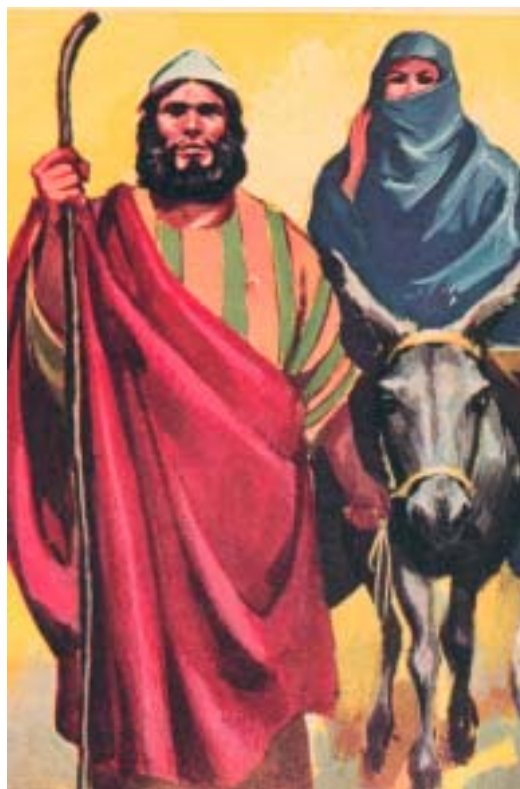


# Spiritual Blessings

Vol. 16 N°5

Sept./Oct. 2002

## Mary and Joseph.



From "The Bible Story" April 1964,  
Fleetway Publications, London.

The Bible is full of the stories of men and women who were faithful to God and played a very important part in His great plan of redemption.

Sometimes many chapters are required to tell us of the part played by the faithful. Examples of this are the stories of Abraham, Joseph, David and Moses. The part played by others in God's plan requires only a few verses.

In this article I want to look at two people who were very important to God's plans, but people of whom we know so very little.



The Berean  
Bible Fellowship of  
AUSTRALIA Incorporated

2 Timothy 2:15 2 Timothy 3:16

From the words of God to Eve we learn that the "Promised Messiah" would be born of a woman, and Eve apparently thought that she had produced the promised seed with the birth of Cain but it was not so. Four thousand years later God appeared to a young Jewish girl, who was engaged to be married, with startling news - she was to bear the Messiah.

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her". Luke 1:26-38.

Mary was living the life of an ordinary Jewish girl when God sent Gabriel to her with this astonishing news. No

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wonder that Mary was troubled or confused. She was a virgin and told Gabriel so. With further explanation from him she accepts the revelation with no further comments recorded. God had spoken and she believed God.

Continued page 3

# The President's Word



The most important event on the BBFA's calendar at the moment is the annual study weekend at Bethshan, Wyee, NSW, from Sept. 27th. to the 29th.

The Producer has been regularly running reminders about it in each issue of this magazine, and we hope that you have decided to come. We can assure you of a time of rich study and fellowship around the Word of God. Your presence will add a great deal to the meetings, as each of us draws encouragement and inspiration from those who attend.

You should have received a registration form in the previous issue, and if you haven't already done so, I would urge you to register straight away.

We have sometimes set a theme for the conference, but usually we leave it to the various speakers to choose their own topics. We believe the Holy Spirit is the best chooser of topics. We look forward with great anticipation to our "Bethshan" refresher course.

As I was preparing these notes (early August), we received news from New Zealand that our Brother in the Lord, Val Griffiths had fallen asleep in Christ.



17Jan 1922-31 July 2002

Val was one of the Lord's gentlemen, and a wonderful encourager of other believers. He served his Lord

faithfully for most of his life, and was not afraid to follow Him into new paths when he discovered the Truth concerning the Mystery and the Church which is His Body. With his wife Valerie, he attended several of our Bible conferences, both in NSW and Queensland, and spoke at a number of these. I thank the Lord for the privilege of knowing Val and for his faithful stand for the truth of God's Word. We pray for his wife Valerie and all the family members that they will be very conscious of the Lord's presence and His sustaining grace.

Athol Walter.

## Meetings

**2002  
Conference  
27-29 Sept.  
BETHSHAN  
Wyee**

### **Brisbane**

Alternate  
Sundays  
10:00AM

Long Weekend  
June 2003  
(07) 3297 1981

### **Sydney**

3rd Sunday  
of each month.  
Lunch 12:45PM.  
Study 1:30PM.  
Community Hall  
104 Galston Rd  
Hornsby Hts.  
(02) 4996 4455

### **Newcastle**

Every Monday.  
7:30PM  
34 Aroona St  
Edgeworth.  
(02) 4950 6708

## New Queensland Bible Study Venue.

C Block.  
Redbank Plains State High School,  
Willow Street,  
Redbank Plains.  
Brisbane. QLD

## Spiritual Blessings

The official journal of the  
**Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia Inc.**

Visit our Web Site: [www.bbfa.org.au](http://www.bbfa.org.au)

Articles which honour The Lord Christ Jesus, and acknowledge the principle of right division will be considered for publication. All articles are accepted on the basis that they may be used as the BBFA sees fit unless otherwise requested by the author.

The interpretation of Scripture by various authors is not necessarily the one held by the majority of the Fellowship.

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### **The BBFA Tenets.**

1. Full Inspiration of the Scriptures.
2. The Deity of Christ.
3. All sufficiency of Christ's One Sacrifice.
4. The Bible study principle of right division.

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V-President: Anne Ward.  
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Secretary: Margaret Abbott.  
Committee members:  
Bob Davidson, David Tavender.



## Mary & Joseph. Cont.

After confiding in Elizabeth, who would be the mother of John the Baptist, Mary blessed God.

"...My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever".

Luke 1:46-55.

Mary recognized that by choosing her as the Messiah's mother God was honouring her, but not only that, He was honouring the promises that He had made to Israel.

What a remarkable young woman! Besides telling Elizabeth about her baby she told nobody else. If she had, the resulting scandal would certainly have attracted Satan, and God was not ready for that to happen until some time after the birth.

The only-begotten Son of God was born in a stable at Bethlehem and worshipped by common shepherds. An unusual birth for the coming "King of Kings" and "Lord of Lords" and we are told that, "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart". Luke 2:19.

Although Mary believed God about the conception of the Lord she could not have fully understood the full significance of what was happening to her. Who could?

After the ceremony of circumcision and the proclamation of Simeon we are told that "Joseph and his mother (Mary) marvelled at those things which were spoken of him". Luke 2:33.

The next time that Mary is mentioned in Scripture is when the Lord was twelve years old. After visiting Jerusalem for the Feast, they left the city without Him and going back to Jerusalem they did not find Him for three

days. When they did find Him, His mother scolded Him and told Him how they had worried about Him. He told her bluntly that she should have realised that He would be about His father's business, and He did not mean Joseph's business.

Again they did not understand what He was saying to them but Mary "kept all these sayings in her heart". Luke 2:51.

### *The Lord's Ministry.*

Whether the Lord performed any miracles before His Ministry began at 30 years of age we are not told. He may have, or Mary may have known that He could or would do miraculous things because of who He was, because there is an interesting incident involving Christ and His mother recorded in John 2:1-12.

The Lord, His mother and disciples were at a wedding in Cana and the supply of wine ran out, (verse 3). Mary obviously knew that the Lord could do something about it if He wanted to or else she would not have told Him about it and He would not have answered as He did in verses 3- 4.

"And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him, they have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."

That did not put Mary off as verse 5 makes evident. She must have learned something from being His mother for 30 years.

"His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

The incident recorded in Matthew 12:46-50 and Mark 3:31-35 must have given His mother more to wonder about as the words of her son's difficult sayings are hard to understand, and we will not try to deal with them here.

### *The Crucifixion.*

Mary is not mentioned again until the Lord was being crucified on the Cross. It is difficult for us who are not mothers to appreciate what Mary must have been going through as she saw her precious son hanging on that tree and what she would have understood by the words that He spoke to her.

"When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy

**If you have not yet registered for Bethshan**

**please contact the Secretary or a committee person immediately**

**see opposite page**

**don't miss this weekend**

Continued Page 8

# The Lie Versus The Truth.

## Three Measures.

The measure of the gift of Christ;

the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;

working in the measure of every part.

# Ephesians

N° 38



**Athol  
Walter**

These three measures, or perhaps standards, are set before us in Ephesians 4, providing us with appropriate goals at which to aim. They will also provide us with a few headaches as we try to achieve them.

One other subject that I want to bring to your attention in ch. 4 is rather obscured by our English translations, and not only the A.V. All the translations have missed this point, which seems to me to have some importance.

In 4:25 we read in the A.V., "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another."

Of course, I have no argument with what that verse appears to say. Telling lies should have no place in our conduct as redeemed children of God. But the verse, I believe, is saying something more. It touches on a subject that pervades Scripture right from Gen. 3, but which does seem to become more prominent as we get closer to the last days.

Other versions have the beginning of v. 25 like this:

"Therefore, putting away falsehood ..."

(RSV)

"Therefore, rejecting all falsity ..." (Amplified)

"Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood ..." (NIV)

If, however, you consult your Interlinear Greek Testaments, you will see that what Paul actually wrote was this: "Wherefore putting off the Lie ..." I hope you can see the difference between putting away (or off) lying, and putting off THE LIE.

There are three other places in the New Testament where the Lie is spoken of (making four in all). They are as follows:

John 8:44, "... When he speaketh 'the' (not 'a', as in the A.V.) lie, he speaketh of his

own; for he is a liar, and the father of it."

Rom. 1:25, "Who changed the truth of God into the Lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."

2 Thess. 2:11, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe the Lie;"

Please read and consider the contexts of the above verses, as they provide important information. It would take us too far afield to consider each of those references in any detail, but notice that in the context of 2 Thess. 2:11, some will be condemned not only because they turned away from the truth, but also and perhaps more importantly, because they did not receive a love of the truth. There is a point worth pondering surely, as we look at our own walk and witness for our Master.

## What is The Lie?

Once we start to consider what these passages say about the Lie, our minds should turn to Genesis 3, for it is here that we find the first manifestation of the Lie in human history. It is usual for many of us to say that the Lie is Satan's statement to Eve, "You shall not surely die." That, I think, is certainly part of the Lie, but not the whole of it. Please look at Gen. 3 as I make a few points about it.

Notice firstly what Satan says in v. 1. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" The inference in this seemingly innocent question is that God is a bit mean to stop them eating of the fruit of every tree. What is He trying to keep from them? Satan impugns God's character.

Satan then flatly contradicts what God had said. "Ye shall not surely die." Eve, of course, did not quote accurately what God had said.

And finally, Satan leads Eve to expect a false outcome. "... ye shall be as gods." Don't forget that it was Satan's desire to be as God that led to his downfall. And following on from this, the sorry history of mankind shows that anything and everything has been put in God's place by fallen man, and worshipped as God. How apt are Paul's words in Rom. 1:21-23: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in the imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the

Col. 3:4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Col. 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Col. 3:6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,

Col. 3:7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

Col. 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

Col. 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,

Col. 3:10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created

him, Col. 3:11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian,

Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." And we should add the opening words of the next verse: "Wherefore God gave them up.."

Now let's turn to Eph. 4:13-16 and 22-25. I can hear quite a few echoes in these verses of Rom. 1. Be that as it may, our focal point in Eph. 4 is v. 25: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour ..."

My Interlinear Greek version puts it like this: "Wherefore putting off the lie ..." This is the only translation that renders the verse like that. All the others I have follow the A.V in speaking about lying or falsehood. I think they have missed an important point. Let me elaborate.

We must go back to the verse 17: "This I say, therefore, ... that ye walk not as other Gentiles walk ..." While the section really goes beyond the end of the chapter, our purpose will be served in this study if we conclude at v. 27: "Neither give place to the devil."

Note the following points:

- v. 14. "... no more children tossed to and fro ... sleight of men ... cunning craftiness ... lie in wait to deceive."
- v. 17. "Walk not as other Gentiles in the vanity of their mind."
- v. 18. "... understanding darkened ... alienated from the life of God through ignorance ... blindness of heart."
- v. 19. "... lasciviousness (lustfulness)... uncleanness ... greediness."
- v. 20. "But ye have not so learned Christ ..."
- v. 21. "... as the truth is in Jesus."
- v. 22. "... put off the former manner of life ... corrupt ... deceitful lusts."
- v. 24. "Put on the new man ... righteousness ... true holiness."
- v. 25. "Wherefore putting off the LIE ... speak truth with your neighbour."
- v. 27. "Don't give place to the devil."

The parallels with Gen. 3 and Rom. 1 in the above verses are quite conclusive to me. Paul is speaking about THE LIE, not just telling lies.

Don't forget that Paul started ch. 4 with an urgent request that we walk worthy of our calling. It seems to me then, that what follows is nothing less than his detailed explanation as to how we are to walk worthily.

Notice the contrast in v. 13 between the

mature (perfect) man (maybe we should say adult here, as it is not confined to males) on the one hand, and on the other, in v. 14 the children who are pushed and pulled with every new doctrinal fad that comes along, or by the cunning deceitfulness and conjuring tricks of men who are lying in wait to deceive.

In v. 17 Paul urges us to walk not as other Gentiles walk. There is no word for "other" in the Greek in some texts. We are not to walk as the Gentiles do. And how is that? They walk in the vanity of their minds, with darkened understanding, alienated from the life of God through ignorance, because of the blindness of their hearts. That is how we are not to walk.

Don't miss the two references to the mind in this section. 4:1-2 has "Walk worthy in all humility of mind." And v. 17 gives us the contrast, "Don't walk in the vanity of your mind."

We speak about the heart as being the seat of our emotions knowing full well that our hearts are simply muscular pumps to circulate our blood. In Paul's day they referred to their bowels in a similar way. These are simply figures of speech that we use, but the truth is that it is our minds that control our emotions, while temptations arise from the lusts of the flesh, the battle of the temptation is won or lost in the mind. It is a worthwhile study to follow through what the Scriptures say of the mind. However, I would remind you of just one reference now, i.e. Rom. 12:1,2:

## The "old man"

is the sinful nature we all inherit from fallen Adam. Fundamentally God dealt with this at the Cross, for then our old man was crucified with Him (Rom. 6:6). Now each member of the Body is exhorted to count this by faith and so make it experimental day by day. The old nature can never improve, or be redeemed or changed. God gives it over to death and implants into His children the perfect thing he requires. This now can renew and control the mind with its thinking and planning through the Spirit's work. It is a new beginning, a transformation of the mind as Romans 12:2 declares; it is called "the new man" and manifests in practice the mind of Christ, and the actions that spring from it are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22, 23). This is the new man "put on" (Eph.4:24), the mind of Christ in action, and it is this way of thinking and living that must now characterise each member of Christ's Body.

Paul now shows how this works specifically:

"Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor', for we are members of one another." Eph.4:25.

Stuart Allen. "Letters From Prison".

Continued Page 8

# NEWS FLASH!



## Birth of a Nation READ ALL ABOUT IT!

There are two people in the book of **Genesis** who played a very important role in establishing the **nation of Israel**. They were Abram (later **Abraham**) and **Joseph**. They were obedient and faithful to **God's Word**.

**Israel** became God's chosen people and they became important in **God's plan to save mankind**.

Now, let's look at .....

# Abraham

*Read Genesis 12.*

*Fill in the blanks to find out what God's covenant (promise) to Abraham was.*

I will make you into a ..... nation and I will ..... you;  
I will make your name ....., and you will be a .....  
I will ..... those who ..... you, and whoever  
..... you I will ..... ; and all peoples on earth will  
be ..... through you.



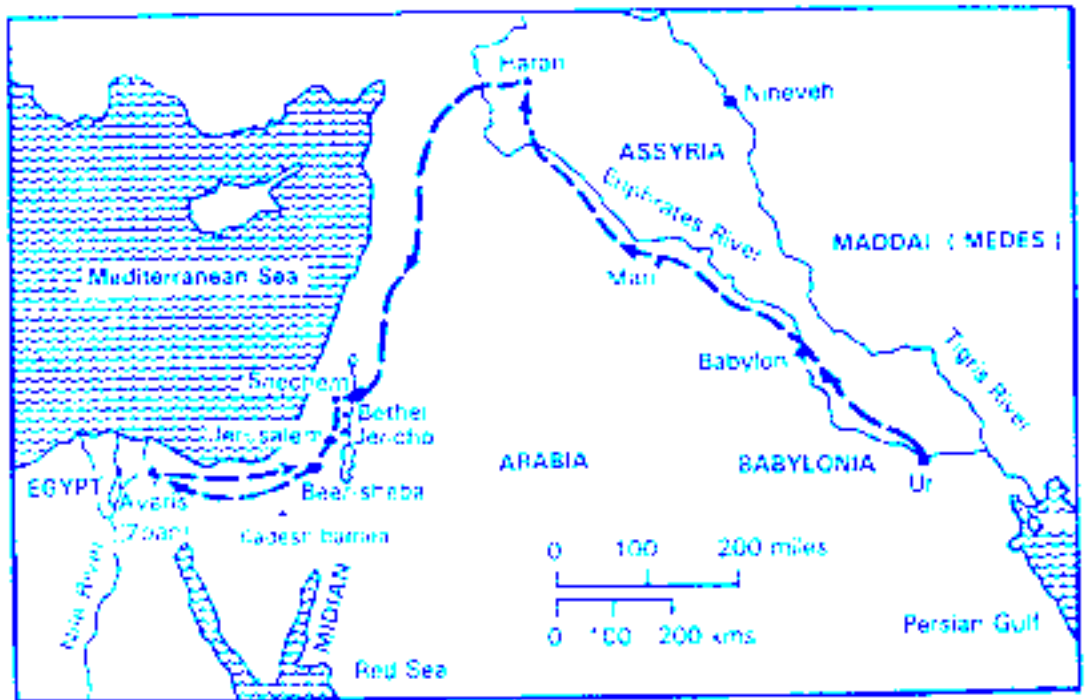
Read about Abraham's early travels in Genesis 11:31-32.

Now read Genesis 12 and 13:1-4 to find out about Abraham's other travels.



Follow where Abraham travelled on the map.

Start at Ur.



## QUIZ TIME



- Why did Abraham and his family stay close to the Euphrates River?
- How many kilometers did Abraham cover? (Using a piece of string to go along the route, measure the length of the string and then, using the scale, estimate how many kilometers Abraham travelled.)
- What was Abraham's wife's name? .....
- How many children did Abraham have? .....
- What happened to his son, Isaac, and why?  
.....
- Abraham was to be the father of a great nation. What was the name of that nation? .....
- They were to be God's chosen people. Where was their new land?  
.....

## Ephesians N<sup>o</sup> 38. From page 5

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice ... and be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may (ap)prove what is...the will of God."

The end result of the vanity, darkness and ignorance of the unbeliever's mind is in v. 19: lustfulness, uncleanness, greediness. Fortunately, it is gloriously possible for the believer to walk differently. The positive side is given to us in v. 20: "But ye have not so learned Christ," and v. 21. "if (indeed) ye have heard Him." There is no uncertainty here. Paul means something like "as ye surely have heard Him." And don't miss the last half of the verse: "... taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus."

Let me quote these verses from the NEB, as I think they help us to see the flow of thought a bit better:

"But that is not how you learned Christ. For were you not told of him, were you not taught the truth as it is in Jesus? - that, leaving your former way of life, you must lay aside that old human nature, which, deluded by its lusts, is sinking towards death. You must be made new in mind and spirit, and put on the new nature of God's creating which shows itself in the just and devout life called for by the truth. So then, throw off falsehood (THE LIE). Speak the truth to each other for all of us are parts of the one body."

This brings us to our climax. Because we have learned "the truth as it is in Jesus", because we don't walk as the Gentiles do in the ignorance of darkened minds, because we have put off the old man and put on the new, the logical outcome is to put off the Lie and speak truth.

I passed over the reference to speaking the truth in v. 15 earlier, but we need to link up v. 15 and v. 25 now.

There is a little more in these references to speaking the truth than we may realise. It is more being true, than just speaking what is true. It implies being genuine, sincere through and through, and if we are that, if THE LIE and all that is implied by that has no part of us, then the Truth will flow out of us, not only by word, but in every aspect of our living.

The chapter comes to a fitting conclusion. Part of vv. 31 & 32 is like this in the NEB: "Have done with spite and passion, all angry

shouting and bad feeling of every kind. (And now the positive) And be kind and generous to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you."

Brethren, let us put off in every possible way the old nature, and put on as thoroughly as we can the new nature created in us by the work of the Holy Spirit. God has made it possible for us. It is now up to us to do it in the strength He has given us. **S**



Mary's Well, Nazareth  
From "The Bible Story" April 1964,  
Fleetway Publications, London.

## Mary & Joseph.

from page. 3.

son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home".

John 19:26-27.

Mary had been chosen and highly favoured to bear the promised seed of the woman of Genesis 3 and Israel's Messiah. As well she had

provided for Him as a baby and young child and she did it well. Now, her purpose was finished as far as the plan of Redemption was concerned, and I think that by His words He was telling her that, and that this remarkable woman understood what he was saying.

## After The Resurrection.

It is interesting to note that while He had contact with Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Cleopas after His resurrection there is no record of any personal contact between the Lord and His mother.

Mary is mentioned once more in Scripture.

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room...all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:12-14).

As we can see there is not a lot of information given in Scripture about Mary, the mother of our Lord. Anything else that is

written about her has no basis as far as the Bible is concerned.

### Joseph.

If there is not much written about Mary, there is even less written about Joseph.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily". Matt. 1:18-19.

As well as loving her, Joseph was a just man. Before the appearance of the angel of the Lord to explain what was happening he had decided not make it public that she was pregnant because of the shame that it would bring her. As well as being a just man he must have loved Mary deeply.

God decided to soften the blow that Mary's news must have been to Joseph by appearing to him with the explanation of the events that he found himself caught up in.

"But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS". Matt. 1:20-25.

God had spoken and Joseph believed God. The baby (brephos) had grown into a young child (paidion) by the time the wise men came to worship and was old enough to more easily travel.

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his

mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt". Matt. 2:11-14.

Again Joseph was obedient to God and the Son of God's life was saved. After the death of Herod, an angel of the Lord appeared and told Joseph that it was safe to return to the land of Israel and Joseph took his family home (Matt. 2:19,21).

The fact that the Lord Jesus was not Joseph's son was kept secret by this faithful man. The evidence of this is recorded in Matt. 13:55, Luke 3:23 and John 6:42.

"Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?"

Joseph fades from the pages of Scripture. What a mighty part Mary and Joseph played in the birth of the Redeemer, although the record of that part takes only a few verses of



The Flight into Egypt.

From "The Bible Story" April 1964, Fleetway Publications, London.

Scripture. The part of Mary was more spectacular, but both are a lesson for us because God spoke and they believed Him. That, in a nutshell, is what faith is, isn't it? **S**

John Hutton.

## Jewish Priority During Acts.

Question - What do you mean that the Jews had priority during the Acts period, but not now – priority over who/what?

The book of Ephesians, written around 62 A.D., reveals an aspect of God's plans which was previously not known by mankind before that time. Although it is called a mystery, we can very much liken it to being a secret which has now been told. So, what was this big secret?

## PLEASE EXPLAIN



David  
Tavender

**"That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel."** Ephesians 3:6.

The Greek words behind this verse tell us that Gentiles are joint-heirs of a joint-body and joint-partakers of His promise. In other words, the same in every aspect. Now, we may be tempted to think, especially in New Testament times, that Jews and Gentiles were always the same. But this was not the case.

From the time of the conversion of Cornelius (a Gentile) in Acts 10, until Israel was set aside in God's plans in Acts 28, there were in fact two categories of Christians: Jews in Christ and Gentiles in Christ. Note that the common feature was being in Christ. In regard to salvation there was equality between believers of all nations. However, there were still some differences between the two during the Acts period, and we can see some of these in the book of Acts. But, as we would expect, the books and letters written during that time also reflect the different ways in which God dealt with believers, and we outline some of these here.

### (1) Jews held the prior place.

Jews held the prior place in God's plans for mankind, because the promises were to be fulfilled through that nation. You'll remember that, way back in Genesis, Abram was called to father a nation through which God would bless all nations (Gen 12:1-3), and for the rest of the Old Testament, no Gentiles are even mentioned unless they come in contact with the Jews.

Surprising as it may seem, this difference still existed during the gospels. In Matthew's

gospel, the Lord sent his disciples out to preach, saying, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel". (Matthew 10:5,6). Obviously the Lord saw a difference between Jews and Gentiles at that time. This was because Israel was still the nation through whom God was dealing with mankind, and it was important for them to repent first before they could be a blessing to the other nations.

Contrary to popular opinion today, Israel were not finished with after the death and resurrection of Christ, and they continued in the Acts period, through God's longsuffering, to be the instrument through which He would bless the world. Hence we find that the salvation of Israel was still the major goal, and this is reflected in the fact that during the Acts period, Paul preached to the Jews of each town first in his journeys (as illustrated in Acts 13:5,14,45,46; 14:1; 17:1,2,10; 28:17).

The prior place of the Jews in God's dealings at that time is also reflected in one of the letters written during the Acts Period – the epistle to the Romans. Although there are many portions of Romans which talk about salvation and apply equally to Jews and Gentiles, there are other sections which illustrate that there were still differences between the two groups in God's plans at that time:

**"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile"**

**"There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."**  
**"What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew ... much in every way."**  
Romans 1:16; 2:9,10; 3:1,2.

### (2) Gentiles were blessed via Israel.

Still in Romans, we are told that Jews and Gentiles in the Acts period were a bit like an olive tree and branches which had been grafted on. Gentiles received the blessings via Israel. This is referred to as nourishing sap (or "fatness" in the KJV) See Romans 11:17-22.

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### (3) *Different laws were in place*

It is sometimes easy to overlook the fact that the law of Moses was still being kept by the apostles and other Jewish Christians during the Acts period. Nevertheless, it is so, and many felt that Gentiles should also be expected to keep the law of Moses. At the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) it was decided that there should be only four laws for Gentile believers - "abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood". (Acts 15:20)

So, while there were only four ceremonial laws in place for Gentile Christians, the Jews were still expected to keep the Mosaic law. No one said "stop circumcising" or "stop keeping the ceremonial feasts", etc. In fact Paul went out of his way to keep the law on one occasion. There were reports that Paul was telling Jews not to circumcise their children, and not to live according to the law of Moses. There was no truth in these rumours, and Paul continued to live in obedience to the law (Acts 21:19-21,24).

On this point, it should be noted that keeping the law was of no value as regarding salvation. Galatians 3:12, also written during the Acts period, says, "that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident, for the just shall live by faith". The law was still required to be observed by the Jew for reasons more to do with signifying the holiness of God's chosen people, and because the law was a shadow or picture of heavenly things (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1). Clearly, at that time, there were two different sets of laws in place for Jewish and Gentile believers, even though members from both groups were Christians and blessed equally in regard to their hope of salvation.

### (4) *Gentiles blessed to provoke Israel.*

Romans 11:11-13 tells us that Gentiles were given these blessings in order to provoke Israel to jealousy. Jealous, because non-Israelites were now being blessed in ways which were previously exclusive to Israelites. In this way it was hoped that the Jewish

nation as a whole would repent; however, the majority rejected Christ as the Son of God. This situation remained right up until the final few verses of the book of Acts.

### *The Mystery - Equality.*

After Acts 28, Israel were set aside for their continual unbelief as a nation. Naturally, we should expect that the letters written after Acts 28 would reflect this change - and they do. One of the first letters written after this change was Ephesians, and we read about a mystery - or secret - which was newly revealed:

**"That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in**

**Christ by the gospel."**

Ephesians 3:6.

In other words, equal in every way.

These are the conditions which are in force at present, and we find that the national differences have disappeared.

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(1) There is now no prior place for Israel, believers are equal in every way (Ephesians 3:6).

(2) Gentiles are blessed completely independently of Israel, God's rule for one believer is God's rule for all believers (Colossians 1:27).

(3) The law of Moses is not in force and there are no ceremonial ordinances (Col 2:13-17).

(4) Blessings of our dispensation do not depend on Israel (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Finally, read Ephesians 2:11-18 and note how Jewish and Gentile believers, who were once separated because of race, have now been joined in every way through Christ. The priority of the Jew, which was a part of God's dealings during the Acts period, is not in operation today.

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**Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.** Col. 3:12-13

## Why the Search for Truth?

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**We love Him, because He first loved us.** I John 4:19

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This extract is from the final page of "My Search for Truth" by Val Griffiths of New Zealand. Val fell asleep in His beloved Lord on Wednesday 31 July 2002. Rest in Peace friend.



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2 Timothy 2:15 2 Timothy 3:16