

# Spiritual Blessings



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## God With Us

by Charles H. Welch

**T**O THOSE WHO HAVE TAKEN the apostle Paul as the Divinely ordained apostle, teacher and pattern for believers of the present dispensation, it is natural and right that they should place such a text as that of 1 Corinthians 15:3 near the forefront of their testimony concerning the work of Christ in the great matter of salvation:

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1Cor. 15:3).

We meet with this same basic doctrine in Romans where we read, "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

The phrases "first of all" and "while we were yet sinners" fully justify the primary importance with which this aspect of the work of Christ is regarded. That which is first in the experimental order, however, is not necessarily the first in the historical order, and a moment's reflection will reveal that, however fundamental and primary the doctrine that "Christ died for our sins" may be, much had to be done before that death on the cross could be accomplished.



These thoughts arise as a result of pondering the opening of Matthew's Gospel, for there, at the close of the genealogy, the Saviour is given a twofold name: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins", and, "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" (Matt. 1:21-23). It is the fact that this child, born at Bethlehem, was "Emmanuel", "God with us", that made the glorious doctrine that Christ died for our sins a blessed possibility.

When we think of the gospel of eternal life, we immediately call to mind John 3:16, but we also remember that the "giving" of the only begotten Son is not, as in that passage, limited by John to the death on the cross, for in the first chapter he writes, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14).

Christ is most surely set forth as Emmanuel, "God with us", in the opening chapter of John's Gospel, for "the Word" Who was made flesh, was, in the beginning, God" (1:1). If we leave the doctrine of redemption and the gospel of grace, and turn to other phases of the Divine purpose, we shall see that this Emmanuel doctrine is ever present.

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# The President's Word



Athol Walter

## Meetings

Come along and meet with us! All meetings (except annual conf.) are free. All welcome.

### Brisbane:

Alternate Sundays 10:00AM  
Redbank Plains High School.

### Study Weekends:

- 27, 28 March 2004 (9am start)  
- Long Weekend June 12-14, 2004  
(07) 3297 1981

### Sydney:

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

### Study Day:

Sunday May 16  
(10am start)  
(02) 4996 4455

### Newcastle:

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

### BBFA Annual Conference 2004

22nd, 23rd, 24th  
October 2004, at  
Camp Toukley. See  
page 12 for details.

**O**NE YEAR HAS closed, a new one has opened, and there were the usual, excited celebrations and high jinks around the world. I can't help wondering how those, who got so excited, feel when they discover that the world and their lives are really no different just because the number on the calendar has ticked over.

We need the calendar to plan and order our lives, but I think it is true that no one can say with any certainty what the true date is. True to form, we have managed to muddle up the calendar over the centuries. I suspect that God has allowed this uncertainty about the true date, because it means that all our attempts to compute times and seasons are on shaky ground.

We can rest assured, however, that there is no confusion about the date with God. His timetable is not only fixed, but based on absolute knowledge, and nothing will be able to bring any change to it. For example, the Exodus took place on the exact day foretold (Exodus 12:41). In the fulness of the time (season), Christ came (Galatians 4:4), and the Lord's death and resurrection occurred precisely according to God's previously published timetable.

So, while we may not be absolutely sure that this year is indeed 2004, we can be absolutely certain that the great events still to come in the outworking of God's Plan, will take place not a moment too soon nor too late.

Surely then, we can relax and concentrate on walking as faithfully as we can for our Lord. As one of our hymns says: "Why should I ever anxious be, since such a God is mine?"

We wish all our readers every good thing in this new year.

Athol Walter

Special events  
coming up *soon* ...

### **Brisbane Study Weekend:**

**March Sat 27 & Sun 28,**  
Redbank Plains High School.  
9am start each day. Contact:  
(07) 3297-1981

### **Sydney Study Day:**

**Sunday May 16,** Hornsby Hts  
Community Hall. 10.00 am start  
Contact: (02) 4996-4455

## Spiritual Blessings

The official journal of the  
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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.

### **BBFA Postal Address:**

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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.

### **The BBFA Committee:**

President: Athol Walter.  
V-President: Anne Ward.  
Treasurer: Sue Hall.  
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Committee members:  
Bob Davidson, David Tavender.



# Jews & the Law in Acts

by David Tavender



**I**N GALATIANS, PAUL STATES that the believing Jew was free from the Law, yet they continued through the Acts period to keep the Law, and were even zealous for the Law.

To state the problem another way: Why were Jews told that they were free from the Law in one verse, while other verses seem to indicate that keeping the Law was a good thing to do? This does appear to be somewhat of a contradiction, so let's examine this issue a little more closely.

## Justified by Faith, not Law

The short answer to this dilemma is that in Galatians, Paul is referring to their salvation, and how that observing the Law would not make them righteous. On the other hand, it was acceptable for the Jews in Acts 21, for example, to be zealous for the Law, because they had already placed their faith in Christ, and were not relying on the Law for their salvation.

The verses being referred to here may be found in Galatians 2:15,16. "We who are Jews by nature ... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the Law, for by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified."

Again from Galatians: "if righteousness come[s] by the Law, Christ is dead in vain" (Galatians 2:21).

The message is indeed clear. Observing the Law was never going to make anyone righteous or save them from their sin. Yet, as may be seen elsewhere, Jewish believers during the Acts period were still zealous for the Law. Further to this, they were never condemned for doing so by the apostles, and Paul even went out of his way to be seen to be observing the Law on one occasion, which we will now look at.

## Jewish Believers Zealous for the Law

Soon after Paul arrived back in Jerusalem

from one of his many journeys, he heard of a false rumour which had been circulated about him: "... that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs" (Acts 21:21). Although this rumour was not at all true of Paul, even so, as a result, he saw fit to join some men in carrying out some purification rites in the temple, so that "all may know that those things, whereof they were informed ... are nothing". (Acts 21:24).

The rumours about Paul abandoning the Law were not true, and he took pains to illustrate this. Clearly, Paul, a Jew, did not consider it against God's wishes to perform such rituals as these found in Numbers chapter 6 as part of the Law.

## So, Why Keep the Law Anyway?

We should remember that the Law given to Moses was not just for the "religious" people of the time, it formed the very backbone of Jewish civil law as well. The everyday activities of life for Israelites in the first century were influenced greatly by what was written in the Law. So this is one reason why believing Jews were never told to forsake the writings of Moses, but there are also two other reasons why it might have been profitable, and perhaps even desirable for a Jew to continue to observe the Law.

## (a) as a witness to non-believing Jews

Paul, writing to the Corinthians during the Acts period says, "unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the Law, [I became] as under the Law" (1 Corinthians

9:20). If you like, it was a way of maintaining his Jewish credentials with his fellow Jews, whom he would like to have seen converted. It was a way of showing them that he could have faith in the saving power of Christ, without forsaking his national identity. He was, in many ways, still "one of them".

## (b) the Law served as an illustration

The Law was only "a shadow of good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1), not the realities themselves. Colossians 2:16,17 speaks of various ceremonies of the Law - holy days, the new moon observation and the sabbath - and says they are "a shadow of things to come".

The Law with its rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices, priests and other intricacies serves as a constant reminder of the work of Christ on the cross, the holiness of God, and Israel's hope itself.

## The Law Today

Even today, centuries later, we can learn much about God's dealings with man from the writings of the Law, despite the fact that Christians today are no longer required to observe the rituals and ceremonies in the Mosaic law.

It should be highlighted that nowhere in the Scriptures is observation of the Law encouraged in order to secure one's salvation or righteousness before God. Regarding this matter we would do well to remember Abraham, who "... believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3).

It is the same for us. The Law, or any other such system can never be a substitute for the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ.





**Bob  
Davidson**

Genesis 22:1-18

1 And it came to pass after these things, that God [Elohim] did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. 2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. 3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God [Elohim] had told him. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. 5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. 6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

*(continued next page)*

# The Names of the Lord

**I**N OUR MODERN WORLD parents tend to give their children names they like, or names which are fashionable, little attention being given to the meanings of the names. This has not always been so, especially in Scripture, where names are frequently given specifically because of their meanings.

Samuel means 'asked of God' or 'God heard', Daniel means 'God my judge' and Joshua means 'Jehovah my saviour'. Many dispensationalists recognize the significance of the name 'Lo-ammi', given by the Lord to a son of the prophet Hosea (1:9). A great deal of care is taken with names in Scripture because of their meanings, and as would be expected, the same applies to the names used of God. If the Lord's names are specific in their meanings, then it is likely that these names reflect His character and attributes.

## Elohim

'Elohim' is the first divine name to appear in Scripture and its first occurrence is in Genesis 1:1 where it is stated that in the beginning 'Elohim' created the heavens and the earth. This clearly connects 'Elohim' with the creation and is the only divine title used in Genesis 1. Elohim is therefore the power behind creation and the source of life. The name appears in the Old Testament about 2700 times and is translated 'God'.

In John 1:13, Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2,3 it is made quite clear that Christ was the creator. It is difficult to escape the inference that Christ is in fact Elohim. We know from John 4:24 that "God is spirit" and from John 1:18 that "no man hath seen God at any time"; yet Elohim visited Adam in the garden as

'Jehovah Elohim' (The Lord God - Gen. 2 and 3), and God and man obviously came face to face at that time.

Elohim appeared to Abraham in Genesis 22 and told him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Jacob wrestled with Elohim (Gen.32:24-30), and verse 30 says "...I have seen God (Elohim) face to face...". Elohim appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:6), and it was Elohim who said to Moses "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14).

This seems to create a problem, but Colossians 1:15 says Christ is the image of the invisible God and that He is the firstborn of all creation. Could it be that God took on the form of Elohim - the image of the invisible God - and that it was Elohim who was born at Bethlehem? Was "being in the form of God" (Phil 2:6) actually being Elohim? If this is so then it is certainly true that "the great creator became our Saviour".

## EI Shaddai

'Shaddai' occurs 48 times in the Old Testament and is always translated 'Almighty'. On seven occasions it is combined with 'El', related to 'Elohim', to form 'EI Shaddai'. Its origin is probably related to the idea of 'All-bountiful' rather than 'All-mighty', and this thought is supported by the following references. In Genesis 17:1 Jehovah appears to Abram and declares himself to be 'EI Shaddai'. The following five verses relate to Abram's fruitfulness and the name 'Abram' meaning 'exalted father' is changed to 'Abraham' meaning 'father of a multitude'. In Genesis 35:11 Elohim has just changed Jacob's name to 'Israel' when Elohim says "I am GOD ALMIGHTY (EI Shaddai): be fruitful and multiply". It is noteworthy that in these references both Jehovah and Elohim say "I am EI Shaddai", thus forming a strong connection between the two.

As has already been noted Elohim is Christ, but these references suggest that El-Shaddai and Jehovah are also Christ. This makes great sense of Phil 4:19, "But My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus".

A search of the Old Testament passages referring to El Shaddai, Shaddai or The Almighty shed further light on the idea of 'All bountiful'.

## Jehovah

Jehovah is the name of God which the Jews would not pronounce, and frequently would not write. The Massorah (the notes above, below, on either side and between the columns of the Hebrew Scriptures) gives 134 passages in which 'Adonai' is substituted for 'Jehovah' because of this reticence.

Purists object to the name 'Jehovah' and often refer to the name as the tetragrammaton, meaning "word with four letters" for the Hebrew 'Yahweh', or YHWH without vowels. When written in the Hebrew, if it is alone, it is spelled using the vowels from Adonai, a word meaning 'Lord', to give YaHoWaiH. If used with 'Adonai' it is spelled using the vowels from Elohim to give YeHoWiH. Utilising the spelling "Jehovah" is merely an attempt at its pronunciation. We do something similar with the name 'Jesus'. In Hebrew the name is 'Jehoshua' and in Greek it is "Iesous", but nobody is troubled by the pronunciation 'Jesus'.

Jehovah is the proper name and should not be translated 'Lord' any more than 'Samuel' should be translated 'heard' or 'Ephraim' translated 'fruitful'.

The name first occurs in Genesis 2:4, where it is combined with 'Elohim' to form 'Jehovah-Elohim', another evidence that the two are the same person. Jehovah is God in covenant relationship to those He has created, while Elohim is the creator. Eve understood this. Elohim dealt with the sin in the garden but when she bore a child she saw him as Jehovah - the one who would come in fulfilment of the covenant made with her.

The distinction is seen again in Genesis 22. In verse 2, Elohim tells Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, and through the narrative it is Elohim who is God until in verse 11 it is Jehovah who intervenes. In verses 12 and 13 Jehovah supplies the ram and in verses 15-18 it is Jehovah who makes further promises to Abraham.

Jehovah is especially the God of Israel in covenant relationships, and He is the One who is to come. He is not Jehovah in creation. It is Jehovah-Elohim who will lead Israel out of Egypt using great powers (Ex. 3:15-17), but it is Jehovah who appears in the burning bush to make the promise to Moses (Ex. 3:7,8).

God first really revealed Himself as 'Jehovah' when He spoke with Moses. In Exodus 6:3 He says that He appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as 'El-Shaddai', not as 'Jehovah'. The name was known by these patriarchs but this was not the major name by which God manifested Himself at that time. He tells Moses to go to the children of Israel and say "I am Jehovah". It is little wonder that Pharaoh in Exodus 5:2 did not know

Him. Israel, before Moses, had little idea of the richness of the name 'Jehovah', and Pharaoh had no idea at all.

(continued on page 8)

(Genesis 22:1-18, continued from page 4)

8 And Abraham said, My son, God [Elohim] will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

9 And they came to the place which God [Elohim] had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

11 And the angel of the Lord [Jehovah] called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. 12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God [Elohim], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

14 And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah Jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord [Jehovah] it shall be seen.

15 And the angel of the Lord [Jehovah] called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord [Jehovah], for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;

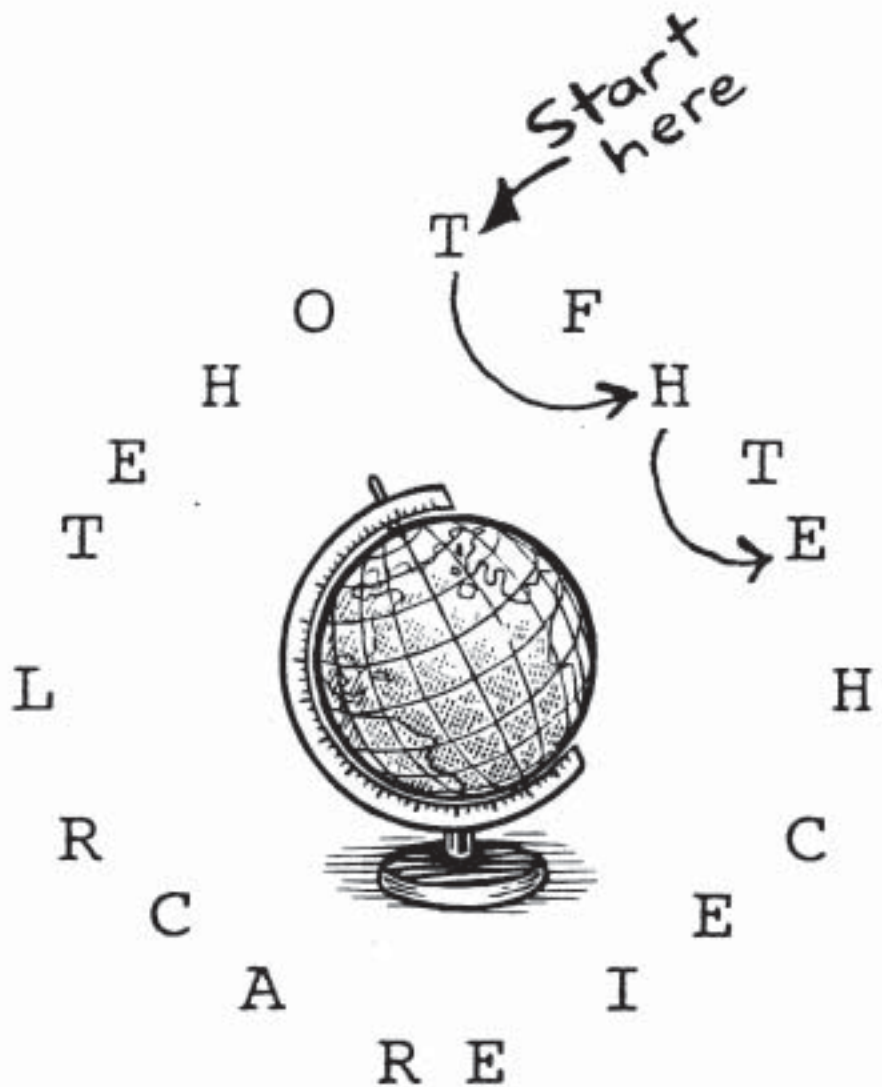
because thou hast obeyed my voice.

***"If the Lord's names are specific in their meanings, then it is likely that these names reflect His character and attributes .."***

# THE BIBLE IS

For many years, people thought that the world was flat. Today we know that it is round, but God knew all the time. He even told us in the Bible thousands of years before people found out.

Find out what God told us: Starting with "T", write down every second letter in the puzzle. Put your answer in the space provided. You can see if you were right by looking up Isaiah 40:22.



*Answer:*

God sits above \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Isaiah 40:22)

Many people also thought that the world was held up by very big elephants. But the Bible has always said that God "suspends the earth over nothing" (Job 26:7). God's Word was right again!

# ALWAYS RIGHT

The Bible has predicted many events - before they happened! That's because the Bible is God's words and thoughts. He knows what's going to happen BEFORE it takes place.

Use your Bible to find some of the predictions from the Old Testament which came true in the New Testament. They are all about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Old Testament

Prediction: 720 B.C. He will be born in \_\_\_\_\_ (Micah 5:2)

Fulfilled: 4 B.C. New Testament (Matthew 2:1-6)

Old Testament

Prediction: 1000 B.C. He will be betrayed by a \_\_\_\_\_ (Psalm 41:9)

Fulfilled: 29 A.D. New Testament (Matthew 26:49,50)

Old Testament

Prediction: 1000 B.C. His hands and feet will be \_\_\_\_\_ (Psalm 22:16)

Fulfilled: 29 A.D. New Testament (John 19:37)

Old Testament

Prediction: 700 B.C. He will be buried in the tomb of a \_\_\_\_\_ man (Isaiah 53:9)

Fulfilled: 29 A.D. New Testament (Matthew 27:57-60)



*"Some of these predictions were written 700-1000 years before they actually happened! We can believe the Bible, because it really is God speaking to you and me."*

# The Names of the Lord

יהוה

Bob Davidson

(cont. from page 5)

## The Jehovah Titles

The name Jehovah was frequently used in combination with other words, and this added great depth to the meaning of the name. Jehovah cared for Israel and these combined titles show how He supplied all their needs.

**Jehovah-Jireh:** The first need of His people was a substitute. In Genesis 22 this substitute is seen in Isaac, then in the ram. The only son is mentioned three times in this passage; and the two, father and son, going up together is mentioned twice. Considering our earlier recognition that Jehovah is Christ, it is no great leap to see both Isaac and the ram as pictures of Christ, nor is it difficult to see in the two going up together, a picture of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Isaac, the only son, had the ram as a substitute, but Christ had no substitute, He was the ram. *Jehovah-Jireh* - "Jehovah will provide". (Genesis 22:1-14)

**Jehovah-Ropheca:** The second need of His people was healing. The Lord promised Israel in the wilderness that if they obeyed Him, He would protect them from the diseases He had brought on the Egyptians. He declared Himself to be *Jehovah-Ropheca* - "I am the Lord that healeth thee." (Exodus 15:26)

**Jehovah-Nissi:** The third need of His people was protection. When Israel fought Amalek at Rephidim the Lord used miraculous means to defeat the enemy. He revealed Himself as Jehovah-Nissi - "The Lord, My banner". (Exodus 17:15)

**Jehovah-Mekaddishkem:** The fourth need of His people was sanctification. Israel were commanded to keep the Lord's Sabbaths, a sign that they were different from the nations around them.

**Elohim**

*El-Shaddai*

●  
**Jehovah**

*Jireh*

*Ropheca*

*Nissi*

*Mekaddishkem*

*Shalom*

*Tsidkenu*

*Shammah*

*Rohi*

*Zeboath*

*Elyon*

They were promised that if they did so they would know Him as *Jehovah-Mekaddishkem* - "The Lord who sanctifies". (Exodus 31:13)

**Jehovah-Shalom:** The fifth need of His people was peace. In Judges 6, Gideon had seen the angel of Jehovah face to face and was terrified, but Jehovah brought him peace and eased his fears. Gideon built an altar and called it *Jehovah-Shalom* - "The Lord, my peace". (Judges 6:24)

**Jehovah-Tsidkenu:** The sixth need of His people was righteousness. In Jeremiah 23, Jehovah promises a restoration of Israel, and a King to reign over them. The King's name would be: *Jehovah-Tsidkenu* - "The Lord, our righteousness". (Jeremiah 23:6)

**Jehovah-Shammah:** The seventh need of His people was the presence of the Lord. In the final chapters of the book of Ezekiel, the restored state of the land and the city and the Temple are described. As a benediction it is stated that the name of the city would be *Jehovah-Shammah* - "The Lord is there". (Ezekiel 48:35)

**Jehovah-Rohi:** The eighth need of His people is to be cared for. Psalm 23 speaks of His care, and in verse 1 Jehovah is referred to as *Jehovah-Rohi* - "The Lord, my shepherd". (Psalm 23:1) See the next page for more on Psalm 23 and these titles.

While there are a number of other instances where Jehovah is combined with other words, only two more will be considered.

**Jehovah-Zeboath:** Elkanah, the husband of Hannah, went annually to Shiloh to worship and to sacrifice to the 'Lord of hosts'. This is the first occurrence of this title which appears

281 times and denotes the God of Israel as the Lord of all the hosts of earth and heaven. David (1 Sam. 17:45), when confronting Goliath said he came in the name of 'Jehovah-Zeboath', the God of the armies of Israel. This name is associated with kings and kingdoms. Jehovah-Zeboath is the Divine Ruler and Leader and Commander of His people. *Jehovah-Zeboath - "The Lord of hosts"*. (1 Samuel 1:3)

**Jehovah-Elyon:** We have seen that as Elohim, Christ was the creator, and that Elohim and Jehovah both stated that they were El-Shaddai. This is clear evidence that the God of the Old Testament was in fact Christ. Careful examination will show that all the attributes of God described in the Old Testament are attributes given to Christ in the New Testament. If God is to be greatly praised in the Old Testament, then the same should be expected for Christ in the New Testament. This is made so clear in Philippians 2:9-11...

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".

*Jehovah-Elyon: "Jehovah most high"*. 

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*Editor's note:*

*Due to ill health, Bob Davidson has been unable to submit the second instalment of his series on "Shadows" in the Scriptures for this issue of Spiritual Blessings.*

*The Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia extends its prayers and best wishes to Bob for an improvement in health over the coming months.*

*We hope to pick up the series again in the next issue, but have replaced it here with another of Bob's excellent articles, first printed in the Nov / Dec 1995 issue of Spiritual Blessings.*

## Psalm 23

The whole of Psalm 23 relates to the way Jehovah watched over His people Israel, and, although not specifically mentioned, many of the Jehovah titles are implied.

**(1) The Lord is my shepherd;**  
[Jehovah-Rohi: Shepherd]

**I shall not want**  
[Jehovah-Jireh: Provision]

**(2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.**  
[Jehovah-Shalom: Peace]

**(3) He restoreth my soul,**  
[Jehovah-Ropheca: Healing]

**He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake,**  
[Jehovah-Tsidkenu: Righteousness]

**(4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.**  
[Jehovah-Shammah: He is there]

**(5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:**  
[Jehovah-Nissi: Banner]

**Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.**  
[Jehovah-Mekaddishkem: Sanctification]

**(6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**  
[Jehovah-Rohi: Shepherd]

# Grace, not debt

*in the sovereignty of God*

*a consideration of the parable  
"The Labourers In The Vineyard"  
Matthew 20:1-16*



**by Val Griffiths**

**W**HEN I FIRST STUDIED THIS parable, I found it somewhat difficult to find an application for us as truth for today. Because of its dispensational setting, I was rather inclined to set it aside as being a message for Israel, which of course it is. However, since all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, I found wonderful fundamental truth illustrated so clearly in the parable and embodied in the above heading which I have given this discourse.

I decided to put into practice the Berean approach to the study of the Word. I must confess that I had preconceived ideas about what the parable was teaching, but somehow they did not stack up, as the saying goes. If you have an interpretation dominating your thoughts, how can you hope for new light? In fact this is what Dr. Bullinger points out in the first paragraph on page 7 of his book "How To Enjoy The Bible".

He says, "...when we study the Word of God, as a whole, not to treat it as something which we have to interpret, but as being that which God has given in order to interpret Himself and His will to us". The profundity of this statement dawned on me twenty years ago and I discovered that for thirty years prior to this I had been, in fact, doing what Dr. Bullinger was warning about in his book.

Let me illustrate what I mean. I used to take the Bible, like an English scholar often takes a piece of obscure literature, and express my understanding of what I thought the writer was saying.

Again let me give you a homely illustration. My son John and his wife Rosie love English literature and poetry and the other night John read a poem and we all were given the opportunity of interpreting it. Needless to say we all arrived at different conclusions, but it was great fun.

But why the confusion? No doubt it was because of the different degrees of appre-

ciation of the poetic art that we each had. Some of us had less imagination than others.

Sadly, many in Christendom treat the Bible like that. But God is not a God of confusion. He has one meaning for what He says, and it is for us to seek it out. He shows us in His Word how to do that. In fact He commands us to do it - "Study to show thyself approved unto God ... rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2 Tim.2:15).

It is called "Rightly dividing the Word of Truth". This involves simply taking a common sense approach to the Scriptures by asking ourselves, "to whom was it written?, when was it written?, why was it written?, what were the circumstances that prompted the writing?, and what is the context of the writing?".

So let us apply this reasoning to Matthew 20:1-16 (printed on the next page). Even one of the above questions, honestly answered, is sufficient to put us on the right track.

## **Questions.**

To whom is the passage addressed? Think about it for a moment. Is He talking to us? We tend to put ourselves in the centre of the Bible. No! We are not the centre - God is. The Bible is not always talking about me or you.

What were the circumstances? Let us see the context of the passage. This is a most important aspect to consider. Please read chapter 19:16 to the end of the chapter. Peter asked the Lord a question, "...what shall we have therefore?" The Lord answered Peter's question in verses 28 to 30 and went on to teach Peter a lesson that we all need to learn. How do I know that the next chapter is in consequence to Peter's question? Verse 1 starts with the little word "for" in the A. V.

I think that we can safely conclude that He was talking to Peter and the circumstances were because of Peter's question. Let us summarise the parable.

## **The parable itself.**

Putting it in a nutshell, the householder hired some labourers early in the morning and agreed to pay them a penny at the end of the day for their work, and they were happy with this. Then he hired other labourers at various times during the day and they were promised they would be paid "what was right". With just an hour left of the day he again employed more labourers with the promise again that they would be paid "what was right".

At the end of the day he paid all his labourers one penny which was the figure set with the labourers engaged early in

## The Labourers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.  
2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.  
3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,  
4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.  
5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.  
6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?  
7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.  
8 So when even was come, the Lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.  
9 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.  
10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.  
11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,  
12 Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have born the burden and heat of the day.  
13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?  
14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.  
15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?  
16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.



the morning. The fellows that were hired first grizzled. There was no grizzling from the fellows that were hired last. The householder said that he had made an agreement with them and was sticking to it. A deal is a deal after all. Where do your sympathies lie? I wonder what the Industrial Courts would say about this today?

### Was Peter's question impertinent?

Remember what he said. Please read 19:27. What does this imply? Peter was saying, "but we have sold everything and followed you. What will we get?" Was he saying, "You owe me - you are in debt to me"?

Do you think that the Lord did owe Peter anything, or was Peter in His debt? He could have said something like this to Peter: "Peter, remember that I called your father Abraham out from among all of the other nations and gave him, and his children, which includes you, a land and the promise of becoming a great nation, and this promise was unconditional".

"I also promised that you and your people would have all of these blessings if they were obedient to me. Let me remind you about some of the blessings that you were promised. You and your people were to become a nation of priests and reach all the nations of the world and tell them how I love them, as I love you Peter. You would always have a full basket and the best of health and happiness if you were obedient to Me. All of those blessings are yours because you have followed Me, Peter, do you think that you have earned more?"

Well, the Lord could have said something like that but He didn't. The Lord was very gracious in His reply. He did agree that those who followed Him would be greatly blessed in the way that He indicated, then He carefully pointed out His sovereignty with a masterful story.

### An analysis of the parable.

Should the labourers engaged early in the morning have complained? Certainly not! They had agreed to one penny for the day and the householder

was not in debt to them in any way. They had been treated honestly and fairly. They might have thought that the householder owed them more but such was not the case.

They were paid that which was right. The Lord was clearly telling Peter that God was not indebted to him in any way. What about the labourers who came later in the day? Obviously there was no question of debt here. They all received the one penny. Did they earn it? The payment of one penny was obviously fair or else the labourers hired early in the day would not have agreed to it, so the fact that those who came later in the day received the same was payment that they had not merited. In theological circles, what do we call a favour from God (the householder in the parable) which we do not merit?

It is grace. It is never because of the debt which we may consider that God owes us because of our service to him.

More to the point of the parable, what about the favours that Peter had received which I have already outlined above and that he had not merited? They are given because of God's grace.

Peter asked the question "What shall we have therefore?" The Lord may well have said, "Do you know that all that you have received of Me is not in payment of any debt that you might claim that I owe you but because of my grace towards you and, why are you so favoured, Peter? You shall sit on a throne in Judgment on Israel. Did you earn that, Peter?"

### Truth for today.

Indeed it is not because of debt that we are so favoured, but because of His Grace and His Sovereignty. The words that He said to Peter long ago is also "truth for today".

We who belong to the Church which is His body, with such a wonderful high calling to the "far above all" position know that our hope is not founded on any service that we give, or have given. God owes us nothing. What God has done for us is because of His great grace and His sovereign choice.

We are the ones who are indebted to the grace of God and His Sovereignty. I believe that this is the message of the parable for us today. ☞

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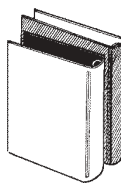
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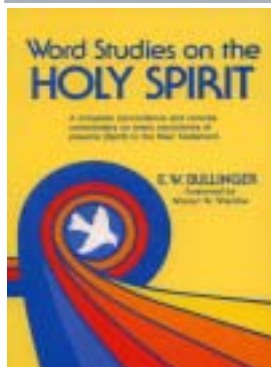
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