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IN PERFECT PEACE

(All references are from the NIV.)

Benjamin Roe

"In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts.

Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith.

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal" (Isaiah 26:1-4).

Peace. Peace is reflected in the outcome of almost every book, movie or TV series you can come across. It is seen in the happily ever after and notably absent in a cliff-hanger – which draws us back to see the conclusion. We long for peace, and we pray for peace. So what is it, and what are God's promises about peace?

Peace is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as: Freedom from war and violence, especially when people live and work together happily without disagreements.

The Hebrew word translated peace is *Shalom* (Strong's Hebrew 7965). To get a deeper understanding of the nuance in this word, I will read its entry from the book '52 Hebrew Words Every Christian Should Know', by Dave Adamson. He wrote:

'To some people, the idea of peace is a stress-free day. To others, peace is the serenity of a gorgeous sunrise or sunset. Whatever your definition, peace is something we all want. But do you pursue it? Do you seek peace? Do you chase after it every day?

'In ancient Jewish tradition, peace was valued more than truth. The rabbis would argue that if there was a situation in which truth and peace were in conflict with each other, peace should take precedence. Perhaps, this is because the Hebrew word for peace is shalom, which means to be wholly unified with God and others. Among the rabbis, it was more important for you to be unified with God and others than to be right. My friend Andy Stanley puts this

idea into modern terms when he says, You are more important than my view. But how often do we get this the other way around and put our need to be right ahead of people?

‘The first believers in God taught that those who follow God should love peace and pursue it, love their neighbours, and attract others to the Scriptures. This is the peace Jesus offers — peace with God, peace of God, and peace with each other. This sort of peace attracts people to the truth.’

I think that the Jewish traditional greeting of *shalom* takes on new meaning when we realise its implied statement that you are more important than my view. Perhaps this is something we can think about when we greet others.

Throughout the Old Testament we see God’s promises of peace again and again. The following verses are a select few examples (there are well over 200 occurrences in the Old Testament alone).

“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land. I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove wild beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country” (Leviticus 26:3-6).

“The Lord said to Moses, Tell Aaron and his sons, This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:22-26).

“To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you” (Isaiah 54:9-10).

We see these various promises of peace, and yet as we read the Old Testament we realise that there never was true peace. Certainly there were periods of peace, some that lasted several generations, but never true eternal peace. Why not? Because the promises of peace in the Old Testament are *conditional*. As we read in Leviticus 26:3-6, *if* you follow my decrees ... I will grant peace in the land. This is the lesson that re-occurs throughout the Old Testament, the lesson that we cannot obey God perfectly, not on our own. Because of this, there was never (and hasn't yet been) perfect peace.

So, what is the promise to us, to believers after Jesus Christ's time? Let's have a look at some of the New Testament promises.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:15-17).

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:17-18).

"Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:8-12).

From these verses, as well as others, I draw the following points:

- We are told that we will experience trouble (not have physical peace);
- We are called to live at peace with others (mend division, where possible);
- We receive the peace of Jesus Christ in our hearts.

I believe that a significant part of having the peace of Jesus Christ rule in our hearts is our hope for the future – for the resurrection. Knowing that one day we will see again friends and family that we miss. Knowing that there will be true peace. Knowing that there will be no more death. As we read in the New Testament:

“However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man” (Acts 24:14-16).

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Often we are surrounded by annoyances, frustrations and tragedy, and struggle to feel peaceful within. I believe that true peace of the heart and mind isn't the absence of turmoil. I believe that it is a trust *despite* this turmoil. This, I believe, is what is promised to us: because of our faith, because of our hope, and because of God's love (and therefore our love for God, and others), we have peace. Not, as the dictionary definition says, absence from war and violence, but instead *shalom*, being unified with God and trusting in his purpose and plan.

Is this easy to do? Absolutely not! So I'd like to offer a few methods for restoring the peace in our hearts. You will have heard these three points time and time again ... but there's probably a good reason for that!

1. Prayer

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Spend time alone and time with others in prayer. I have personally found that having a suggestion of how a prayer will be structured is helpful (although this won't work for some). There are lots of models out there,

but personally I like the simple upward, outward, inward design. Upward: thanking God; outward: praying for others, issues in the world and so on; inward: asking for help and bringing things that are troubling us to God.

2. Reading scripture

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

I'd like to read a snippet from an article I found online titled 'How to allow the peace of Christ to rule in your heart'.

'In order to allow the peace of Christ to rule your heart, you must first focus. We live in a world that continually demands for our attention. We struggle to keep our thoughts in order and our task lists and projects completed. There's no doubt that it's hard to focus. But focus is crucial when it comes to our relationship with Christ. When we attempt to read Scripture, but lack focus, it's easy to feel lost reading the Bible. You will wander around Scripture and may feel like you have no clue what you're doing. You may even come to a point where you feel like you're wasting your time because you're not truly connecting with the words you're reading. When we approach God's Word, we must learn to focus on what we see and develop a trained eye to know its significance.'

3. Fellowship

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:19-25).

It's my view that we were designed for relationships and for community. This complex web of support is precious, because it allows weakness in individuals by the support of the whole. Practical examples such as

visiting others and calling friends, all remind us of how God can provide for us. Laughter with friends is especially (and scientifically) useful ... guaranteed to settle nerves.

Summary

- Greet others with peace (You are more important than my view).
- We are told we will suffer.
- We are called to live at peace with others.
- We receive peace in our hearts through faith, hope and love.
- We can renew peace daily in the following ways:
 - Prayer;
 - Reading scripture;
 - Fellowship.

Most importantly, trust in the Lord, as we read at the start:

“You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal.” (Isaiah 26:3-4).

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7).



THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

(All references are from the New Century Version.)

Devotion by Diana Robinson

John 6:27 says *“Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you”*.

According to this scripture, our goal is eternal life, which means living in the Kingdom of Heaven. But then why did God give us life on Earth? What does God intend us to do with our lives on this Earth? This question had been on my mind for a long time, and I found an answer to this when I read the Book of Ecclesiastes.

We all know that Solomon, renowned for his wisdom, wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon was a wise and wealthy king. He had everything (from our perspective), but he mourned throughout the twelve chapters

of this book, just like a common man. This book describes Solomon's search for meaningful and long-lasting happiness, which eventually leads to his realisation of what God expects us to do with our life on Earth.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 reads, *“The Teacher says, ‘Useless! Useless! Completely useless! Everything is useless’ ”.*

Some of the other words used for ‘useless’ in other versions are ‘vanity of vanities’, ‘meaningless’, ‘no purpose’, ‘pointless’ and so on.

The author here said that everything in life is useless and questioned the value of all human efforts.

In further verses, Solomon raised a very important question: What brings happiness – completeness – satisfaction?

In verses 4–11 he explored the world and observed a cyclical pattern in nature – generations come and go, the sun rises and sets, the wind blows, and rivers flow into the sea yet never fill it. These observations led him to a realisation that despite continuous efforts, nothing is new under the sun, everything just repeats.

For example, in our daily lives, we clean our house, but the next day it is unclean again. Sometimes I wonder what the point of cleaning is. Everything is repetitive. But we still clean every day. Similarly, we wake up in the morning, eat, work, and sleep before repeating the same process the next day. Solomon here questioned the value of all human efforts and pursuits under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:12–18 addresses the question: Does wisdom bring happiness? Despite his wisdom being greater than all who were before him in Jerusalem, and his heart experienced much wisdom and knowledge, he realised that in much wisdom is much grief, and increasing knowledge only increases sorrow.

Let’s read verses 16–18. *“I said to myself, ‘I have become very wise and am now wiser than anyone who ruled Jerusalem before me. I know what wisdom and knowledge really are.’ So I decided to find out about wisdom and knowledge and also about foolish thinking, but this turned out to be like chasing the wind. With much wisdom comes much disappointment; the person who gains more knowledge also gains more sorrow.”*

Here, chasing the wind is an expression that depicts to do everything you ever wanted to do to find happiness and still feel a void that the wind could just blow through.

He found that wisdom is useless. Then he continued his search for meaningful happiness and tested: Does having fun bring happiness?

“I said to myself, ‘I will try having fun. I will enjoy myself’. But I found that this is also useless. It is foolish to laugh all the time, and having fun doesn’t accomplish anything. I decided to cheer myself up with wine while my mind was still thinking wisely. I wanted to find a way to enjoy myself and see what was good for people to do during their few days of life” (Ecclesiastes 2:1–2). He realised that having fun offers no lasting satisfaction. It only exists in that moment. It is again like chasing the wind.

Next, he tried to give life meaning through the satisfaction that comes through hard work, and tested: Does hard work or accomplishment bring happiness?

In verses 4 to 11 of chapter 2 Solomon undertook great projects: building houses, planting vineyards, gardens, and parks, and acquiring slaves, herds, and flocks. Despite amassing immense wealth, he acknowledged that these possessions were fleeting and unsatisfying.

Despite becoming greater than all who were before him in Jerusalem and indulging his every desire, Solomon found that all his achievements and possessions were meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

He returned to consider: Maybe wisdom is the answer. However, according to Ecclesiastes 2:12–16, death is the future for both the wise and the fool.

“Wise people see where they are going, but fools walk around in the dark. Yet I saw that both wise and foolish people end the same way. I thought to myself, ‘What happens to a fool will happen to me, too, so what is the reward for being wise?’ I said to myself, ‘Being wise is also useless’. The wise person and the fool will both die, and no one will remember either one for long. In the future, both will be forgotten” (Ecclesiastes 2:14-16).

Solomon tried everything and yet couldn't discover the ultimate solution for meaningful and long-lasting happiness. He came to a realisation that all we can do is eat, drink and enjoy. We read this in Ecclesiastes 2:24–26): *“The best that people can do is eat, drink, and enjoy their work. I saw that even this comes from God, because no one can eat or enjoy life without him. If people please God, God will give them wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But sinners will get only the work of gathering and storing wealth that they will have to give to the ones who please God. So, all their work is useless, like chasing the wind.”*

We can observe that some of most successful people of the world are also unhappy, while a man who does not have enough money can still find satisfaction in simple things. Being satisfied with whatever we have is a blessing from God. Enjoying our labour and the fruit of our labour is also a blessing from God. Being able to eat well is also a gift from God.

In Ecclesiastes 3:9–15 Solomon gave wise advice to enjoy one's life and labour as God's gifts, as people cannot add anything to what God has done, and they cannot take anything away from it. God does it this way to make people respect him.

“I have seen what is best for people here on earth. They should eat and drink and enjoy their work, because the life God has given them on earth is short. God gives some people the ability to enjoy the wealth and property he gives them, as well as the ability to accept their state in life and enjoy their work. They do not worry about how short life is, because God keeps them busy with what they love to do” (Ecclesiastes 5:18–20).

In the above verses, Solomon suggests that the ability to enjoy what one has is a gift from God and encourages people to focus on the present day instead of dwelling on the shortness of life; to have contentment in work and life's simple pleasures.

Ecclesiastes 9:7–10 reads, *“So go eat your food and enjoy it; drink your wine and be happy, because that is what God wants you to do. Put on nice clothes and make yourself look good. Enjoy life with the wife you love. Enjoy all the useless days of this useless life God has given you here on earth, because it is all you have. So enjoy the work you do here on earth. Whatever work you do, do your best, because you are going to the grave, where there is no working, no planning, no knowledge, and no wisdom.”*

I believe that Solomon's realisation and insight is valid even in our current position of life. God undoubtedly wants us to prioritise Him while also enjoying what He has bestowed upon us and working towards our goal of eternal life. If we eat, drink, and enjoy without God, life is meaningless, and pursuing happiness without God is like chasing the wind. However, having God at the heart of our lives simplifies everything, and even the tiniest thing brings us serenity, joy, complete contentment, and happiness, making our lives worthwhile. So we are to eat, drink and enjoy in God to make our life meaningful.

1 Corinthians 10:31 says, *“The answer is, if you eat or drink, or if you do anything, do it all for the glory of God”*.

Finally, Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 says, *“Now, everything has been heard, so I give my final advice: Honor God and obey his commands, because this is all people must do. God will judge everything, even what is done in secret, the good and the evil”*.

In conclusion, our main purpose under the sun is to honour Him and obey His commands and to enjoy everything that God has blessed us with.

May our Almighty God bless each of us with the ability to enjoy and be happy with what we have.



TWO PROMISES

(References quoted from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.)

Merv Buckmaster

Introduction

Our recent New Covenant Fellowship Conference titled ‘Promise Keeper’ brought to mind the conference conducted in April 2009 titled ‘All Things New’. That title was taken from Revelation 21:5 where it is recorded that God has promised; *“Behold, I make all things new”* (first promise), followed by John’s words, *“And he said unto me ‘Write: for these words are true and faithful’ ”*.

In a world of strife and calamity this promise of renewal has great appeal, which is what God intended when he inspired John to record it. During the 2009 conference it was stated that in many countries Christians are looking for the setting-up of God’s kingdom here on earth.

One conference paper pointed out that all things were new at the time of creation.

Another paper showed that the promise included a new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13), but made the point that those terms were symbolic of a new government and ruling administration to be established by divine power when God sends Jesus to bring God's kingdom to rule on earth.

Yet another paper showed that the new order is itself symbolised by the *"new Jerusalem, coming down from God, out of heaven"* (Revelation 21:2).

Other papers showed that some renewal has begun, the spiritual revival of Colossians 3:1 producing the 'new creature' of 2 Corinthians 5:17 (also the 'new man' of Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24).

Also there has been established a 'new commandment' (John 13:34) and 'a new and living way' (Hebrews 10:20), both being the essence of the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31.

A group study at the 2009 conference brought out the scope and power of the New Covenant which replaced the Law Covenant. The New Covenant arrangement includes both Jews and Gentiles, and provides the only way to salvation of the human race (Acts 4:12). It is in operation now and will continue thus during the kingdom age.

The breadth and depth of God's promise to make all things new was examined in a paper that indicated that renewal is needed not only for fallen mankind but for the planet earth, and for the plants and animals which were created for the pleasure of God and man.

Thus the first promise of 'all things new' leads on to another promise of 'nothing shall hurt nor destroy'.

In Hindsight

After more than a thousand years of mankind living on earth, God was so displeased with the prevailing wickedness that he destroyed all the people, except Noah and his family, by a flood of waters (Genesis chapters 6, 7 and 8).

Some time after the flood God sent two angels to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of the wickedness of the inhabitants of those cities. When the angels had rescued Lot and his wife and daughters from the doomed city of Sodom, God destroyed both cities, the people and all the vegetation in the valley with a great fire (Genesis chapter 19).

There are several earthquakes recorded in the Bible. One was on Mount Horeb when Elijah was there (1 Kings 19:11). Another was in Judah and Israel when they were ruled at the same time by Uzziah and Joash, respectively (Amos 1:1, Zechariah 14:5). There was the earthquake in Jerusalem on the third day after the crucifixion (Matthew 28:2). Another earthquake occurred when Paul and Silas were freed from prison (Acts 16:26).

There was a storm of darkness and hail which God sent to help the Israelites, led by Joshua, to defeat the Amorites (Joshua chapter 10). There was a storm on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus was with his disciples, and he calmed the wind and waves (Matthew 8:23-26, Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25). There was a storm which battered the ship on which Paul was being taken to Rome (Acts chapter 27).

Thus the Bible record shows that some people, at different times, have suffered from flood, fire, earthquake and storm down through the centuries of Biblical history. But that account is concerned only with the people involved in God's plan of the ages. It does not take into account the floods, the earthquakes, the wildfires and the storms which have affected the other nations spread around the globe during those biblical times. Furthermore, history has recorded the disasters caused by floods, earthquakes, wildfires and storms which have destroyed immeasurable lives and property all around the earth since the times of the apostles. The earth is, and has been, a dangerous place for all living things.

The flood, the earthquakes, the fires and the storms recorded in the Bible were all miracles. They were events engineered by God to serve his purpose, which is to show his power and his control over all of his earthly creation. Each event was an intervention by God at the time of its occurrence, focussed on the circumstances which were under his control. Those events were not part of the apparent curse of the earth which God saw was good at the time of creation. God cursed the ground because of Adam's disobedience, but he allowed it to remain as an environment to be subdued (Genesis 1:28).

While God's power is amply displayed in the created world, he abhors the wickedness of mankind, and he does not take pleasure in the calamities brought about by flood, earthquake, wildfire and storm. Since Adam's disobedience in the garden there has been nothing good enough on earth to satisfy the perfect God who created all things. God's intention is that when he makes all things new, nothing shall hurt nor destroy in his kingdom (second promise), (Isaiah 11:9, 65:25), which must be a promise for the future because, since Eden, there has been much that hurts and destroys on earth. In contrast to this, Jesus' ministry of healing and restoring, which culminated in his sacrifice, validated the gospel message and ratified the New Covenant.

In View

Peter stated in his second epistle the situation that one arrangement of God's dealing with mankind came to its end when he destroyed it by a flood, and that the present arrangement is being reserved until the day of judgement. He also stated that this present heavens, which symbolises the ruling powers of the nations; and this present earth, which symbolises the people subject to those powers, will also be destroyed, since they are 'reserved unto fire', fire being a symbol of destruction (2 Peter 3:6-7).

Down through the ages there have been faithful people who have believed that God would overcome the problems of human disobedience, and at a time of his choosing he would make the earth properly suitable for them to live in. Thus, through their faith they also knew that at that time he would prevent the ravages of flood, earthquake, wildfire and storm. Many of those faithful men and women are named in Hebrews chapter 11. All of them believed in the promise of the resurrection, a promise, that since their times, has been proven by Jesus' resurrection, and their belief included the understanding that, although the earth was good in God's sight at the time of creation, it was no longer good. They also understood that it was God's intention, not only to grant eternal life to the faithful, but to have the world brought to the same standard, to a state of perfection.

Thus, while the ages of miracles are past: there is a new age of miracles to come.

This indication of the age of miracles to come is implied in Peter's second sermon to the people of Jerusalem (Acts chapter 3). Although Peter was explaining to them the miraculous power of the God who had sent Jesus

to them with an invitation to salvation, he declared that Jesus would remain with God in heaven *“until the times of restitution of all things”* (Acts 3:21).

The phrase ‘restitution of all things’ is from the KJV. Other versions have ‘restore everything’ (NIV), ‘final restoration’ (NLT), ‘period of restoration’ (NASB), ‘times of restoration’ (NWT and Diaglott), ‘universal restoration’ (Phillips) and ‘great restoration’ (Moffatt).

In a paper titled ‘Restoration of All Things’ (see NCN No. 159, August 2022) it was reasoned that translating the Greek word ‘apoka-tastasis’ as ‘restoration’ indicates that Peter was referring to something which had been lost by the nation of Israel, and that it was something which had been restored to them as individuals at Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection. The Israelites had become lost as God’s chosen people; *“And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end”* (Ezekiel 21:25), and *“‘I have no pleasure in you,’ saith the LORD of hosts”* (Malachi 1:10). And they no longer had God’s chosen king, David; *“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day”* (Acts 2:29). David was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22), and those that followed him were not like him.

Jesus was the promised heir to David’s throne (Luke 1:32, Acts 2:30), and at his ascension he was appointed as the king and high priest of the new kingdom of spiritual Israel (Matthew 28:18, Acts 2:36). This was the fulfilment of prophecy, firstly in Ezekiel 21:26-27 *“... remove the diadem, and take off the crown ... and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is, and I will give it him”*. And secondly in chapter 37, *“... brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you ...”* (Ezekiel 37:13-14), thus restoring, in both these aspects, king and nation, through a new spiritual covenant, the favourable situation of the Israelites in God’s sight.

Although this view limits the meaning of the Greek word to ‘restoration’, it is appropriate in this instance. Limiting the application of ‘all things’ in Peter’s address is sufficient for the period during which he was explaining to his Jewish audience that God’s favour had been restored to them.

Jesus had been set on David’s throne, and they could become reinstated as God’s favoured nation if they went to him in spirit and in truth, as individuals, to become members of a spiritual Israel, the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). This restoration was the beginning of God making all things new.

But they, as a nation, rejected Jesus as the Messiah, and at the end of Daniel's seventieth week (Daniel 9:27) that period of restoration came to an end when the invitation was extended to the gentiles, also extending the meaning of 'all things' to include "*the times of refreshing to come from the presence of the Lord*" (Acts 3:19).

The times of refreshing began when Jesus began his ministry, and the work of making all things new began when he made the sacrifice which opened the way to life for a nation, exclusively to the Jews for three and a half years, and then to all mankind, including both Jews and Gentiles, all of whom were spiritually dead: a refreshing which will become universal when Jesus returns to establish God's kingdom on earth and extend the opportunity for spiritual revival (Colossians 3:1) to all people.

In Anticipation

However, Weymouth renders the phrase as 'times of the reconstitution of all things'. This is in agreement with the translation in Strong's concordance (Strong 605) where the primary meaning is given as 'reconstitution', followed by a secondary meaning, 'restitution'.

Thus there are three related aspects of the meaning of 'apoka-tastasis'.

Firstly, the aspect of restoration which is 'returning something to its former state' or 're-instating someone to their former position'. This is the case with the Israelites in the preceding discussion above.

Secondly, there is the meaning of restitution which is making reparation, that is, 'giving back something to its former owner'. An example is the rise, fall and re-instatement of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia.

And thirdly, there is the meaning of reconstitution, which means 'remaking', or 'giving things a new constitution', a substantial making new again. This conclusion is set out in the CEV (rendition of Acts 3:21) which has "*until God makes all things new*". The same conclusion is implied in the GNB which has "*until the time comes for all things to be made new*".

The foregoing argument is the logical conclusion that follows from Revelation 21:5 where God states "*Behold I make all things new*".

God began the work of making all things new when he replaced the old Law Covenant of condemnation with the New Covenant of redemption which was sealed with Jesus' sacrifice.

The work continued with the writings of the New Testament where God's new dispensation is recorded in the gospel message, and is explained in the epistles. And the work has been extended through the influence of the holy spirit, which has empowered some men and women, beginning with the apostles, to understand and preach the gospel message, including the encouragement from Jesus in his messages to the churches, recorded in Revelation; giving guidance and strength to believers during the gospel age.

All Things Old

Throughout the ages of mankind the earth and its inhabitants have suffered from floods, wildfires, earthquakes and storms. The people have also suffered spiritually because of their ignorance, disobedience and wrongdoing, promoted by the evil influence of Satan, and suffered as a consequence of the deterioration of human nature without access to the tree of life.

When God exerts his power to bring about the reconstitution of all things his ambition can be only to produce the final situation where all things will be perfectly good.

Thus it is easy and appropriate to equate the reconstitution of all things with the age of miracles to come, when God will continue to make all things new.

There will be no more floods, no more wildfires, no more earthquakes and no more storms. There will be no thorn nor thistle (Genesis 3:18), no roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), no poisonous serpent (Psalm 58:4) to cause harm to any living thing, nor will there be any force or event to cause destruction which could mar the testimony to God's power and glory. They shall not hurt nor destroy in that everlasting kingdom of peace.

It should be sufficient to believe that God has promised that he will make all things new. However, he has inspired several of his servants to describe his intentions in human terms. *"He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still"* (Psalm 107:29), both a spiritual calm for these troubled times, and a literal calm to come across all the earth.

"And I will cleanse them of all their iniquity" (Jeremiah 33:8). I think that the earth will also be cleansed of pollution to match the purity of mind and heart of the people.

There will be no more pain. There will be no more death. *“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain”* (Revelation 21:4).

There will be no more starvation, *“they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them”* (Isaiah 65:21). In truth, no-one will be hungry, either for spiritual or temporal needs. This could be regarded as another example of restoration, because when God had placed Adam in the garden he said, *“Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; for you it shall be for meat”* (Genesis 1:29). That situation of nothing lacking will be restored.

Epilogue

John Marshall, an Australian, wrote a book which he titled ‘I Can Jump Puddles’, a title that was both simple and profound because Marshall had been crippled by polio. The joy which he expressed in that book required a leap of faith for him to discover his latent ability to overcome his handicap.

In a similar manner it requires a leap of faith to become convinced that there exists a being who is all-powerful and all-knowing. That being is Yahweh our God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, and the giver of life. With that conviction of his existence comes the realisation that God created us with the ability to converse with him because we are told that we were made in his likeness. This is shown by God explaining to Adam that everything in the garden where he had placed the man was for his benefit; (Genesis 1:28-30), and by the later conversation and his confrontation with Adam in the garden, an exchange which was sorrowful for both parties (Genesis 3:9-11).

When God uses his power and knowledge to make all things new it will not be just for restoration because all things will be better than before; it will not be just for restitution because all things will be in their proper places; it will be for reconstitution so that nothing will hurt nor destroy in his holy kingdom (Isaiah 11:9; 65:25).

At the time of the reconstitution of all things, both these promises will be fulfilled.



CHOICES

Devotion by Felicity Bhatnagar

I would like to share with you some thoughts that have occurred to me over the last few weeks – brought about by my daily readings and things that I have heard.

Firstly, a quote from the Bard, Shakespeare: ‘Prince Hamlet to Ophelia, ‘God hath given you one face, and you make yourself another’.

This is because Ophelia paints her face to make herself pretty to attract a husband. I feel this is a bit like me, maybe us, maybe other Christians as I/we face choices, moment by moment in our everyday lives. Which face do we choose? Do we choose the one God gave us or the other made-up face? The one to please the self or the one to please the world?

God sees us clearly as we are and as he made us and is developing us, inside and out, pure, simple no adornment required. We can feel safe to be ourselves with Him. This could open up a whole rabbit hole to explore but we don’t have time for that tonight. On the other hand, we often dress ourselves up differently, both inside and out, to face worldly standards, sometimes to meet with its approval and other times because we don’t feel safe to express and show everything we feel and are. So, we try to conform to what we think people want and who we think that they think we are. We need to understand that then our face is less pure and less beautiful in God’s eyes. We lose the simplicity and beauty that God has given us.

I see that when we face everyday choices, often minute decisions such as ‘will I eat this or drink that if it’s not good for me’, to huge decisions such as ‘will I take this job or live here’, we need to be mindful as to whether we are choosing God or self/the world.

We read in 1 Peter 2:5; *“Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”.*

I would like to suggest that each choice we make for God over self is another spiritual stone or brick in the temple of God within us.

1 Corinthians 3:16 says, *“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”.* Every choice is binary God or self. To help us make choices facing God-ward, we can look towards his word.

“... his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night.” (Psalm 1:2). Then we will have the strength to choose God because, moving on to verse 3, we will be like a tree planted by the water. *“And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”* (Psalm 1:3). And *“Blessed is the man that trusteth in Jehovah, and whose trust Jehovah is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, that putteth down its roots by the river bed, and shall not fear when heat cometh, but its leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit”* (Jeremiah 17:7-8).

So by trusting in Yahweh we are free of fear – whatever may come our way. Bringing forth fruit in season (fruit of the spirit), our leaves will not wither and we shall always prosper. Because: Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV) says, *“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart’ ”.* And Job 23:10 *“But he knoweth the way that I take; When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”*

Another tree analogy I recall is that a tree with deep roots is strong and can withstand heavy weather. If not deep rooted it needs lots of other trees around it, and they protect each other.



Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 12:1-4

- 1. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,***
- 2. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.***
- 3. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.***
- 4. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.***

The “*witnesses*” of verse 1 are the faithful ones of chapter 11. The Greek word ‘*martus*’ (Strong 3144) has the prime meaning of ‘witness’ although it is the source of the English word ‘martyr’. In Romans 1:9 Paul claimed God as his witness, that is, the observer of Paul’s service to the Christian gospel, while in Acts 22:20 the death of Stephen was a witness, or testimony to his faith. It also made him the first Christian martyr. In this first verse of Hebrews chapter 12 they are witnesses, not as observers, but because of the testimonies of their lives of faith. They are not a crowd of spirit beings looking down on the present world because they gave their lives to living the truth and died in faithfulness (Hebrews 11:13). Their lives of faith are an example to us for encouragement, because through their faith they received a good report (11:2).

“*Every weight*” which we must lay aside includes all those things that are an impediment or an encumbrance to the exercise of faith. While sin besets every one, and sin must be overcome, there may be things that are not wrong in themselves but may be an impediment to living the Christian life. “*Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible, but not everything is constructive*” according to 1 Corinthians 10:23 (NIV), whether it be concerned with eating, with physical activities or with philosophical discussion as in Colossians 2:8.

Also in verse 1, the sense of “*the sin which doth so easily beset us*” is that sin lies in ambush to entangle anyone, and for the believer it is a trap to be avoided. Since sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4), sin, in the general sense, is everything that is against God’s law, or will. If there is a sin that defeats the Christian, it may be different for each individual. However, in Hebrews 12:1 the besetting sin is probably that sin which Paul had dealt with so thoroughly in previous chapters, the sin of disbelief (chapter 2 verse 1; 3:7,8,12,18,19; 4:6,11; 6:4-6; 10:26-29; 11:6). Peter gave a warning against entanglement with the world (2 Peter 2:19,20), and Paul gave a similar warning in verse 3 of this chapter.

For an athlete in a race, to lay aside every weight is essentially physical, wearing only a minimum of clothing and reducing body mass through training exercises. The race is run as fast as possible and there is only one winner.

However, for the Christian these aspects of running do not apply, as Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. In Hebrews 12:1 Paul exhorted his readers to run with patient endurance, not a race, but the course (Diaglott) marked out for us by the example of Jesus, who is described in verse 2 as the pioneer of the life of faith required of the believer. He

was the author and the perfecter, or the first to complete, or bring to completion, that faith shown by the elders of Hebrews 11:2. His faith was perfect.

Our faith is not a system of belief, but our conviction of the efficacy of his sacrifice and of the resurrection. The course is not a sprint nor even a long-distance race but a life-long endeavour, sometimes a struggle, to follow his example. And while there is only one prize there will be many who obtain it and share it with the Lord himself as the joint-heirs (Romans 8:17).

The essence of Paul's message is to keep going with faithfulness, avoiding things that can slow, or even stop the believer, looking towards the finish line where Jesus will reward those who reach it with a crown of life (James 1:12).

The faithful ones of past ages looked forward to the promise of a resurrection to life and honour, whereas the faithful of the gospel age look back to the proof of resurrection and the promise of salvation.

In verse 2 the word "joy" means 'calm delight'. It is an emotion giving a heart-felt uplifting of the spirit together with a sense of relief.

The Lord's achievement of enabling God's promises to be fulfilled in the future was because of the promise of joy to follow the suffering of pain on the cross and the state of death. That joy included being set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2); the salvation of the human race (Hebrews 5:9); entering into his glory (Luke 24:26 and John 17:5), the pleasure of doing his father's will (John 6:38), to be given life in himself (John 5:26), to ask God for his disciples to share his joy (John 17:13), being granted all power and authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18) for the reconstitution of all things (Acts 3:21).

In Luke 10:17-20 the 70 disciples sent out by the Lord to preach, returned with joy that they had been able to do good things in Jesus' name. But Jesus told them not to rejoice in their good works, but in the result, which was that because of their faith and obedience to him their names were "*written in heaven*".

In John 3:29 John rejoiced that he had been able to hear Jesus' voice. And in John 15:11 Jesus told his disciples that his joy in teaching them God's will was the source of their joy. In John 14:28 he told them that his promise to return after going away should make them rejoice, because

he would then complete the work that he had begun with them, making a contrast between the trouble ahead of them and the joy of the reunion to follow.

Also in Hebrews 12 verse 2 Paul noted the Lord's endurance, suffering the actions of sinful men although sinless himself, even as far as death on the cross, as an example to believers to not be weakened in mind or in spirit. Because Jesus suffered (verse 3), the disciples can expect to suffer when resisting temptation to wrongdoing. The Lord resisted unto blood, and although the disciples had not done so until that time (verse 4), they should strive earnestly to resist, even to the extent of being injured.

This exhortation to patient resistance to spiritual challenges was to the Christian Hebrews, and comes to us through the examples of Jesus and the faithful men and women of the Old Testament.



NEWS

Vale Russell Howard Collins

Russell passed into rest on 6 April 2024 at the age of 97 years. He was a stalwart of the faith and for many years led the meetings of the New Covenant Fellowship in Melbourne, writing and presenting countless papers, publishing many books on religious topics (<http://www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au/resources/#Publications>) and contributing valuable thoughts to studies.

He will be remembered for his erudite scholarship, his love of language and extensive vocabulary including many memorable turns of phrase, his love of hymns and music, and his diplomacy, always encouraging warm fellowship amongst believers.

Russell's life demonstrated his unflinching love for our creator and for our saviour Jesus Christ, and his steadfast belief in the promises of God as expounded in his holy word. Russell loved to spend time with the four generations of his family and last year celebrated 75 years of marriage to his dearly beloved wife Joan, who died in December last year. He was always courteous and gentlemanly and has left a wonderful legacy and example of a godly life; he will be greatly missed. We look forward to seeing him again in the Kingdom of God when all of God's promises, which Russell long preached and greatly desired to see, will be fulfilled.

Vale Robert (Bob) Henry Simpson

Bob passed into rest on 13 May 2024 at the age of 90 years. He was a friendly and faithful member of the congregation with a mischievous smile and a strong loyalty to his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and to his heavenly father. Bob was very practical and clever with his hands, had a great sense of humour and loved to have a good chat, especially about the scriptures and the promises of God. There will be great joy when we are reunited with him in the resurrection.

Autumn Conference

We were greatly blessed to be able to share in-person fellowship for our 47th autumn conference at the Foothills Conference Centre in Mooroolbark between Thursday 4th and Saturday 6th April 2024. We were treated to talks, devotions and Bible studies related to our theme of 'Promise Keeper', and there were also plenty of opportunities for informal discussions with fellow brethren. We have booked the Conference Centre for Saturday 12th to Monday 14th April 2025 so please reserve these dates in your diaries and consider how you may be able to contribute to the program.

Sunday Meetings

We are continuing our face-to-face meetings on Sunday mornings as well as offering a Zoom connection for those unable to attend in person. We try 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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