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The Restoration of All Things

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**Notes from a Group Study
of the Epistle to the Hebrews**

News

THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS

(Acts 3:21)

[Quotations are from the Revised Version unless otherwise indicated.]

by Paul W. Brownlow

The apostle Peter referred to “the restoration of all things” in his second public address on the day of Pentecost, about six hours after the momentous oration recorded in Acts 2. It was delivered at the entrance of the Temple in Jerusalem, where, accompanied by John, Peter had just healed a man who had been lame since birth (Acts 3:2; 4:22).

- Acts 3:9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God:
10 And they took knowledge of him, that it was he that sat for
alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple: and they were filled
with wonder and amazement at that which had happened
unto him.
11 And as he held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto
them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.

For the second time that day, a miraculous event had captured the attention of the people and given Peter an opportunity to preach Jesus Christ.

- Acts 3:12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye
men of Israel, why marvel ye at this man? or why fasten ye
your eyes on us, as though by our own power or godliness
we had made him to walk?
13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our
fathers, hath glorified his Servant Jesus; whom ye delivered
up, and denied before the face of Pilate, when he had
determined to release him.
14 But ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a
murderer to be granted unto you,
15 and killed the Prince of life; whom God hath raised from the
dead; whereof we are witnesses.
16 And by faith in his name hath his name made this man
strong, whom ye behold and know: yea, the faith which is
through him hath given him this perfect soundness in the
presence of you all.
17 And now, brethren, I wot that in ignorance ye did it, as did
also your rulers.
18 But the things which God foreshewed by the mouth of all the
prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled.

It's the next three verses that I intend to focus on:

- Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord;
- 20 and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, *even* Jesus:
- 21 whom the heaven must receive until **the times of restoration of all things**, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began.

This passage had always raised questions in my mind, questions to which Peter did not seem to give a direct answer. It only began to dawn on me while writing this, that I was simply not hearing Peter's words as his audience would have heard them. I was failing to make the associations that Peter knew his Jewish hearers would make. These men would have been very familiar with the Old Testament scriptures: almost every aspect of their national culture, and particularly their long-term expectations for Israel, were derived from the Law and the prophets.

Verses 19 and 20

"Repent ye" . . . "**that your** sins may be blotted out" . . . "**that so** there may come seasons of refreshing" . . . "**and that** he may send the Christ".

The connection between repentance and what would follow may be described as action and consequence. In other words, the 'blotting out of your sins', the coming of "seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord", and the sending of "the Christ who hath been appointed for you", are each contingent upon repentance.

Leaving "seasons of refreshing" aside for a moment, let's consider verse 20:

- Acts 3:20 and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, *even* Jesus:

"The Christ who hath been appointed for **you**"— it was for Israel that Christ had been appointed. However, given that the promises which Peter mentioned depended on repentance, they could only be received by those who repented, which is an individual decision. This might seem to present an insurmountable difficulty: having already been sent to Israel and violently rejected, how could Christ now be sent to each Israelite who repented? I think the answer may be found in the closing words of the speech:

- Acts 3:25 Ye are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.
- 26 Unto you first God, having raised up his Servant, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.

The blessing of Abraham

In my opinion, this passage explains Peter's choice of words in verse 20. God sent Jesus Christ to bless the Israelites in fulfilment of God's covenant with Abraham (verse 25), which itself depended on God's promise that Sarah would bear a son (Genesis 15:4-6; 17:15-19,21). It is the latter that Paul, in speaking about Abraham, expounded upon in Romans 4:20,

- Romans 4:20 yea, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong in faith, giving glory to God,
- 21 and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.
- 22 Wherefore also **it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.**
- 23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him, but **for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned**, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead . . .

Reckoned righteousness, this is the blessing in Acts 3:26:

- Acts 3:26 Unto you first God, having raised up his Servant, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.

Note the last clause, "in turning away **every one of you** from your iniquities" — this reveals the way in which the blessing was to be conferred: while Israel as a family were first to be offered the blessing, it could only ever be received on an individual basis.

Peter had already made it clear to his hearers that they shared the nation's responsibility for the murder of Christ, whom God had sent to bless them. However, with that awful reality came the good news that the opportunity for individual Israelites to receive the blessing promised through Abraham had not been forfeited; and I think Peter represented that blessing metaphorically as God 'sending the Christ' to the repentant Israelite.

Verse 19

Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come **seasons of refreshing** from the presence of the Lord;

I am confident that nothing Peter said publicly that day was without substance, and while “seasons of refreshing” is a figurative expression, I think it may well have been an allusion to Old Testament prophecy. That morning, he had quoted Joel 2:28 and 29, which foretold the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon God’s “servants and handmaids”. Curiously though, he added verses 30 to 32, which did not relate to the miraculous gifts. The prophetic imagery in those verses, however, strongly suggests the end of the Law Covenant era and the commencement of a new formal arrangement between God and men*. Peter did not comment on their significance, which indicates that the time had not yet come to speak plainly of these things, and gives us a reason to think that his language in chapter 3, verse 19, may also have been chosen not to confront a conservative audience.

“seasons”

The Greek word translated ‘seasons’ is the plural of *kairos* [Strong #2540], which means ‘an *occasion*, that is, figuratively, *set or proper time*’.

“refreshing”

This has been translated from the Greek *anapsuxis* [Strong #403], and means ‘properly, a *recovery of breath*, that is, (figuratively) *revival*’.

Zechariah 9:9 may suffice to represent those Old Testament prophecies that predicted a time of spiritual revival for Israel:

Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass.

10 And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the nations: and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River even to the ends of the earth.

11 As for thee also, because of the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.

* For a more complete explanation of Acts 2:19-21, please refer to the article *Pentecost – The Voice of the Spirit of Truth*. Copies available on request. (New Covenant News No. 156, October 2021).

“Daughter of Zion”, or, “daughter of Jerusalem” was the people of Jerusalem, the city figuratively being their ‘mother’. “The blood of thy covenant” is Christ’s blood, bringing into operation a New Covenant between God and Israel, its saving principle being justification by faith in Christ, which Peter referred to as having their “sins blotted out”. It was this which would release the prisoners from the bondage of the Law (Isaiah 42:6,7; 61:1).

“the times of restoration of all things”

Acts 3:21 whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began.

This verse has had its share of controversy over the years, due to differences of opinion about when the “times of restoration” should be understood as commencing. The verb “receive” has been a critical point.

The Greek word translated “receive” in Acts 3:21 is *dexasthai*, a form of the verb *dechomai* [#1209]. Strong’s Concordance states that *dechomai* means ‘to receive (in various applications, literal or figurative)’.

According to Moulton’s *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, *dexasthai* in Acts 3:21 means ‘to receive into and retain, (or) contain’.

Benjamin Wilson, in his *Emphatic Diaglott*, translated *dexasthai* as ‘receive’ in his word-for-word translation, but in his *New Translation* has rendered the first part of verse 21,

“whom, indeed, heaven must retain till the times of
restoration of all things”.

This, in my opinion, is erroneous and misleading. Unlike ‘receive’, or ‘receive into and retain’, which confirm that this period in heaven commenced from Christ’s ascension to the Father, ‘retain’ by itself takes no account of that important fact. In my view, the context, both grammatical and chronological, strongly implies that “the restoration of all things”, or at least its completion, was something yet future.

#5550 chronoi - “times”

The word translated “times” is the plural of *chronos* [#5550], which, according to Dr. Strong, means ‘a *space* of time (in general) or *interval*’. This is distinguished from *kairos*, the word translated ‘season’ in verse 20, ‘which designates a *fixed* or special occasion’. I can’t be definitive about the use of

the plural, except to note that the expression “times and seasons” occurs twice in the New Testament (Acts 1:7; 1 Thess. 5:1), in both cases applied to future events which would take place at God’s discretion.

#605 apokatastasis - “restoration”

I’ve quoted this from the Revised Version. Where it uses “restoration” in verse 21, the King James Version has ‘restitution’, and some margins have ‘reconstitution’. These are all valid English translations of the Greek word *apokatastasis*. They have shades of difference in meaning but one important thing in common: they all refer to the re-establishment of something which had previously existed. In other words, whatever was to undergo restoration had a historical precursor.

And here we must remember who Peter was addressing. “Ye men of Israel”, he began. The prophets that he mentioned, who all “told of these days” (verse 24), without exception prophesied to the descendants of Jacob.

Acts 3:21 . . . whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began.

“Since the world began” might bring to mind Adam and Eve, but it comes from the Greek *ap’ aiōnos*, which literally means ‘from an age’. It’s an expression that appears three times in the New Testament, and always to describe the continuity of prophecy through time. I think that “the world” of which Peter spoke was the Jewish establishment, which had its beginning under Moses; and appropriately, it was Moses’ prophecy concerning Christ that Peter cited specifically (Acts 3:22-24):

Acts 3:22 Moses indeed said, A prophet shall the Lord thy God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me; to him shall ye hearken in all things whatsoever he shall speak unto you.
23 And it shall be, that every soul, which shall not hearken to that prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.
24 Yea and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days.

Of all the nations on earth at that time, only Israel had a history from which God might choose some feature, or features, as a suitable pattern for restoration. But the “restoration of **all things**”—what could that possibly mean? There is one other place in the New Testament where a similar expression occurs.

John the Baptist

- Matthew 17:10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes, that Elijah must first come?
- 11 And he answered and said, Elijah indeed cometh, **and shall restore all things:**
- 12 but I say unto you, that Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they listed. Even so shall the Son of man also suffer of them.
- 13 Then understood the disciples that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

The prophecy concerning Elijah appears at the very end of the Old Testament:

- Malachi 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD come.
- 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers; lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

This, we now know, referred to the work of John the Baptist. John's father, Zacharias, drew upon Malachi's prophecy in his own inspired utterance:

- Luke 1:17 And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient *to walk* in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared *for him*.

We can see that although the wording in Luke is different, it provides us with some insight into the meaning of the prophecy:

- Malachi 4:6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, **and the heart of the children to their fathers.**
- Luke 1:17 . . . to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, **and the disobedient *to walk* in the wisdom of the just.**

In the Luke version, the second clause of Malachi 4:6, "and the heart of the children to their fathers", is replaced with "and the disobedient *to walk* in the wisdom of the just". Allowing that the variations are equivalent in meaning, the "children" in Malachi are "the disobedient" in Luke, and "their fathers" are "the just", an unmistakable reference to the faithful patriarchs of old, which shows us that it is speaking of a conversion process. John was sent to reform Israel after the pattern of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the other

faithful of old, whose “hearts”, that is, whose spiritual character, was an example for this later generation to emulate, in order to “make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him.”

So, that was what John came to re-establish. But Jesus said that Elijah would “restore **all** things”, essentially the same words Peter used in Acts 3:21.

If “Elijah”, that is, John the Baptist, did indeed “restore all things”, then the Scripture has used those words in a limited sense, and that limitation should be discernible from the context. In principle, John restored all things that his prophetic commission assigned to him. I say, ‘in principle’, because throughout Israel’s history the words of the prophets only ever took root in the hearts of a relatively small proportion of the nation.

Nevertheless, we can say with certainty that John did prepare the way for Christ by inspiring many Israelites to rededicate themselves to God’s service through the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins, and at the same time making it known that Messiah’s appearance was close at hand (Luke 3:1-20).

Given that “the restoration of all things” concept, both in Matthew 17 and Acts 3, is founded on Old Testament precedents, and that there is a connection between those two references, I think that the work of John may have given us one part of the picture. The other part would seem to have provoked the disciples’ question to Jesus just prior to His ascension.

David’s kingdom

- Acts 1:6 They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?
- 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority.

So much of what Jesus said, both publicly and privately, during his earthly ministry concerned the kingdom of God. The disciples well knew what His role would be in that kingdom, and this question reveals that at that time their expectations of the kingdom reflected Old Testament prophecy, as would those of Peter’s audience on the Day of Pentecost.

I only have time to quote one example, although there are many that contribute to the overall picture. This, however, is one of the most comprehensive. It comes from Ezekiel 37, and while it belongs to the period of the Babylonian captivity, it projects far beyond the conclusion of that captivity:

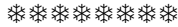
- Ezekiel 37:21 Thus saith the LORD God: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:
- 22 And I will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all:
- 23 neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.
- 24 And my servant David shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgements, and observe my statutes, and do them.
- 25 And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, they, and their children, and their children's children, for ever: and David my servant shall be their prince for ever.
- 26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them: it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.
- 27 My tabernacle also shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
- 28 And the nations shall know that I am the LORD that sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

Conclusion

Within the context of Peter's address, I think the "restoration of all things" comprised two basic elements, king and people: the re-establishment of the kingdom of Israel, ruled by the promised heir to David's throne, Jesus Christ; and a people of renewed faith in God, after the pattern of the nation's forefathers.

A great deal more could be said about the eventual fulfilment of prophecies like Ezekiel 37:21-28, but I have kept this within narrow limits because of the circumstances in which the expression, "the restoration of all things", was used. It was the dawn of the Gospel ministry, Peter was speaking to a purely Jewish audience, and to gain their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, which was the priority, it was appropriate and necessary to communicate in terms with which they were comfortable.

In a few years God would move to extend the Gospel to the Gentiles, “to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 10; 11:1-18; 15:1-21). With that came, in due course, the revelation through the apostles of the wider implications of God’s promise to Abraham (Romans 4:13; Galatians 3:8,9), and of many of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel’s future.



IN THE WILDERNESS

by Darryl Roe

The English title of the fourth book of Moses, Numbers, is a translation of the title in the Septuagint, ‘Arithmoi’, and probably is so-called because of the census in chapter 1, and again in chapter 26, as well as many other numerical data given throughout. The Hebrew title, ‘Bemidbar’, meaning ‘in the wilderness’, or desert, is much more descriptive of the book as a whole. The narrative of forty years in the wilderness is full of interesting and well-known, and not so well-known, stories. A wilderness is defined as ‘an uncultivated, uninhabited and inhospitable region’ in the Collins Dictionary.

Many of you would be familiar with God’s prediction to Abraham in the book of Genesis when He said to him, “*Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years; but I will punish the nation they serve, and afterward they will come out with great possessions*” (Genesis 15:13-14). God was referring to the Israelites’ slavery in Egypt.

You will also be familiar with the story of Moses and how, as a baby, his life was spared and he became the child of Pharaoh’s daughter (Exodus 2:1-10). He was educated in the Egyptian palace. When he grew up he witnessed an Egyptian beating an Israelite worker, so Moses killed the Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-12). Pharaoh found out about this, and planned to kill him, so Moses was forced to flee to Midian (Exodus 2:15). In Midian he married Zipporah, the daughter of the priest Jethro, and looked after his father-in-law’s sheep (Exodus 2:21-22).

Then God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and asked him to go back to Egypt to lead his people out of slavery and on into a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:1-4:21).

However, as you well know, Pharaoh was in no mood to let Moses’ people go. Again God came to the rescue with no fewer than ten horrible plagues which afflicted the Egyptians. However, it was the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, that persuaded Pharaoh to allow Moses and the Israelites to go (Exodus 5:1-12:32).

When the children of Israel finally made their way into the wilderness with all their belongings and their herds, they found the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh's army approaching from behind, so they cried out to the Lord for help. The Lord listened to Moses' plea and sent His angel with a great cloud which blocked off the approaching army, while at the same time He sent a mighty east wind, turning the waves away and drying out the sea bed in order for the people to cross over safely. As soon as they had all crossed, the Lord told Moses to stretch out his special rod. When he had done so, the east wind dropped and the waves returned to their original size, and Pharaoh's army, with its horses and chariots, were all overcome in the deluge (Exodus 14:1-15:21).

While this great victory resulted in much singing and rejoicing, it was not long before Moses found himself out in the wilderness with all sorts of problems. Moses had a huge responsibility to his people. There were well over a million people camping in the wilderness together with their flocks and herds. When they arrived at Marah they found water which was bitter and they complained to Moses. The Lord instructed Moses to make the water sweet by throwing into it a tree which God showed to him (Exodus 15:22-25).

They continued their journey into the Wilderness of Sin where the Israelites grumbled to Moses and Aaron, *"If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death"* (Exodus 16:3). When Moses appealed to God again, He sent bread from heaven each morning, which the people called 'manna.' It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. They were to collect it every day for the entire 40 years, except for each Sabbath, which was a holy day unto the Lord. In the evening, the Lord sent quail unto them to satisfy their desire for meat (Exodus 16:4-35).

At Mount Sinai all the people were afraid of God. When they heard the thunder and saw the lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They all stood at a distance while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was (Exodus 20:18-21). When Moses was so long talking to God, the people said to Aaron, *"Come make us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him"* (Exodus 32:1). They made a golden calf to worship and they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry (Exodus 32:6).

After 40 days, Moses came down from the mountain with two stone tablets in his hands. With His own finger, the Lord had engraved ten commandments on the tablets. These were God's laws which the tribes of Israel were to live by. But when Moses saw the revelry and the golden calf, his joy quickly

turned to anger, and he threw the tablets to the ground in disgust, breaking them in pieces (Exodus 31:18-32:19). The Israelites had failed to honour both Moses and God, and so Moses had to ask God for a second pair of stone tablets containing the ten commandments.

They remained at Mount Sinai for a whole year. Then God lifted the cloud, all the silver trumpets sounded, the tribe of Judah led the march, and they were all on their way again (Numbers 10:11-12). Whenever they were moving, the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud by day and by night He was in a pillar of fire, to help them see. They were to observe the Passover, beginning on the fourteenth day of Nisan each year. The tabernacle and the priesthood services were introduced and maintained throughout their journeyings. All the priests came from the tribe of Levi and only the high priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies once on the annual Day of Atonement with the blood of a young lamb without blemish (Hebrews 9:7).

The people were unhappy about their situation, but when they said, *“We remember the fish we ate in Egypt, also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic”* (Numbers 11:5), the Lord’s anger appeared in the form of fires burning around the outskirts of the camp. When Miriam and Aaron began talking against Moses because his wife was a Cushite, Moses said nothing for he was very meek, but the Lord assembled them together and struck Miriam with leprosy. Moses prayed to the Lord and Miriam was forced to spend seven days outside the camp before she was healed (Numbers 12:1-15).

At Kadesh, in sight of the promised land, Moses sent twelve of his leaders to spy out the land and report back to him. Two spies, namely Joshua and Caleb, brought a glowing report, but the other ten spies said, *“All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there”* (Numbers 13:17-33). The Israelites murmured against Moses and Aaron and said, *“Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder”* (Numbers 14:3).

The Lord was angry with the ten spies and vowed to leave their bodies in the desert, saying, *“In this desert your bodies will fall - every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun”* (Numbers 14:29,30). This turned out to be the crucial point in the whole journey. They were almost to their destination, but they were too frightened to go on. In fact, they wanted to stone Moses and Aaron, and but for God’s intervening power, they would have done so (Numbers 14:10).

Then Korah and two hundred and fifty of his band rose up against Moses and resisted his authority. This made the Lord angry and He gathered Korah and all his people and possessions together before Moses. Suddenly the ground beneath them split apart, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them together with their families and possessions. They went down alive into the grave, the earth closed over them and they all perished (Numbers 16:31-33).

At Kadesh, Miriam died and was buried. She was 130 years old (Numbers 20:1). At Meribah the people complained to Moses, saying, *"If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! Why did you bring the LORD's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"* (Numbers 20:3-5). Upon God's instructions, Moses took his staff and struck the rock in front of the people saying, *"Listen you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?"* (Numbers 20:10). He struck the rock twice and water came gushing out (Numbers 20:10). But the Lord said, *"Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them"* (Numbers 20:12). Moses had taken some of the credit for this great miracle, and paid the price for his mistake. The Lord did not allow him into Canaan, but he was allowed to climb Mt. Nebo and view the land from the top (Deuteronomy 34:1).

On their way to Canaan they tried to go through Edom, but the Edomites refused them entry (Numbers 20:14-21). The people grew impatient and spoke against God and against Moses, saying, *"Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the desert. There is no bread. There is no water. And we detest this miserable food"* (Numbers 21:4). So the Lord sent venomous snakes amongst them. They bit the people and many died. The people went to Moses and asked for the Lord's forgiveness. Moses made a bronze snake and placed it up on a pole, so that anyone who had been bitten could look at the snake and live (Numbers 21:5-9).

When the Israelites had camped near the Jordan, Balak the Moabite and the leaders of the Midianites paid Balaam the prophet to go out and curse Israel. Since this was against God's will, Balaam found himself prophesying against Moab instead. When Balaam was on his way to curse Israel, an angel with a sword stood in the way. Balaam's donkey was thrashed three times and actually spoke to Balaam. Finally he realised that it was the Lord telling him not to curse Israel (Numbers 22:1-24:25). Later, Balaam instigated Israel's idol-worship and sexual immorality with the Moabite women and this again brought about God's anger. A sudden plague caused the instant death of both Balaam and twenty-four thousand Israelites (Numbers 25:1-9).

The Israelites faced a number of enemies during their journeyings toward Canaan. With the Lord's help, they were finally able to overcome the Amalekites, the Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Amorites, and the Midianites.

At Mount Hor, Aaron died. He was 123 years old (Numbers 33:39). Earlier Moses, as commanded by God, had laid his hands on Joshua, son of Nun, and God's Spirit of wisdom passed on to him (Numbers 27:23). Moses died on Mount Nebo, but his body was never found. He was 120 years old (Deuteronomy 34:5-7).

Joshua was appointed Moses' successor to take Israel into the land. God had said, *"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live. And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them.'*" (Numbers 33:51-56).

Remarkably, throughout their forty years in the desert, the people's clothes did not wear out, neither did their feet swell up (Deuteronomy 8:4). Had the twelve spies spoken positively of the promised land, the Lord would have allowed them to set foot in it. But, alas, of that generation, only Caleb and Joshua expressed their confidence in going ahead. The other ten spies refused to go despite all the miracles they had seen performed before their eyes. They were what the Lord described as a *"stiff-necked people"*, and if He were to go with them, He said that He might be tempted to destroy them all (Exodus 33:5).

When writing to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul warned his fellow believers to learn from Israel's mistakes. He wrote, speaking of their forefathers, *"They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink from the rock which accompanied them. That rock was Christ. God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert ... Do not be idolaters ... indulging in pagan revelry ... in one day, twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord ... and be killed by snakes ... and do not grumble as some did, and were killed by the destroying angel. If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:2-12).

The Apostle Paul was referring here to the temptations and desires which we all face, testing our loyalty to the Lord. In Paul's day, lust, immorality, idol worship, heavy drinking and revelry were common. In our affluent society, we have many different temptations and desires. Some examples of this could be the desire to go after material things such as new cars, gambling, sport, glamorous clothes, expensive jewellery, speed boats and two-storey mansions. All of these attractions are part of our materialistic world, and tend to draw us away from our allegiance to God and to Christ. As Paul said, *"If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall"*.

John told us, *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, for everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does, comes not from the Father, but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever"* (1 John 2:15-17). The people of the world have no desire to worship God, but they have a strong desire for money. This desire leads only to destruction.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul said, *"We brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out, but if we have food and clothing, we can be happy with that. People who want to get rich, fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction, for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs"* (1 Timothy 6:7-10).

Timothy was a young elder of the church at Ephesus, and Paul advised him to be content with what he already had. He said, *"You, man of God, flee from all this. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness ... command those who are rich ... to do good, to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share ... they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming Age"* (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul warns us against Godlessness. He said, *"In the last days people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, treacherous, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of Godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them"* (2 Timothy 3:1-5). We can see these characteristics occurring in our present affluent society. Paul was correct. The top news stories on TV and the headlines in our daily papers point to an acceptance of resistance to authority and a rejection of good moral conduct in many of our world's communities.

Paul said, *“The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths”* (2 Timothy 4:3-4). A myth is an imaginary or fictitious story which cannot be verified by scientific evidence. Paul was saying that his teachings were based on sound doctrine, and that people would reject sound doctrine and turn to their own made-up stories instead. He warned Timothy not to argue with those who opposed him, for arguing was a waste of time and was of no value to anyone (2 Timothy 2:14).

We have been looking at God’s dealings with Israel in the wilderness: His original prediction to Abraham; the burning bush; the ten plagues in Egypt; crossing the Red Sea; the idolatry at Sinai; God’s pillars of cloud and of fire; Israel’s complaining followed by the giving of the heavenly manna; the twelve spies; Korah’s opposition; Balaam’s deception; the bronze snake; Israel’s immorality; and finally, Moses’ mistake at the rock. We also considered some modern temptations and desires of our own affluent society, and looked at the apostle’s warnings against Godlessness and the love of money. There is much that we can learn from these writings of old.

Paul told Timothy, *“Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 3:14-15). We also need to continue in what we have learned, in order to gain the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).

Amen.



PRAISE THE LORD

Some devotional thoughts

by Dawn Smith

At the recent New Covenant Fellowship conference the theme was ‘Praise the Lord’. This caused me to reflect on the times when I, and probably others, find it can be a challenge to do that. We can experience low periods through life’s circumstances, such as the death of someone close to us, or a personal struggle through events which are beyond the control of friends or family.

Even world events such as those in Ukraine, that we have been witnessing daily on news cycles, can have a depressing effect on our state of mind, or

challenge our sense of justice. Why do innocent people or societies have to suffer? Our hearts and thoughts go out to those people even though we know that throughout history mankind has suffered at the hand of others, and it is hard sometimes to comprehend why so many such events are woven into God's Plan to bring the world into subjection and finally honor Him, and why others of us are spared that depth of suffering! While our head knows that God is in control, our heart has to face the challenge to continue to give praise to the Lord for His blessings amid circumstances that impact us personally and stir our emotions on a global scale.

It is a reminder to maintain our faith and look for comfort in the scriptures. Hymn 254 reads like a prayer:

*"My times are in thy hand, My God, I wish them there.
My life, my friends, my soul, I leave entirely in Thy care
My times are in thy hands, whatever they may be
Pleasing or painful, dark or bright, as best may seem to thee."*

Suffering is not new in a personal sense, and we see examples in scripture how people were still able to praise the Lord in their affliction. In Habakkuk 3:17-18 we read *"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines: the labour of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation"*.

Also James 5:10-11 *"Take my brethren the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and patience. Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy"*.

Paul was permitted to suffer so much: shipwrecked, beaten, imprisoned, when it seemed an impediment to his work for the Lord. Ananias was reassured about meeting with Paul in Acts 9:16-17, when the message from the Lord said, *"Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles ...for I will show him what things **he must suffer** for my name's sake"*.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul talked about his *"thorn in the flesh"* and how he prayed three times that it might be removed. His request was denied, when God assured him that *"My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."* Paul acknowledged too that this affliction was given to him to keep him humble – *"lest I should be exalted above measure"*

through the abundance of the revelations". In 2 Timothy 3:9-10 Paul related some of his experiences and stated that "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution". So, we are reminded that we are permitted experiences which test us through polishing and refining to make us worthy to inherit the joys of the Kingdom. We learn this lesson in Romans 5:3-4, "we glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope".

On a global scale - we do not know the mind of God, but we understand that He permits evil in the world so that the world may learn lessons from the bitter consequence of evil works. Hymn 99 in the BSH reminds us that "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform".

Time is an important element in God's plans, as the following verses indicate:

Psalm 27:14 *"Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait I say on the Lord".*

Isaiah 40:31 *"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount with wings of eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."*

We are given assurance in Lamentations 3:22-23 that *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; They are new every morning; Great is His faithfulness."* The comforting words in 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 give us hope during these troubling times: *"We are troubled on every side but not distressed, we are perplexed, but not in despair ... persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed"*.

And finally, in Psalm 63:3, *"Because thy loving kindness is better than life, I will praise thee"*.

*"Let the name of the LORD be praised,
both now and forevermore.
From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
the name of the LORD is to be praised."
(Psalm 113:2-3; NIV)*

Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 7:20-28

- 20** *And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest:*
- 21** *(For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)*
- 22** *By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.*
- 23** *And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:*
- 24** *But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.*
- 25** *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*
- 26** *For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;*
- 27** *Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.*
- 28** *For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.*

The oath sworn by the Lord God mentioned in verses 20 and 21 is a quotation from Psalm 110:4, a quotation which is made many times in Hebrews, either in full or in part. We saw the reason for this oath in Hebrews 6:17-18.

God chose to make an oath, though it was quite unnecessary for Him to do so, as a concession to people who from time to time made oaths as a testimony to their intentions to give certainty to their promises and declarations. God's oath declares and guarantees that Jesus will live forever as High Priest over an unchangeable priesthood ministering a better covenant, the New Covenant, the "better hope" of verse 19. Under this new arrangement Jesus is able to save "completely" (NIV) or "to the uttermost" (KJV) those who come to God by him because he "ever liveth" (verse 25) to "make intercession for them". The word in this verse, according to Dr. Strong (#3838) means 'uttermost, completely, perfectly'.

In verse 22 the word "surety" means "guarantee" (NIV) or "pledge" (Diaglott) of a better "covenant" instead of "testament". A reminder was given that

there are unilateral covenants, better regarded as promises, and there are bilateral covenants, that is, covenants or agreements between two parties such as the Law Covenant and the New Covenant, each between God and mankind.

Verse 27 tells us that Jesus' sacrifice has been made once for all, that is, for all people for all time. His sacrifice is the antitype of all offerings and sacrifices under the Law Covenant, and is greater than all of them because it enables believers to be forgiven and reconciled to God.

Jesus as High Priest is able to intercede on behalf of all believers. He can plead the case of all believers before God. This makes Jesus' priesthood so special and so different from the priesthood of the Law Covenant. The high Priests under the Law had to offer sacrifices for their own sins before offering sacrifices for the sins of the people (Leviticus 9:6-7), but Jesus was without sin, and has shed his own blood (Hebrews 9:12), and has obtained eternal redemption for us and for all people. Such a High Priest meets all our needs. No other priests could ever be like Jesus, our Great High Priest.

Hebrews 8:1-6

- 1 *Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;***
- 2 *A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.***
- 3 *For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.***
- 4 *For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:***
- 5 *Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.***
- 6 *But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.***

In verses 1 and 2 the "sum" or point that is made is shown by the present tense, and the message is that the new high priest is now in active service in heaven. The change in priesthood has taken place. The old priesthood has been superseded, the new priesthood has been inaugurated. The old covenant has been abolished and the new covenant has been established.

The old priesthood served on earth (verse 4) but the new high priest serves in heaven (verse 6). Under the old covenant Aaron entered the holiest place in the temple only once a year. Christ has entered the holiest place in heaven and is present there interceding for believers continuously.

Moses was commanded to build the tabernacle exactly as he was instructed (verse 5) because it and its ceremonies were to be a physical pattern of the new spiritual tabernacle arrangement made by God, not by man (verse 2). The old arrangement on earth foreshadowed the new arrangement in heaven.

The present tense of verses 3 and 4 indicates that the priests were then operating at the Jewish temple, even though the old order had been abolished. Thus, the letter to the Hebrews was probably written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. Jesus could not have been a priest on earth because he was not of the tribe of Levi, and also because he was raised to his rightful place at the throne of God in heaven (chapter 7:13 and 14).

The old Law Covenant was removed when Jesus died at Calvary. That event achieved the *“blotting out (of) the handwriting of ordinances ... and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross”* (Colossians 2:14). The first covenant, that is the old law, was ready to be replaced, and the replacement occurred when the blood of the New Covenant was shed to ratify, or establish (verse 6) that is, enact, the new law.

Therefore, the new covenant became available at the same moment that the old covenant was abolished. At Jesus' death, when the temple veil was torn miraculously, the old contract with fleshly Israel was replaced with a new spiritual contract, figuratively inscribed on hearts and minds, not literally inscribed on tablets of stone and parchment.

Salvation is now an individual matter between a believer and the creator (Philippians 2:12). The New Covenant takes effect for each individual at the acceptance of the saving work of Jesus Christ. It is available for all those who go to Christ and who confess with their mouth and believe in their heart (Romans 10:9) that he is king and high priest. His death paid for sin, and through faith in that ransom, forgiveness is imputed to the believer (Romans 4:24-25) which becomes a reality at the resurrection.

The position of high priest may not have been taken up until *“Christ ... appeared in the presence of God for us”* (9:24), and if the New Covenant, although ratified, could not have taken effect until then, God's justice would pertain during the interval.

The comment was made that the Law Covenant practices, which had been annulled, were still in vogue when Hebrews was written, but even before those practices were cancelled, they were ready to vanish away as Hebrews 8:13 tells us. It was suggested that the point of transition may have been the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, but most accepted the evidence of the earlier change-over.

The temple was not destroyed until forty years after Jesus' death and resurrection. The apostles used the temple to preach and proclaim the new dispensation in the intervening time. God allowed a three-and-a-half year period of grace to enable the new arrangement to be set before the nation of Israel only, and permitted the Temple precinct to be used for that purpose.

It was also pointed out that there is a difference between something being in existence and that something being acceptable to God. The application and effect of the Law Covenant had gone, and the destruction of all the equipment and facilities, as well as the temple itself, was shortly to happen, though the precise time may not have been known.

Three features of verse 6 were drawn to the class's attention, namely the ministry, the covenant and the promises.

The ministry was "*more excellent*" (KJV), "*superior*" (NIV), as it is based on Jesus' sacrifice for sins, the pinnacle of possibility which cannot be improved.

The covenant is better than the one declared in Exodus 24:1-8. Jesus as Mediator shed his blood and ratified the New Covenant, a much superior covenant because under it sin can be taken away and not held against everyone who believes and obeys. Under the New Covenant all can gain salvation and life, which no-one could do under the Law Covenant.

The promises are that the new law will be written on the hearts and in the minds of believers, that all will come to know the Lord, and that God will be merciful to their unrighteousness and remember their sins no more.

The wording of verse 6, and later in Hebrews 8:13 may be taken by some to mean that the Law Covenant was in some respects faulty, which it was not. The frailty of people made the covenant unsuitable because they could not keep it. The New Covenant is superior because it is based on the superiority of Christ and on faith in God through him, on God's mercy and grace, and on the fact that eternal life can be gained by all believers.



NEWS

Vale Joyce Thompson (formerly Henderson, née Giles)

It is with great sorrow that we report the death of Joyce Thompson on 17 April 2022. Joyce was a faithful follower of Christ and a tireless worker for the Lord, providing care and assistance in many forms to all around her. She took quiet delight in the wonderful promises of God so we look forward to the time when those promises will all be fulfilled and we shall meet her again in His Kingdom.

Autumn Conference

We were greatly encouraged to be able to meet in person for our first face-to-face conference in 3 years at the Foothills Conference Centre in Mooroolbark between Friday 22 and Sunday 24 April 2022. Our theme was "Praise the Lord!", and it was indeed a great delight to be able to do so together once more. The program included talks, devotions, Bible studies, a quiz and a great deal of joyful fellowship. It was greatly uplifting to also witness the baptism of Ben Roe during the conference.

We have booked the Conference Centre for Friday 14 – Sunday 16 April 2023 so please reserve these dates in your diaries and consider how you may be able to contribute to the program with our theme of 'Keeping the Faith'.

Sunday Meetings

We have recommenced face-to-face meetings on Sunday mornings (always subject to current government coronavirus restrictions) and continue to offer a Zoom connection for those unable to attend in person. We aim to intersperse weekly Bible studies with talks and other presentations every few weeks. All interested persons are welcome, so please contact info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au for details or the meeting link if you would like to join us.

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS

The New Covenant News is compiled by an editor responsible to the New Covenant Fellowship. The thoughts expressed do not necessarily represent the understandings of all the members of the group, and readers are requested to heed the words:
"Prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

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