men are false representatives [of the Church], deceitful workers, transforming themselves into 'apostles' of Christ. And, no wonder! For Satan himself continues to transform himself into an angel of light. It is nothing great, then, if [Satan's] ministers also continue to transform themselves into ministers of righteousness. However, their end will be in harmony with their works." [2 Corinthians 11:3, 4, 13-15 NSR]

Paul was most determined to enter open warfare with such thinking in the Church. For just before the above he wrote: *"We do not wage a fleshly type of warfare. For our weapons are not fleshly, but powerful by The God for the demolishing of strongholds – taking down [human] reasonings, and every lofty thing raising itself up against the knowledge of The God, capturing every thought to make it obedient to the Christ."* [2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NSR] Just as there was such warfare in the early Church it does not surprise us two thousand years later to see the same battles going on.

To Paul the subject of different views in the Gospel is unthinkable. When he writes to the congregations in the region of Galatia he makes it quite clear how he feels about "another Gospel." He writes: *"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel -- not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed."* [Galatians 1:6-9 RSV] It is clear Paul is not about to compromise the Gospel. He does argue that other Christians have different views and so we must "agree to disagree." [See the Nazarene Commentary© article *"What is the Gospel?"*]

When Paul writes to Titus he also warns about those who would introduce another form of teaching or doctrine: *"You must stop the mouths of such men, for they overthrow the faith of whole families, teaching what they ought not, just for the sake of making money. ... Shun a heretical person after two warnings. Realize that such a person has been perverted, and, in sinning, is self-condemned."* [Titus 1:11; 3:10, 11 WEY, RSV] There is no comment by Paul to "agree to disagree" with such members of the church, but rather to "shun" them.

Subject of the resurrection continues to be a source of division and disagreement in the early Church. Some likely tried to bring Greek ideas into the Christian community. For example some may have said "there is no resurrection" because the soul is immortal. How does Paul deal with those who had another view on the subject of the soul and resurrection? Note one example in 1

Corinthians 15:12, 35, 36 where he calls such person – “a simpleton.” [BER] Here Paul does not suggest we accept those members of the church who hold other views on this subject. Nor does he suggest we “agree to disagree.” In the modern 3rd Millennium Church there are also those who teach the immortality of the soul. How would Paul respond to such today?

Some Christians today believe the resurrection has already started, or begun. While others hold that the resurrection will only occur upon the visible Return of Christ Jesus. Can both views be accommodated? What attitude did Paul maintain with a similar situation in his day? Note 2 Timothy 2:16-18: *“Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already. [Or, has even now taken place. (BAS)]. They are upsetting the faith of some.”* [RSV] Rather than seek unity at any price, Paul calls such a teaching as “gangrene” and those who follow such as having “swerved from the truth.” He does not compromise and encourage the brothers “to agree to disagree.” Rather, he roundly condemns those who teach differently on the subject of the doctrine.

There are those today who assert the resurrection has already begun or taken place. Some say the resurrection has been ongoing since the 1st Century. Others point to such dates as 1878 or 1918 as the time the resurrection occurred.

Did Peter “agree to disagree”?

Like Paul, Peter also did not compromise Christian beliefs in order to maintain a shallow unity of agreeing to disagree. Note Peter’s warning:

“Now just as there were false prophets among the people of Israel, just so there will also appear among you false teachers confidentially introducing destructive heresies. They will dispute the very teachings of the Master who purchased them. Thus, they will bring a quick and unexpected annihilation on themselves. Now many will join them and leave your number to follow their impure and destructive teachings. Because of this the real way of Truth will be spoken against with abuse. These false teachers will take advantage of you with words molded by greed. However, that ancient judgment is not without purpose and their destruction is not slumbering.” [NSR Paraphrase]

Peter does not suggest these teachers be welcomed to remain in the Nazarene fellowship. He does not argue for a form of unity that would leave everyone free to believe as they wished, whether this agreed with the original fundamental doctrines. Rather than encourage such an atmosphere of freedom within the Church, he warns about those who offer such freedom. 2 Peter 2:19 records Peter’s caution: *“These false teachers promise a certain liberty and freedom while they are really slaves to their own moral depravity.”* [NSR Paraphrase]

Did Jude “agree to disagree”?

Nor did Jude argue for a unity based on an agreement to disagree. Like Peter, Jude writes to warn about those teachers among the Christian community who were wandering from the Truth. Compare his words:

“For certain persons have sneaked in among you -- persons condemned by what had been previously written long ago. They are irreverent, perverting the unmerited favor of our God into loose conduct. They deny our only sovereign and Lord Jesus Christ. ... There persons are slanderers and complainers conducting themselves according to their own lusts, their mouths speaking inflated things, admiring personalities to benefit from (their) charity. But, beloved, remember the teachings previously spoken to you by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They told you that in the last time there will be

mockers driven by their own lusts proceeding from their irreverence. These are those persons who create disunity.” [Jude 4, 16-19 NSR]

Jude does not here suggest unity at any cost. Nor does he encourage, in an effort to achieve harmony, put forth any idea of “agreeing to disagree.”

Did John “agree to disagree”?

The last of the Nazarene’s apostles also copes with these splintering groups within the Church. The beloved John in his old age writes:

Young spiritual children, it is the final hour. As you have heard already, the antichrist is coming. Already many antichrists have materialized. It is from this we know it is the final hour. These antichrists abandoned us because they were never really part of us. If they really had been part of us they would have stayed with us. In order to manifest these antichrists and make it clear they were never part of us. All of you who have an anointing from the Holy One have an intimate relationship with Him. I am not writing you because you do not know the Truth but because you do know it and also that no lie springs from the Truth. ... My dearly beloved friends, do not put your trust in every ‘inspiration’. Rather, test out these ‘inspirations’ to know whether they originate with God. The need for this is because many false prophets have proceeded from the world. [1 John 2:18-21; 4:1, 2 NSR Paraphrase]

Even this late in Christianity, John nowhere argues for an agreement with these men. They are simply “antichrists” though we know from history that these included Christian sects that had taken on certain Greek ideas in Gnosticism.

How to “Speak in Agreement” Today

The key to any true agreement in the spirit of Christian liberty today is the very principle Paul applied to himself: “Do not go beyond the things that are written?” [1 Corinthians 4:6] The Bible – not human reasoning or doctrines – must be the basis for achieving agreement. However, this does not appear so simple. Why not?

Think of this seriously: There are two billions Christians in the world today. How many of these do you suppose have read the Bible once? And, how many of these have read the teachings of Jesus several times? And, how many of these have made a serious study over a considerable time? It is obvious that the vast majority of Christians are not even in a position to know for sure what were the fundamental teachings of Jesus Christ and his inspired disciples. [Compare the book *Nazarene Principles*.]

To illustrate this: one new Christian, having only begun to read and study the Bible, suddenly thought he had a good grasp of the Book of Revelation. He went on to write books over a period of many years. Today, even his own religious organization rejects most of what he wrote. Humility would seem to impose upon a new Christian a patience while learning “the Truth.”

One of the problems with Christians reaching agreement is that when they move on into a group more devoted to Biblical study, they carry with them convictions once held in their former sect. They may have never really studied such matters seriously, but rather just accepted these teachings. What should be the approach of new Christians?

It seems only reasonable that a Christian neophyte refrain from debating an assertion that he has not had enough time and opportunity to examine. It is clear that there will be those moments in our lives when we must trust to other Christians who are more experienced and mature. Whom shall we trust?

The following may be suggested as a wise list of characteristics before considering a Christian teacher [James 3:1, 2]:

- Such a teacher should be an elder who meets all the qualifications listed by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1ff and Titus 1:5ff.
- Such a teacher ought to be characterized by righteous fruit, leading a moral and virtuous life that can be an example for all
- Such a teacher should be *“Holding to that teaching in harmony with [the] faithful Word.”* [Titus 1:9 NSR] Or, KJV: holding fast the faith word as he hath been taught; MOF: holds by the sure truths of doctrine. The elder must be very familiar with the teachings of the Nazarene, able to quote and cite sizable portions. He knows where to turn in the Bible for truths on doctrine and conduct. He does not rely on his own opinion or worldly thought. He must have read the Bible several times and the Christian Bible many times. This “teaching” or doctrine, is that found in the Gospels and the writings of those inspired disciples of the Nazarene. He is not a man without an opinion, or a man who believes there is a wide range of interpretation to the “faithful word.” [1 Timothy 4:16; 6:3; James 3:1]
- Such a teacher out to be a mature Christian with many years of experience in a dedicated, or consecrated life. Generally, a man who is in his 50-70s, and who has been faithful studying the Word for many decades. Such a man should be characterized by a humble and moral life over some time. He also should be a man who – though holding his own convictions firmly – understands that some Biblical matters are not necessarily firm. In other words, he is knowledgeable and fair enough to make sure that his students understand there may be more than one view on some subjects. Also, he makes no judgments regarding those who reject the “pattern of the sound words.” [2 Timothy 1:13; John 12:47]
- Such a teacher out to produce “fine fruit” in his life and teachings. [Matthew 7:15-23]
- Finally, such a teacher ought to live a simple life after the manner of Jesus and Paul. [1 Corinthians 11:1] There should be no question that he is taking advantage of others for material gain. [1 Timothy 6:5]

Agreement can be reached in the Nazarene community when humility and love exist. Agreement can be reached when new Christians and younger persons have the attitude of Elihu: *“I am young and you men are older. I was intimidated and so refrained from speaking that I should speak my knowledge to you. I told myself, ‘Many days of experience should speak and a multitude of years should make known wisdom.’* [Job 32:6, 7 NSR] Indeed, in an age of bad manners and youthful disrespect for authority, Christian youth devoted to the Nazarene would not hesitate to observe the principle of the Mosaic Law: *“You must stand before gray hair, and you must honor the presence of an elder. You must stand in awe of your God.”* Leviticus 19:32 NSR; Proverbs 16:31]

Agreement can be reached by following this principle: There are few people without an opinion. There are few of these who think that opinion wrong. But, it is not always necessary to express such an opinion when it may cause divisiveness. As James exhorts, *“Be slow to speak.”* [James 1:19 NSR] No doubt he echoes Ecclesiastes 5:2, *“Do not be rash with your mouth, nor be hasty of heart to utter a word before God. For God is in the Heavens, and you are on earth. For this reason your words ought to be few.”* [NSR]

If each Christian teacher -- and each Christian disciple – strive by the help of God, sincere believers in these times will be able to sing the Psalm: *“Behold! How good – how delightful – for brothers to dwell together as one.”* [Psalm 133:1 NSR; Acts 4:32]

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WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Introduction

Some call it the Gospel. Others, the Good News. And some, the Evangel. Regardless of the designation, the “Gospel” is passed around by a variety of churches and sects. One hears it in the preaching of tele-evangelists, or reads it in a wide-range of writings. For many the word “Gospel” has become a simplistic statement unclearly referring to Jesus as a person. What is the “Gospel”? Not everyone gives the same answer. One group will answer that it is the good news that Jesus returned invisibly in 1874 or 1914 – or came for an inspection in 1844.

Meaning of the Term “Gospel”

The English word “gospel” is rooted in *godspel* or “good spell” and then “good story.” [God + story = god-story] The word has come to dominate either the sum of the teachings of Jesus the Nazarene, or the story of his life. The Greek word used in the Christian Bible is EUANGELIION [Mark 1:1] which literal means “well” plus “angel.” Or, a good message, an excellent story, or proclamation.

“Good News” or Gospel occurs about 120 times in the Christian Bible, occurring most often in Acts [18 times] and Galatians [15 times].

What is the meaning of the Gospel? What are the major subjects involved in the Gospel? Will a future Gospel be revealed to humanity?

Three Major Subjects Involved in the “Gospel”

The term “good news” is most often connected with three subjects: God, Jesus, and the Kingdom. [God -- Mark 1:14; Romans 15:16; 2 Corinthians 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 8, 9; 1 Timothy 1:11; 1 Peter 4:17; Jesus -- Mark 1:1; Acts 5:42; 8:35; 10:36; 11:20; 17:18; Romans 1:9; 15:19; 1 Corinthians 9:12; 2 Corinthians 2:12; 4:4; 9:13; 10:14; Galatians 1:7, 16; Ephesians 3:8; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Kingdom -- Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 16:16; Acts 8:12]

When Jesus the Nazarene used the term “good news” it was almost always in connection with the word “kingdom” – the good news of the Kingdom. [Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 16:16] It is interesting to note that neither Mark or John do this. Indeed, in the “Gospel” of John the word “good news” never occurs.

In the Nazarene’s teachings there are two kingdoms:

1. The realm or domain of his own rule as King [Matthew 13:41]
2. The heavenly Kingdom of the Father [Matthew 13:43]

It was “good news” that humans could enter this “Realm of Profession” belonging to Christ Jesus. In this context the “kingdom” becomes the same as the “congregation.” [Matthew 16:18, 28] Upon his ascension to heaven in the year 33 CE, Jesus was “installed” by God as King. [Psalm 2:6, 7; Acts 13:33; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 10:12, 13] This was in fulfillment of Daniel 7:13, *“I continued to observe in my night visions, and, look! With the clouds of the Sky someone like a Son of Humankind was arriving. He was brought to the Ancient of Days. The angels brought him into the Presence of the One And to this [Son of Humankind] there were given government and dignity and realm, so that peoples, languages should all serve him.”* [Daniel 7:13, 14 NSR]

Just so, Christ became King and thousands of “peoples” of many “languages” submitted to his reign. [Acts 2:5, 6, 41] These became his Body or Congregation within his “kingdom.” [Ephesians

1:19-23; Colossians 1:13] This was good news indeed – the opportunity of gaining entrance into this kingdom or realm. [Matthew 11:11, 12; Luke 13:24]

This good news also involved another aspect – one most thrilling and wonderful! The possibility of actually moving from the Son's "realm" [filled with scandal and lawlessness; see notes on Matthew 13:43 in Nazarene Commentary©] into the "Kingdom of the Father." [Compare also Daniel 12:3.] This marvelous prospect will be realized at some future moment described in Revelation 11:15-18 and Revelation 12:10 –

RV11:15 *And the 7th Angel trumpeted.*

Great voices occurred in Heaven, saying:

"The sovereignty of the world

became our Lord's and His Messiah.

The Lord will reign into the Ages of the Ages."

RV11:16 *And the 24 Presbyters,*

those in the sight of The God,

those sitting on their thrones,

they fell upon their faces and worshipped The God, saying:

RV11:17 *"We give thanks to you, The Lord,*

The God, The Almighty,

The-One-Who-Is, and, The-One-Who-Was,

because you have taken your great power and reigned.

RV11:18 *And the nations were wrathful,*

and Your wrath came.

The appointed time to judge the dead.

To give the reward to Your Slaves the Prophets,

to the Saints,

to those fearing your Name,

the small and the great.

To corrupt those who thoroughly corrupted the earth."

RV12:10 *And I heard a great voice in Heaven, saying:*

"Salvation has occurred!

The Power, the Kingdom of our God,

the authority of His Messiah! [NSR; for complete discussion see Nazarene Apocalypse©]

So, the Gospel essentially involves God, Jesus, and their Kingdoms. At the center of the Gospel are the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as his teachings. [Acts 10:36-43] However, what other subjects are involved in the Gospel?

WHAT ELSE IS INVOLVED IN THE GOSPEL?

The story of a special woman. It is a revelation of Jesus' character that an often overlooked matter is an important part of the "Gospel." The record is found in Matthew 26:6-13 [Mark 14:9] and involves a woman's use of expensive perfumed oil to anoint Jesus in anticipation of his death. It tells us a lot about the Nazarene's sensitivity to women in the face of his disciples' disdain.

The Word. The Word of God cannot be separated from the Gospel. Peter writes: "For, 'all flesh is grass, and all its glory is as the flower of the field. The grass has withered, and the flower has fallen off, but [the] Saying of יהוה remains into the Age.' [Isaiah 40:6-8] Now this 'Saying' is what has been declared to you as Good News." [1 Peter 1:24, 25 NSR] The "word" is connected to the Gospel. Indeed, Acts 15:35 speaks of "the good news of the Word of the Lord." Thus, if one is to become familiar with the Gospel one must also become acquainted with the "Saying" of Yehowah, which would involve the Hebrew Scriptures.

Obedience. Mere belief or conviction is not enough to benefit from the Gospel. Several times “obedience” is associated with the Gospel. Note the following:
“ ... because you are submissive to the good news about the Christ.” [2 Corinthians 9:13 NWT] “ ... they were not walking uprightly in the spirit of the Good News [Galatians 2:19 Weymouth Translation] “ ... inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” [2 Thessalonians 1:8 Revised Standard Version] “... what will be the end of those who are not obedient to good news?” [1 Peter 4:17 NWT]

This “obedience” to the Gospel must involve the teachings and commandments of the Nazarene. He taught, “*My friends are those who observe my commandments.*” [John 14:15; 15:14] Such obedience would involve becoming very familiar with the sixty “commandments” of Jesus. [For details see the work *Nazarene Commandments*© in Nazarene Commentary© CD.]

Such “commandments” of the good news of Jesus involved two main themes: conviction and charity.

Gospel includes the prophets and the Holy Scriptures. The Gospel about Jesus Christ cannot be separated from the Hebrew Bible for this is the source of the Good News. This Good News was declared throughout the history of God's relationship with His Hebrew worshippers. [Romans 16:25, 26; Galatians 3:8]

Romans 1:1-4, 9, 16 declares this association with the Gospel:

Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to God's good news, which He promised by means of His prophets in sacred writings, -- concerning His Son who descended from David's seed by means of flesh, declared God's Son (our Lord Jesus Christ) by a resurrection from the dead through a spirit of holiness. ... For I am not ashamed of the good news because it is God's power unto salvation.” [NSR]

Thus the Gospel included:

- a. Jesus would be born in the flesh as a descendant of David
- b. Declared God's Son by the resurrection [2 Timothy 2:8]
- c. Resulting in Grace and an Apostleship
- d. Salvation by faith through obedience

Judgment. As much as some wish to avoid this subject, the Gospel deals not just with salvation, but also judgment. Paul speaks so: “[The non-Jews] demonstrated the Law's work ‘*written within their hearts*’ [Jeremiah 31:33] – the combined testimony working between their conscience and their logical thoughts, either prosecuting or defending them. According to my own Good News through Christ Jesus [this is how] it will be in the day The God judges the secret things of all humankind.” [Romans 2:15, 16 NSR]

When declaring the good news to the first non-Jews Peter had also associated judgment with the Gospel: “[God] sent out the word to the sons of Israel to declare to them the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. ... [God] ordered us to preach to the people and to give a thorough witness that this is the One decreed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.” [Acts 10:36, 42 NWT] There can be no salvation without first judgment. [Hebrews 5:8, 9; 9:27; compare Matthew 12:36, 37]

Three Gospel Mysteries

There are three religious mysteries or sacred secrets also involved with the Gospel.

First, is the mystery that not just fleshly Hebrews or Jews would gain entry into the Kingdom, but also non-Jews would be blessed in the Gospel. Note how Paul involves this mystery with the gospel:

Thus, after he arrived (in the flesh) he proclaimed the Gospel to you (non-Jews) -- peace and unity to both the strangers and the citizens. Because by means of Christ we are being led together in one unified mind to approach the Father. ... All past generations of humankind were ignorant of this sacred mystery as it has been revealed to the sanctified apostles and prophets by Pneuma. The mystery is this: non-Jews are to be fellow heirs in a consolidated Body! Collective partakers of the promise incorporated in Jesus Christ according to the Gospel! ... pray for me so I might be given the right words and the ability to speak freely as I make known the mystery of the Gospel." [Ephesians 2:17, 18; 3:5-8; 6:19 NSR Paraphrase]

Second, the resurrection of the Church to immortality in the heavens was also part of the glorious Gospel. This is describes as "the hope of the Gospel." [Colossians 1:23] This marvelous hope is described in 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2, 48-54 –

Now I make known to you, brothers, the good news which I declared to you, which you also received, in which you also stand, **2** through which you are also being saved, with the speech with which I declared the good news to you, if you are holding it fast, unless, in fact, you became believers to no purpose. ... **48** As the one made of dust [is], so those made of dust [are] also; and as the heavenly one [is], so those who are heavenly [are] also. **49** And just as we have borne the image of the one made of dust, we shall bear also the image of the heavenly one. **50** However, this I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom, neither does corruption inherit incorruption. **51** Look! I tell you a sacred secret: We shall not all fall asleep [in death], but we shall all be changed, **52** in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, during the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised up incorruptible, and we shall be changed. **53** For this which is corruptible must put on incorruption, and this which is mortal must put on immortality. **54** But when [this which is corruptible puts on incorruption and] this which is mortal puts on immortality, then the saying will take place that is written: "Death is swallowed up forever." [NWT]

Paul also wrote: *"And from us thanks are always due to God on your behalf--brethren whom the Lord loves--because God from the beginning has chosen you for salvation through the Spirit's sanctifying influence and your belief in the truth. To this blessing God has called you by our Good News, so that you may have a share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."*[2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14 Weymouth Translation] *"And now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher."*[2 Timothy 2:10, 11 RSV]

The resurrection of the dead Saints and the Rapture of the living Saints is part of the Truth of the Gospel. [1 Thessalonians 4:15-17]

Finally, The Book of Revelation cannot be separated from the Gospel. That mystery unveiled in the Bible's last apocalyptic book is also highly related to the Gospel. *"For in the days of the voice of the Seventh Angel, when the Angel is about to trumpet, the Mystery of The God is finished! [Just] as He declared the Good News to His Slaves the Prophets."* [Revelation 10:7 NSR] It follows that if one is to know, obey, and be blessed by the Gospel an acquaintance with the prophecy of Revelation. Revelation 1:3 makes this clear: *"Happy is he who reads aloud and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and who observe the things written in it."*[NWT]

The above helps us appreciate what is involved in the Gospel. However, is there danger of "another Gospel"?

A Pseudo Gospel Preached by Satan's Ministers

Not only Jesus, but all of his inspired disciples who wrote after him, warned of an apostasy away from original Christian Gospel. [Matthew 13:37-43; 2 Thessalonians 2:3FF] Paul cautions about such who would introduce a pseudo gospel inspired by Satan. Consider:

*"The god of this Period of Time has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that the illumination of the glorious good news about the Christ may not beam forth. ... Indeed, if another arrives preaching **a different 'Jesus'** – not the One we preached – or a different spirit – you receive them; or, **a different Gospel** than what you accepted, you easily tolerate such. ... Such persons are pseudo apostles, deceitful workers, refashioning themselves into Christ's apostles. And no wonder, for Satan himself continues to transform himself into an 'angel of light'. It is not great thing, then, if his servants also continue to refashion themselves as ministers of righteousness."*
[2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; 11:4, 13-15 NSR]

To Paul "a different Gospel" is not just a matter of opinion to be tolerated as if he had "agreed to disagree." Galatians 1:6-9 stresses the importance of the original Gospel:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to **a different gospel** -- not that there is **another gospel**, but there are some who trouble you and want to **pervert the gospel** of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you **a gospel contrary** to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you **a gospel contrary** to that which you received, let him be accursed."
[RSV]

By reading the above Biblical description of the true Gospel, one will be able to identify those who preach "another gospel" – a "different gospel." [Matthew 7:21-23] Happily in the future the Gospel will be proclaimed in such a way that all humanity will have the opportunity to make a decision leading to blessed opportunities.

A Global Declaration of a Heavenly Evangel

Revelation 14:6, 7 foretells a future event as the "hour of judgment" arrives: *"And I saw another angel flying in the atmosphere having everlasting Good News to declare as glad news to those sitting upon the earth – and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people – haying in a great voice: 'Fear The God and give Him glory, because the hour of the judgment has arrived. And so worship the One who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and fountains of water.'"*

This sky-high angelic announcement of the Gospel does not mention Jesus Christ. It calls upon all peoples to worship the Creator, exhorting only that He be given fear and glory. This announcement – in whatever form it takes – occurs before the collapse of Babylon the Great and before the beastly creation of global economic control. [Revelation 14:8-12 NSR; for details see *Nazarene Apocalypse* in *Nazarene Commentary*© CD] We rejoice that there is yet opportunity to repent and fear God!

Conclusion: Will you now benefit from the Gospel by your faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ the Nazarene? Right now the Gospel offers the wondrous opportunity to gain entrance into the "Kingdom of the Son" with its glorious hope. Study the teachings of the Nazarene. Read the Bible. Then make your decision to "follow the Lamb no matter where he goes." [Revelation 14:4; 1 Peter 2:21] No doubt you will be moved to share the Gospel with others as the most stirring News despite the passing of two thousand years. [Romans 15:16; 2 Corinthians 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 8, 9] God bless those who hear and obey the Gospel!

==== END ====

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT MILDNESS & SELF-CONTROL [PART 5 OF 5]

MEEKNESS - MILDNESS OF DISPOSITION

The Greek word translated “meekness” at Galatians 5:23, is **praotes**, which in essence simply means “mildness.” **Praotes** is derived from the Greek word **praos** which means “mild.” **Praos** in turn, is related to the Greek word **praus**, which is apparently a primary word meaning “mildness of disposition, and gentleness of spirit.”

The etymology of the word “meekness” at Galatians 5:23 is here noted because it is important not to confuse the Biblical definition of “meekness” with one of the world’s view of “meekness,” that being in reference, at times, to a person who is “spiritless,” as even the *Webster’s College Dictionary* records for one of its definitions of “meek.” Without question does the Biblical definition of meekness refer to an individual who is readily trained or taught, i.e. teachable, and a person who is humbly patient, even under provocation from others, but it is far from being “spiritless.” Again, it simply refers to one who is mild in his or her disposition.

Jesus proclaimed, **“Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke on you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”** (Matthew 11:28-30, NKJV)

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Pharisees were one of the most prominent religious sects of Judaism. The Pharisees, or “Separatists,” were the party of scribes which arose after the victory of the Maccabees. They devoted themselves scrupulously to the works of the Law, so much so that they, in actuality, began teaching their own man-made traditions, as if *they* were commandments of God. They went far and beyond the Law, and completely overlooked the spirit of God’s commands.

Jesus said to the crowd of people and to his disciples, **“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not. Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.”** (Matthew 23:2-4, ASV)

The Jews were under the grievously heavy burdens of the Pharisees’ traditions, many of which nullified the very commandments of God. Given this background, we now examine the virtue of meekness, i.e. mildness.

A “yoke” is a device for joining together a pair of draft animals i.e., animals used to pull or carry heavy loads such as a plough. One authority by the name of Henderson states, “The **ol**, yoke, not only included the piece of wood on the neck by which the animal was fastened to the pole, but also the whole of the harness about the head which connected with it. The yokes used in the East are very heavy, and press so much upon the animals that they are unable to bend their necks.” (*Manners And Customs of the Bible*, James M. Freeman, page 317)

The word “yoke” is therefore on occasion used figuratively in the Bible for severe bondage, or affliction, or subjection, as in the case with the troublesome laws imposed on the Jews by the

Pharisees. The “yoke” of the Pharisees was so burdensome because of their biased application of the Mosaic Law, and because of the man-made traditions that they insisted the people adhere to. Therefore Jesus’ analogy is powerfully appropriate.

Many of the people were loaded down and overburdened, but Jesus said, **“Come to me...and I will refresh you.”** (Matthew 11:28, NWT) With following Jesus, and with following *his* commands and example of living, there would be rest, there would be calm, and there would be refreshing peace.

A yoke was also a frame fitting a person’s neck and shoulders, for carrying a pair of buckets or the like, one at each end; and also, it means something that “couples or binds together,” i.e. bond or tie. So here again, Jesus’ analogy is fantastic, as we should consider ourselves bound or tied to him.

It is with this idea of being under bondage, being restrained, carrying a load, and being coupled together with something or someone else, that Jesus says, **“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls.”** (Matthew 11:29, NWT)

Imagine for a moment, that you are with Jesus -- side by side -- trying to emulate everything he does and says. You, like he, are servants of God the Father, doing *His* will, regardless of what man says and does to you. Take it a step further. Imagine that you are Jesus’ oxen. You have no problem working for him. After all, he’s not asking you to do anything he hasn’t done himself! You’ve placed yourself under his control. Being the Father’s Servant, he has been rewarded for his faithfulness, and has been given all things! Taking his yoke upon you means placing yourself under his control, being his worker--his slave. It means allowing yourself to be subject to him, as he allowed himself (and continues to allow himself) to be subject to God (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

This whole concept of being yoked together, and under the yoke of the Messiah is seen in Paul’s letter to the Philippians when he refers to a brother in the congregation as a *“true yoke-fellow.”* (Philippians 4:3, ASV) The Greek word here translate “yoke-fellow” is the Greek word **suzugos** which refers to those united by the bond of marriage, relationship, office, labour, study, business, or the like; a consort, comrade, colleague, partner.

It is interesting that Jesus said, **“... learn from me.”** (Matthew 11:29) The Greek word here translated “learn” is **manthano**. The word **mathetes**, i.e. “disciple; learner; pupil” is derived from **manthano**. Therefore, it can be understood that Jesus is in essence saying, “Subject yourselves to what I say, and what I do. Become my disciples. Learn my ways.” In addition to being, loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, whole-hearted and faithful to God, Jesus was *meeek*. He was *mild-tempered*. According to *The Complete Word Study Dictionary* by Spiros Zodhiates Th.D., “*Mathetes* means more in the NT than a mere pupil or learner. **It is an adherent who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct . . .**” (p. 936, col. 2, para. 4)

Jesus said that he was mild-tempered and humble. Therefore, those claiming to be his disciples--those taught and trained by him -- will exhibit the same qualities of mildness and humility. Compared to the various works of the law, along with the overburdening traditions of the elders, which the Pharisees made incumbent on the people, the assigned commands from Jesus is light, that is to say, not heavy, not over-burdening.

Jesus promised that in taking his yoke upon them, the people would find refreshment for their souls. Peter hit on this when he spoke to the people gathered at what was called Solomon’s Colonnade after a lame man was healed. He said, *“Repent, therefore, and turn around so as to get your sins blotted out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the person of Jehovah and that he may send forth the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven, indeed, must hold within itself until the times of restoration of all things of which God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets of all time. . . You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God*

covenanted with your forefathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed.' To you first God, after raising his Servant, sent him forth to bless you by turning each one away from your wicked deeds." (Acts 3:19-21, 25-26; NWT)

Throughout the New Testament, we find a number of occasions where the congregation is exhorted to exhibit meekness or mildness. For example, *"Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."* (Galatians 6:1-2, ASV)

In another place, *"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* (Ephesians 4:1-3, ASV)

And again, *"Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness."* (Colossians 3:12-14, ASV)

Paul writes Timothy, *"But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."* (1 Timothy 6:11, ASV)

And in his second letter to Timothy, Paul writes, *"And the Lord's servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him unto his will."* (2 Timothy 2:24-26, ASV)

When Paul wrote to Titus, his *"true child after a common faith"* (Titus 1:4, ASV), whom he left in Crete that he should set in order the things that were lacking, and to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5, ASV), he said, *"Put them in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work, to speak evil of no man, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing all meekness toward all men."* (Titus 3:1-2, ASV)

Examples in the Hebrew Bible. A good example of the power of a meek spirit is found with Gideon and the Ephraimites. Notice the outcome of this story:

"So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outermost part of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch, when they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake in pieces the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the torches in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands wherewith to blow; and they cried, The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp; and all the host ran; and they shouted, and put them to flight. And they blew the three hundred trumpets, and Jehovah set every man's sword against his fellow, and against all the host; and the host fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Israel were gathered together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after Midian. And Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill-country of Ephraim, saying, Come down against Midian, and take before them the waters, as far as Beth-barah, even the Jordan. So all the men of Ephraim were gathered together, and took the waters as far as Beth-barah, even the Jordan. And they took the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian: and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon beyond the Jordan.

And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with Midian? And they did chide with him sharply. And he said unto them, What have I now done in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God hath delivered into your hand the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison with you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.” (Judges 7:19-8:3, ASV)

Just as wise King Solomon recorded, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1, KJV)

TEMPERANCE - SELF CONTROL

Interestingly, Paul begins describing the qualities of the fruit of the spirit with love. After all, “*he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law*” (Romans 13:8b, KJV), and “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8, 16; KJV). Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing. . . . But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13, ASV)*

None of the other qualities of the spirit’s fruit can come to maturation without love as the root! It is also interesting to note that Paul sums up his description of the fruit of the spirit with the quality of **self-control**. As we look at this quality, let us, for this study, re-word it to “control over one’s self” and “mastery over one’s self.”

The Greek word translated temperance or self-control at Galatians 5:23 is the word **egkrateia** which means *self-control*, especially *continence*, i.e. self-restraint. It is derived from the word **egkrates** which means strong in a thing, i.e. *masterful*.

As previously stated, in order for all of the qualities of the spirit’s fruit to come to maturation, love is the key, but to manifest any of these virtues on a consistent basis, especially in the face of trial and affliction, one must have “control over one’s self.”

So important is the virtue of “control over one’s self,” i.e. “mastery over one’s self,” that it was part of that which was publicly proclaimed by Paul. When Paul was accused by the orator Tertullus, before Felix the governor of Caesarea, we see that “*he reasoned of righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment to come.” (Acts 24:25, ASV) For Paul to be in such a position as to have to defend himself before such influential men, and from this position, preached the good news, considering “control over one’s self” important enough to be mentioned right along with “righteousness” and the “judgment” which is to come, is incredibly significant.*

It becomes evident that “control over one’s self” is directly related to one’s righteousness, and in the end, one’s judgment -- whether it be favorable or adverse. Obviously, for example, if we cannot control ourselves when we become angry, we risk adverse judgment, just as it is written:

“Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things’ sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience: wherein ye also once walked, when ye lived in these things; but now do ye also put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth: lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him.” (Colossians 3:5-10, ASV)

James wrote, "Ye know this, my beloved brethren. But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." (James 1:19-21, ASV)

Peter, in his second letter speaks about how God "has freely given us the precious and very grand promises" (2 Peter 1:4, NWT) that through these promises, we may become sharers in divine nature, "having escaped from the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Peter 1:4, NWT)

Peter goes on to state that it is for this very reason (the possibility of becoming sharers in divine nature), that we must respond with all earnest effort, to supply to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge "control over one's self," to "control over one's self" endurance, to endurance godly devotion, to godly devotion brotherly affection, to brotherly affection love. (2 Peter 1:5-7)

Peter says, "For if these things exist in you and overflow, they will prevent from being either inactive or unfruitful regarding the accurate knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:8, NWT)

Notice that while all these things are interrelated, Peter says to "knowledge" add "control over one's self." Controlling ourselves refers to controlling our actions, our speech, and even, if possible, our thoughts. When one harbors a spirit of humility, i.e. thinking of the other person greater than oneself, a person is more apt to control these things. For example, think of a three-year old child who loves, fears and respects, his 6'8", body-building, black-belt wearing, college-educated, police officer dad. This child is more apt to be able to control his actions, speech, and possibly even certain thoughts (at least when Dad's around), if Dad so commands.

On the other hand, if a child thinks he knows as much or even more than Dad, or thinks he is bigger or better in some way than Dad, he is less apt to take control over himself. Just as the Scriptures reveal, "knowledge puffs up." (1Corinthians 8:1) So, appropriately, Peter says, add to knowledge, "mastery over one's self."

When Paul wrote to Titus, he described the attributes of an overseer. He said, "For an overseer must be free from accusation as God's steward, not self-willed, not prone to wrath, not a drunken brawler, not a smiter, not greedy of dishonest gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, sound in mind, righteous, loyal, self-controlled, holding firmly to the faithful word as respects his art of teaching, that he may be able both to exhort by the teaching that is healthful and to reprove those who contradict." (Titus 1:7-9, NWT)

God's Own Example. The greatest Biblical example of someone being patient and exercising "self-control" is Jehovah himself. By all rights, since Jesus was manifested over 2,000 ago, and at any time before or since, Jehovah could have done away with all that practice sin and cause sin, but he has been patient, and has exercised self-control.

Peter said, "However, let this one fact not be escaping your notice, beloved ones, that one day is with Jehovah as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. Jehovah is not slow respecting his promise, as some people consider slowness, but he is patient with you because he does not desire any to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance." (2 Peter 3:8-9, NWT)

This is incomplete harmony with what the prophet Jeremiah recorded:

"Then the word of Jehovah came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith Jehovah. Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy it; if that nation,

concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if they do that which is evil in my sight, that they obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith Jehovah: Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your doings." (Jeremiah 18:5-11, ASV)

Jesus, a Controlled Person. Another incredible example of someone exercising self-control is Jesus. The New Testament is replete with examples, but two incidents stand out as remarkable. The first is when Jesus is betrayed by Judas, who had spent three years walking, talking, and eating with Jesus, yet the Scriptural account reads,

*"And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he: take him. And straightway he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Rabbi; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, **Friend, do that for which thou art come.** Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. And behold, one of them that were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and smote the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear. Then saith Jesus unto him, **Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Or thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?"** (Matthew 26:47-54, ASV)*

Jesus had the ability to appeal to God, and God could have supplied Jesus with more than twelve legions of angels, yet he didn't appeal to God for such a heavenly host to intercede. He fully understood the Father's will, and the import of his thoughts, words and actions. How many of us would have exercised such self-control, especially given the situation Jesus was in at the time?

The other incident which stands out, as far as this author is concerned, as the most remarkable example of a man being able to control his thoughts and speech. It is when Jesus had been mocked, beaten, tortured and finally impaled on the stake. The biblical record reveals that after all of this, Jesus says, **"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And parting his garments among them, they cast lots.**" (Luke 23:34, ASV)

How many of us, as servants of our Lord Jesus, and sons and daughters of God the Father, would be able to manifest such self-control, especially in such adverse situations? Is it difficult? Absolutely. Is it *impossible*? Absolutely not! With God's spirit and a willing heart, we shall be conformed into the very image of God's son, for even the faithful disciple Steven manifested similar self-control.

We read, *"But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon the Lord, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."* (Acts 7:55-60, ASV)

The creation account reads, "And God said: 'Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth.' And it was so." (Genesis 1:11, JPS)

Notice the phrase "after its kind." We must strive to be good trees bearing good fruit, in likeness to the Creator. We must make every effort to allow ourselves to be conformed into the very image of Jesus the Messiah, who in turn, is described in the biblical record as "*the image of the invisible God*," (Colossians 1:15, ASV) and "*the express image of His essence*." (Hebrews 1:3, GLT)

We must also remember how important it is to manifest the fruitage of the spirit, not just for our own salvation, but also for the salvation of those around us, who come in contact with us each and every day. Remember, the biblical record reads, "*wherein is the seed thereof*." (Genesis 1:11) This means that more trees shall take root, and more fruit shall be brought forth.

Jesus said, "***So every good tree produces good fruits, but the corrupt tree produces evil fruits. A good tree cannot produce evil fruits, nor a corrupt tree produce good fruits. Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and is thrown into fire.***" (Matthew 7:17-19, GLT)

And elsewhere, "***Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.***" (Matthew 12:33, ASV)
[Contributed by Michael Welhous.]

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