

Spiritual Blessings



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Doctrinal Basics

Wonderful Words of Life *Part 3*

by Athol Walter

Redemption

Another Scriptural word that describes an aspect of God's work of salvation is redemption. There is an important point that needs to be made about some of these words we will consider, this one in particular. Brought up as I was in a Christian home, and belonging to an evangelical denomination as the family did, I grew up hearing these various words used very often. I absorbed the idea that they were 'sacred' words, words that belonged to the Bible and God's work for sinful people, so it was a surprise to say the least, to learn, as I got older, that words like redemption were used in the 'sinful world' out there. I slowly came to realize that by understanding the meaning of these words in their 'worldly' use, I would understand better what it meant when it was used in the 'sacred' or Biblical way. Regardless of whether the word we are thinking about is only used in the Bible or not, it pays to consult the dictionary to get the definition. The only word of caution I would add is that the usage of the word in Scripture should also be studied, for the way the Holy Spirit uses a word is more important than even the dictionary definition. However, don't despise your dictionary.

While they may not be so common these days in our society, people of one hundred or so years ago were quite familiar with the operation of pawn shops. If they

had ever pawned something to raise a bit of cash, they understood full well that the only way to get their property back was to 'redeem' it. That meant that money had to be paid to get back what really belonged to them.

My trusty Pocket Oxford Dictionary has this to say about 'redeem', which of course, is the verb: Buy back, recover by expenditure of effort or by stipulated payment. The third definition it gives says this: Purchase the freedom of another; save by ransom. Now, there are some words that sound comfortably familiar to my evangelically trained ears!

So the words 'redeem' and 'redemption' are words of the financial world, the share market and even the slave market, and these uses of the word redemption have significance in the way the Bible uses it. Although slavery still exists in parts of the world, in most countries it is a thing of the past, but I'm sure we all understand something of what it means.

The first concept we must have in our minds when considering redemption – and this is clearly illustrated by slavery and the pawn shop – is that the person or object that needs redeeming has been sold, stolen or lost. The object to be redeemed is not in its proper or original position. This has particular importance when we think of God redeeming us through

Christ's work. It was not the original or proper condition of man to need redeeming. By the act of creation, God owned humanity. We were His to start with. But through Adam's disobedience, and in spite of God's warning, humanity became enslaved by sin and death. Thus it came about that we (I use the term 'we' to mean humanity) needed to be redeemed – bought back – if we were to be restored to our proper position of freedom in God's possession. Who is the slave master? Satan, of course, and he would not let any of his slaves go unless the proper price was paid. Peter has something to tell us about this:

"... you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold, ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Peter 1:18 and 19.

What a price had to be paid for our redemption! The most precious metals known to man were not

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Editorial

It is a joy to greet our readers once again with an offering of studies of various kinds centred on the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. Our prayer is that they will bring help, stimulate thought, turn you to God's Word, and above all, lead us all into a more Christ-honouring daily walk.



to make to make the total up to \$1500. Two of our Newcastle members, Janelle and David Tavender, have visited Malawi and met the believers concerned, and they tell us that the joy of these folk in being able to have a Bible of their own in their own language is beyond words.

The response to our recent appeal for funds to send another shipment of Bibles to churches in Malawi, Africa, has been wonderful. We thank all who responded so generously, and above all, we thank our Lord. The treasurer told me last week that, to date, just on \$850 (Australian) has come in. As I said previously, the BBFA committee had already earmarked \$500 for this project, and while I can't speak for it, I would think that the committee will be more than happy

An amount of over \$400 has also been subscribed towards the ongoing costs of printing and posting 'Spiritual Blessings', for which we are very appreciative. Our group is not large, so this help means a lot. It is obvious that many of our readers think the magazine is worthwhile. I was speaking to one reader recently whom I had not seen for several years, and he said he loved reading the articles we produce. Not everyone, however, has been so complimentary.

One reader wrote, asking to be taken off the mailing list, as "I don't get much from the magazine, so the expense in sending it is not justified". That disappoints me, of course, and leads me to ask for feedback from readers. Obviously, at least one reader thinks 'Spiritual Blessings' could be different/better, and maybe others do too. I would like to hear any constructive criticisms you may have. This does not mean that we will change or tone down our emphases on the full inspiration of the Bible, the Deity and sufficient sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and the Dispensational Boundary at Acts 28:28, but I would certainly consider comments about what you would like to see in future issues. Address your letters to:
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AUSTRALIA.

Happy reading. Athol Walter.

The Father's Love

From the writings of the late David Fryer, selected by David Tavender.

This my son was dead, and is alive again. He was lost and is found." Luke 15:24. This verse, as many will know, is found in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

In God's time, still to come, there will be a remnant of Israel, like the prodigal son away in 'a far country', whose eyes will be opened to remember the Father's love, goodness and promises to them. They will arise, a nation born in a day, as He will give them a new heart. He is yet to bring that time about, when He shall go forth in love, compassion and forgiveness, and restore that which was lost to the scene of blessing and rejoicing. Then it shall be said, "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord." (Psalm 118:26)

It has been something like this for us Gentiles who were once afar off, without hope and without Christ.

God saw our hopeless condition and has bestowed on us untold blessings in Christ. We have forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace, and He makes us acceptable before Him in His dear Son (Ephesians 1:6), even we who were by nature, children of wrath and children of disobedience, clad only in 'the rags of a far country'. What love, mercy and forgiveness shown to us Gentiles now in Christ Jesus!

Let us return to the story of the prodigal son. The father, in righteousness, could not have the son seated at his table with the 'rags of the far country' still on him. Also, it would not have been grace had the father waited for the son to deck himself out in robes of his own providing. But both grace and righteousness shone forth when the father went out to receive his son, and clothed him in a manner suited to that happy and blessed

occasion. "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." (Luke 15:22) Here is the father's provision of grace and righteousness for his son who was lost but now was found.

What joy and blessing for Israel when that day comes for them. Isaiah 61:10 prophesies, "My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness."

In a somewhat parallel way, what joy and blessing is now ours whom God our Father has brought from the 'rags' of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son by grace, and covering each of us with the 'best robe' – the righteousness of His dear Son, now making us together 'accepted in the Beloved' before Him. (Ephesians 1:16) ◻

Wonderful Words of Life

enough. Only the blood, i.e. the life, of the Lamb provided by God Himself – His Son – was sufficient.

I hope you can hear the echoes from the Old Testament in Peter's words. They take us back to Exodus and the plight of the Hebrews in Egypt. What was their plight? They had been enslaved, and so had to be redeemed, or bought back! While those events really happened, they provide us with graphic illustrations of what God in Christ has done for those who are in Christ through faith.

There is a startling passage in Isaiah 43 that says a lot about our subject. I hope you will read and ponder the whole chapter, but I want to quote just the first 3 verses:

“But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: **‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine.** When you pass through the waters, I will be with you ... For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour; **I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place.**”

I freely admit that I cannot explain these references to the Lord giving Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba as a ransom for His people Israel, but the verses illustrate very well the manner of redemption. Something or someone, of equal value was paid for the thing or person who was being redeemed.

Which brings us to what is perhaps the most important point about redemption. The Scriptural principle is that, not only must the one who redeems a person be a person too, but that person who redeems must be a relative, as close a relative as possible. The biblical term is the ‘kinsman-redeemer’. In addition to what Peter told us in the quote above, we have

the following from Hebrews 10:4 & 5:

“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He (i.e. Christ) came into the world, He said, ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.’”

The ‘body prepared’, of course, is the body in which the Word became flesh and dwelt among His people when He was born in Bethlehem. In being born like that, He became our true kinsman – one of the family – and being truly human, He could then die as our representative.

These truths are spelled out for us particularly in the Book of Ruth. If you are not familiar with Ruth's story, I would urge you to read the book through at one sitting. It will take you less than thirty minutes. The highlights of the story are these:

Elimelech takes his wife, Naomi, and his two sons from their home in Bethlehem because of famine to neighbouring Moab. He has heard there is food there. His two sons marry Moabite girls, but later Elimelech and the two sons die. Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, and tells her two widowed daughters-in-law to return to their fathers' homes, as she has no more sons who can marry them, as the custom was. One of the girls goes back home, but the other, Ruth, will not leave Naomi, and returns with her to Bethlehem.

But while the family were away in Moab, their property in Bethlehem had been sold off. Naomi had no money with which to redeem it, and the story tells how Ruth was brought into contact with Boaz, who was not only rich, but was also a kinsman of Naomi. After a hiccup or two, Boaz redeems the property, takes Ruth as his wife (which was

part of the redemption deal) and produces a son who is a forebear of King David, and therefore of the Lord Jesus Himself. I have given here the bare bones of the story, but there is much more to it, and I hope you will ponder it all deeply.

As I said before, it was not acceptable for just anyone to be the redeemer. It must be as close a kinsman as possible, and here we have the reason why it was necessary for the Word to become flesh. To be our Redeemer, the Lord had to be a real human being. It was not enough to assume human form, i.e. to pretend to be human for a while. He had to be human just as we are. And in that body in which He became ‘one of us’, He took our place as the condemned, and with His death, paid the price of the sins of Adam and Eve and every one of their descendants. He could do all that for us, because, not only was He truly our kinsman, but, because He had no sins of His own to pay for, His death could pay our penalty.

Redemption, therefore, is a very important part of God's plan of Salvation. Like reconciliation, and all the other results that the Lord's death has brought us, redemption is possible because the justice of God has been satisfied in every way by the Atonement that the Lord's death made first and foremost.

And having been redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, as of the blood of a lamb without spot or blemish, I am free, free from condemnation, free from future punishment, free from Satan's dominion and power, free to serve God to the best of my ability, free to enjoy communion with my Heavenly Father through the access into His presence that my Kinsman-redeemer gained for me. Truly, redemption is one of the wonderful words of life! □

How to Recognize an Important Doctrine When you See It

By Athol Walter

Although I have never been involved in a war, I have learned a lot about it from reading books and watching films. One strategy that is highly important in war is that of discovering and attacking the enemy's strategically vital areas. This is what Winston Churchill was trying to do apparently, when he launched the ill-fated Gallipoli Campaign in 1915, a disastrous battle that has become an important part of the national psyches of Australia and New Zealand. Another way of describing this strategy of attacking important areas is to say that the aim is to do as much damage as possible to the enemy in the area where it will hurt the most. An example of this from the second world war was the raids of the Dam Busters on the large dams in the Ruhr Valley in Germany.

So what has this got to do with Christian doctrines? Just this. If you would know what is fundamental and important Christian truth, simply look at what God's enemy has been attacking the most. I have no doubt that Satan knows exactly which are the most significant and important truths of the Christian faith, and it should not surprise us to find that those are the very areas in which he makes his greatest and most persistent attacks. It also should not surprise us that opponents of Christianity launch these attacks, but what is surprising and very disappointing, is that some prominent Christian leaders seem very happy to join in these attacks on the very Faith they are supposed to promote.

The Bible

The area that has been persistently attacked over the last

two hundred years is the accuracy and reliability of the Bible itself. Doubts of all kinds have been cast on many parts of the Bible, and seeing that some of these attacks come from some Christian leaders, the faith of more than a few ordinary believers has been damaged.

One part of the Bible that has been persistently attacked is the Book of Genesis. Satan is no fool, and knows that if he can undermine the trust of believers in Genesis, he has gone a long way to undermining their faith. Why is Genesis such a strategic target? Simply because it is the book of beginnings (as the word Genesis means), and it tells us of God beginning His great work of Salvation, the creation of the first humans, the coming of Satan into the paradise God had provided for them, and his success in causing Eve and then Adam to disobey God's command.

Notice Satan's method. God had given Adam a specific command. We read that "God said ..." Satan came to Eve and asked, "Has God said ...?" He sowed doubts in Eve's mind not only about what God had said, but also about God's intentions. It seems to me that these strategies lie at the bottom of all Satan's efforts to undermine God's work.

God's response to Satan's apparent victory in Eden was to pronounce Satan's ultimate doom, pass judgement on Adam and Eve, and then give the first prophetic statement about the Coming Redeemer, the Seed of the Woman. Is it any wonder that Satan would blind the eyes of believers to what is said in Genesis? From chapter 12 on, Genesis gives the account of God's choice and establishment of

the nation of Israel, who were to be the channel through which the Seed of the Woman should come. As a result, Israel became a special target for Satan's attacks.

A commonly stated objection to accepting Genesis as a true and factual record, is that these 'stories' have been handed down orally over many generations, and therefore, having thus become distorted, can only be treated as legend or myth, not historical truth. There are two errors in this statement.

Firstly, it ignores the marvellous memories of primitive people in recounting the history of their races. Rather than becoming distorted, the stories, as they are being told, are constantly checked by the hearers who will allow no deviations.

But the second point almost does away with the need for this first statement. The 'many generations' of the critics are a myth in themselves. The early chapters of Genesis give detailed statements about the ages of the descendants of Adam, going through his son, Seth. These figures continue right through the book, and show that the lives of **ONLY TWO MEN** cover the fifteen hundred years (approx.) from Adam to the flood. Those two men are Adam, of course, and Methuselah. (Note that I am rounding off the numbers in these cases.)

According to the Biblical figures, Adam was 930 when he died, which is over halfway to the flood. But more to the point, Methuselah had been alive for 240 years when Adam died. Did they know and speak to each other? We are not told specifically that they did, but we do know that the people of that time did not spread out until well

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after the flood, so it is reasonable to assume that Methuselah did know his ancestor.

Adam's son, Seth, was contemporary with Methuselah for 350 years. Methuselah, of course, was Noah's grandfather so it should be obvious to even the most severe critic that these two, i.e. Methuselah and Noah, knew each other. They were alive together for 234 years. It is not necessary to speak of other early notable men such as Enoch and Lamech, but they too were alive while Adam and Seth were still living.

Noah takes us past the flood, but note that before the flood, Noah's sons were born while Methuselah was still alive. Shem, who carries the Messianic line on, was just over 100 years of age when his great grandfather died. And here is a startling fact. Abraham was 150 years old when Shem died. Again, we do not know whether Abraham ever met Shem, but the point is that Shem, who lived for approx. five hundred years after the flood, knew Methuselah, who had been contemporary with Adam for 240 years. So, the overlapping lives of Adam, Seth, Methuselah, Noah, and Shem take us from the Garden of Eden right up to Abraham. The fact that many of these people were contemporaneous with each other mitigates against the accounts of events in the early chapters of Genesis becoming distorted.

Going down a generation or two, Joseph was nearly thirty years old when his grandfather Isaac died, and Moses was born 64 years after Joseph's death. Moses, of course, was the one who wrote the first five books of the Bible, and it is obvious from what is said in Genesis that

he had access to earlier written records.

Why is it so serious to doubt, or more seriously, to disbelieve the record of Genesis? Apart from the dangers of throwing out the belief in the inerrancy of Scripture, we lose the reason for the need of a Saviour, then the truth of the organic unity of the human race 'in Adam' is undermined and we break the line of descent to Jesus of Nazareth, who must be a son of Adam. If He is not, then He is not our Kinsman-Redeemer.

It is quite amazing, to my mind, that some of the early leaders of the atheistic, evolutionist movement showed a better grasp of the important position of Genesis than many leaders of Christian denominations. T. H. Huxley, an early and ardent proponent of evolution, wrote this:

"I am fairly at a loss to comprehend how anyone for a moment can doubt that Christian theology must stand or fall with the historical trustworthiness of the Jewish Scripture (i.e. the Old Testament). The very conception of the Messiah, or Christ, is inextricably interwoven with Jewish history; the identification of Jesus of Nazareth with that Messiah rests upon the interpretation of the passages of the Hebrew Scriptures which have no evidential value unless they possess the historical character assigned to them".

Then again, this:

"If the covenant with Abraham was not made; if circumcision and sacrifices were not ordained by Jehovah; if the 'ten words' were not written by God's hand on the stone tables; if Abraham is more or less a mythical hero, such as Theseus;

the story of the Deluge a fiction; that of the Fall a legend; and that of the creation the dream of a seer; if all these definite and detailed narratives of apparently real events have no more value as history than have the stories of the regal period of Rome – what is to be said about the Messianic doctrine which is so much less clearly enunciated? And what about the authority of the writers of the books of the New Testament, who, on this theory, have not merely accepted flimsy fictions for solid truths, but have built the very foundations of Christian dogma upon legendary quicksands?"

From Chapter 6, 'The Lights of the Church and the lights of Science – Science and the Hebrew Tradition, Essays by Thomas H. Huxley, 1903.

As I read the above quotes, I have to stop and remind myself that it was not a believing Bible expositor who wrote those words – although it sounds like it – but an atheist, opposed to God, the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is because people like Huxley understand the crucial position of Genesis that they have worked so hard to undermine it. The fact that they have succeeded with many Christians is a tragedy of the first order.

Much more could be said about Satan's attacks on the Bible, but we need to move on to a couple of other points. Remember, however, that whenever you hear someone casting doubts, or ridiculing, or attacking the Bible, it is part of the enemy's strategy to do as much harm as possible. Let's move on.

The Virgin Birth

This is another Biblical truth that has been attacked for a long time.

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The critics say that this was a story invented by Christian writers a couple of centuries after the death of Christ to enhance Christ's standing and bring His birth into line with Old Testament prophecies. However, there is much evidence to support the Gospel accounts, which evidence shows that the Gospels fit into the first century AD setting. Many books present this evidence, one of which is Josh MacDowell's "More Evidence that Demands a Verdict".

But why is the Virgin Birth of Christ important to our Faith? Simply because a conception that did not involve a human father was the only way that the Lord Jesus could be born of a woman, and so be truly human, yet at the same time, escape the sin-impaired human nature that we all inherit through our fathers from Adam. Liberal Christian leaders who throw out the Virgin Birth, apparently don't understand what they are doing. If Christ was Joseph's son after all, then He was born with the sinful nature Himself, and His death would have paid for His own sin alone. If that is the case, again we have no Saviour. But, I can't go on without stating the truth as emphatically as possible. The Baby that was born to Mary was NOT the son of any human father – Joseph knew better than anybody else that Jesus was not his son – but was the result of a miraculous intervention by the Holy Spirit. He was thus born without SIN, and committed no SINS during His life, therefore was able to die as our substitutionary Sacrifice. The Virgin Birth is a vital plank in God's Plan of Salvation.

A point worth mentioning here is that if Mary's pregnancy was the result of spontaneous conception, as sometimes happens in nature,

her baby would, of necessity, have been a girl and not a boy!

The Deity of Christ

The other major Christian Doctrine that comes in for plenty of attacks is the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not enough to say or believe that the Lord was divine. He is not just of God, He is God, and the only word that fits, is Deity.

Skeptics, Humanists, Atheists, Agnostics and Spiritualists all, with one voice, denounce the basic truth of Biblical Christianity. Again, it is inconceivable that some who call themselves Christian also reject this Truth. The Bible, however, is quite clear in its testimony.

I have heard, as I expect you have, many people say that they believe Jesus was a great teacher and a very good man, but they cannot believe He is God revealed in the flesh. This, as we will see shortly, is quite untenable. But, first, some Scripture quotes.

John 1:29: "The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him, and said, 'Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.'" This was repeated, in part, the next day, and two of John's disciples heard him. They followed Jesus, and spent some time conversing with Him. One of them was Andrew.

John 1:41: "(Andrew) first found his brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah', (which is translated, the Christ)." The next day, the Lord called Philip to follow him, who went to his friend Nathaniel.

John 1:45: "Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote ...'. A little later, when Nathaniel met Jesus,

he said to Him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God". (John 1:49).

These verses show what was clear and connected in the Jewish mind, but which is not necessarily so for us Gentile believers. For the Jew in the first century AD, to speak of the Lamb of God was to mean the Messiah, the One spoken of by Moses and the prophets, and the Son of God all in the one breath.

We could fill a book with quotations from the Old Testament that equate Jehovah with the Lord Jesus, but just two will be sufficient.

"For unto us a **Child is born**, unto us a **Son is given**; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, **Mighty God, Everlasting Father**, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6, 7. The verses from the beginning of this chapter should also be read.

"Thus says the Lord (i.e. Jehovah) ... And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me (i.e. Jehovah) whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son ..." Zechariah 12:1 and 10.

These revelations stretch our minds beyond the limits of human understanding, but they are part of the inspired revelation of God. The Child who was to be born as the Son of God was, among other things, the Mighty God and the everlasting Father. (This last phrase is better translated 'the father of the ages'.) Then, in Zechariah's prophecy, Jehovah says that the time will come when the people of Israel will look on Himself, that is, Jehovah, whom they pierced. We know full well that

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it was Jesus whom they pierced, so, if words mean anything at all, Jesus is none other than Jehovah become human. Then we have the marvellous opening of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word was God."

As I said earlier, these statements of Scripture challenge our minds, but there are only two responses we can have in regards to them. We either accept them as truth from God, or we reject them entirely. There is no middle ground! This brings me back to my earlier point, that it is untenable to say that Jesus was a good man or a great teacher, but not God's Son. The Bible, and even the Lord Himself, does not give us that option. I can do no better than quote words of C. S. Lewis (yes, the Lewis of the Narnia Chronicles) from his book, *Mere Christianity*:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that

people often say about (the Lord Jesus): 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a mad fool or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool; you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

Conclusion

Are these the only Christian doctrines that are attacked? No, of

course not, but these three seem to be the special targets of the enemy. There are, however, no reasons for Christians to feel threatened by these attacks, or think that there are no answers to them. Eve failed in her time of testing because either she did not know exactly what God had said, or else she thought it did not matter. In contrast, when the Lord was tested in the wilderness, He overcame Satan, by appropriate and exact quotations from the Word of God.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" Psalm 119:105. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17. ◻

A Mixed Bag

Bits and pieces from here and there of interest to Bible Students.

The Bible and Science.

After presenting many facts about scientific discoveries in the field of cosmic research from the last 50 –75 years that point conclusively to intricate design in the universe and therefore a Designer, astronomer Hugh Ross concludes with these words:

"The community of believers has no reason to fear, and every reason to anticipate, the advance of scientific research into the origin and characteristics of the cosmos. The more we learn, the more evidence we accumulate for the existence of God and for His identity as the God revealed in the Bible. Those (scientists) who fight hardest against a supernatural, or theistic, explanation for the

cosmos often produce the most powerful new evidence for it. As technology produces new measuring tools and theoretical capacities increase, the clearer the case for Christ the Creator will grow. Though not many scholars who write about these new measurements acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Savior, they do admit that the best, perhaps the only, explanation for the universe we observe is the work of an entity beyond the space-time continuum of the universe capable of exquisite design and of carrying out that design. Whether they know it or not, in their admission they have testified eloquently of the God who made us and wants to be known by us".

Hugh Ross refers in his chapter

to Psalm 19:1 and 2, which says: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge."

From "Why I am a Christian", edited by Norman I. Geisler and Paul K. Hoffman, Baker Books, revised and expanded edition, 2006, chapter 8, "Why I believe in the miracle of Divine Creation".

Slaughterhouse Religion.

The emphasis by Evangelicals on the shed Blood of Christ as the Lamb of God is sometimes criticized as 'Slaughter House Religion'. All this emphasis on blood, they say, is 'disgusting', or

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'revolting', the inference being that refined and intelligent people would not talk like that, let alone believe such stuff.

But let's approach it from a different angle. Some years back I had a spell in hospital, needing a serious operation. The medicos came to me one day and told me that I needed to have a blood transfusion to build me up for the operation as I was so anaemic. I was horrified, and said, "Don't be so disgusting. I find this talk of blood absolutely revolting. If you people had any good manners you would not even bring the subject up. Go away."

Of course, I did not react like that, and I would have been totally stupid to have done so. I suspect that those who criticize the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ in this way, would not respond like that either, if they were in a bad way in hospital. They would, as I did, gladly accept the transfusion, knowing that their health is inextricably connected to the condition of our blood. I am aware that members of the Jehovah Witnesses would not have a blood transfusion, but, apart from them, the rest of us would gladly accept the opportunity of what could be a life-saving procedure.

The emphasis on sacrifice in the Bible is based on the principle, "The life is in the blood." Gen. 9:4-6; Lev. 17:11 and Deut. 12:23. So to say that someone's blood has been shed is simply a way of saying their life has been taken away somehow. To say that the Lord Jesus Christ shed His blood as the ransom for sinful humanity, not only means that He died in our place on Calvary, but it ties His death to all the prophetic pictures in the Old Testament, such as the Passover Lamb and the sacrifices

on the Day of Atonement, pictures that point forward to, and explain some aspect of, the death of the Lord Jesus when "He shed His blood for us". His life, given so freely for me, brings to me by grace through faith, life that was lost through sin, and that I had no hope of ever gaining by my own efforts. This is why the doctrine of the shed Blood of Christ is so precious to me. What God gave me in Christ is miles ahead of any blood transfusion!

Difficult Passages in The Bible.

Many people who will neither recognise their need of a Saviour, nor accept the Bible as the Word of God cite difficulties in Scripture as one reason for their refusal to believe.

Mark Twain once made a very perceptive comment that has some relevance to this. He said, "It is not the parts of the Bible that I don't understand that cause me the most trouble, but rather the parts that I do understand." In case some reader doesn't quite get Mr. Twain's point, what he meant was that it was the parts of the Bible that clearly told him what he should not do and what he should do in his life, that caused him the most trouble, because he found it so difficult to put it into practice. He was an honest man, and if we are honest, we will acknowledge the truth of what he said.

But, apart from Mark Twain's point, most of the so-called difficulties in the Bible can be resolved, some very easily. The following points will help any earnest seeker after truth:

1. Come to the Bible with the right attitude. It is more likely that we are wrong rather than the Bible.
2. Allow the Bible to be its own interpreter. We seldom need to go outside of Scripture itself to find answers to problems. "Compare

spiritual with spiritual". 1 Corinthians 2:13. In other words, study passages dealing with the same subject.

3. Remember to correctly apportion the Word of God. 2 Tim. 2:15. Some things change from one dispensation to another.

There are several good books available dealing with Bible difficulties. Treat yourself! And remember, that even if you could answer every objection of those who throw up these difficulties, they still would not believe. Their problem is more in the heart than in the mind.

Is Your God Big Enough?

In the conclusion of his book refuting the arguments put forward by Richard Dawkins in 'The God Delusion', Andrew Wilson has this to say:

"Like Einstein, then, Dawkins' problem seems to be that the God or gods he has heard described are simply not big enough. ... But Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is far larger and more glorious than Dawkins imagines ... No pictures are sufficient to express the full truth about him, not even biblical ones ... In intercession, he is both the one praying and the one being prayed to. In justice, he is the policeman, judge, jury, defence lawyer, and the one who receives the punishment. In the tabernacle, he is both Aaron and the goat, as in an astonishing twist which no one saw coming, the high priest and the sacrifice on the altar turn out to be the same person. In the family, he is father, mother, son and husband. He is unknowable and known, invisible and revealed, lion and lamb, Prince of Peace and man of war, wrathful and joyful, strength and song, holy and

.....cont Pg. 9

A Mixed Bag

gracious, prophet, priest and King.”

From “Deluded By Dawkins?” by Andrew Wilson, Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne.

In an essay entitled “Why I believe Jesus Christ is the Ultimate Source of Meaning”, Ravi Zacharias draws to his conclusion with these words:

“I found new life in Jesus. The Jesus I know and love today I encountered at the age of seventeen. I can now enjoy the benefit of time’s distant view. Over three decades later his name and his tug in my life mean infinitely more than they did when I first surrendered my life to him. I came to him because I did not know which way to turn. I remain with him because there is no other way I wish to turn. I came to him longing for something I did not

have. I remain with him because I have something I will not trade. I came to him as a stranger. I remain with him in the most intimate of friendships. I came to him unsure about the future. I remain with him certain about my destiny. I came amid the thunderous cries of a culture that has three hundred thirty million deities. I remain with him knowing that truth cannot be all-inclusive.” I close with these glorious words of Malcolm Muggeridge on his discovery of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ:

“I may, I suppose, regard myself as a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets, that’s fame; I can fairly easily earn enough money to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Internal Revenue Service. That’s success. Furnished with money and a little

fame, even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of friendly diversions. That’s pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time. That’s fulfillment. Yet, I say to you, and I beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by millions, add them all up together, and they are nothing, less than nothing. Indeed, a positive impediment measured against one drop of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are.”

From the book “Why I Am A Christian”, edited by Norman L. Geisler and Paul K. Hoffman, published by Baker Books. ◻

Failure - Musterion

It seems a bit of a strange title Failure – Musterion. It is true we all know what Failure means. I do anyway. But what is Musterion and what is the connection?

Well, the word Musterion is a Greek word. It is found 27 times in the New Testament and only in one place in the Old. It is translated by the English word Mystery.

Unfortunately the word Mystery gives us an eerie feeling. We think of “the Mystery of the Haunted House”, or “The Mystery of the Moated Grange”. Spooks, spirits, ghosts, but there is no suggestion of this in the word Musterion. The word simply means a secret which is known to some (The Stewards of The Mystery) and is revealed to others as they are entitled to receive it. The old religious cults all had their mysteries. The new member of course knew nothing. After a while, one part of the Mysteries or

Secrets of the Society was revealed to him and so, step by step, he was initiated into those secrets.

Well, now we can see that meaning clearly waiting for us if we turn to the New Testament. In Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 13, verse 11, our Lord says to His disciples, “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom but to them it is not given.” So the disciples were to be initiated into the Secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Suppose then we make a new title for our study – FAILURE – Secret Revealed.

When we look at the Old Testament we quickly realize that from Gen. 12 to the end of Malachi it is dealing with one race of people – the Jew. Great dynasties rose and fell during that period but no

From a pamphlet by the late A. J. Harrop.

mention is made of them except as they influence or affect in some way, the Children of Israel. The Jew was quite a small, insignificant nation (most of the time, anyway) yet his history was of paramount importance so far as the Bible was concerned. We are told of their early beginnings as slaves under Pharaoh, of how God delivered them by the hand of Moses, of their wanderings in the wilderness, their eventual victories in the land of Palestine, God’s dealing with them during the period of the Judges, then the Kings, the greatness of the kingdom under the rule of King David, then the zenith of Grandeur and Greatness under King Solomon until the Queen of Sheba has to confess “One half ... was not told me ... thou exceedest the fame that I heard” (2 Chron. 9:6)

Failure - Musterion

or in the words of our Lord, 'Solomon in all his glory'.

Still the Children of Israel were a Failure. They eventually turned aside from the worship of the One True God. Solomon himself turned aside to worship Ashtoreth, Milcom and other false gods and, as often happens, failure in worship led to failure in material things. After Solomon, the kingdom was disrupted. Never again did it reach to such a height. Ungodliness and disobedience mark the footsteps of both kings and nation, so the downward trend continues. Things go from bad to worse – until, in the end, God gave them up and delivered them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who took them into captivity. The Jew was a complete Failure. It is at this point that the Musterion occurs (in the Septuagint, i.e. Greek translation of course). FAILURE – MUSTERION.

It happened this way. Among that unhappy nation were a few godly men whose hearts ached for their people, the Jews. Daniel was one. He worshipped the God of Israel and loved His people, but he could not understand God's dealings. It is to such that God speaks. So when Nebuchadnezzar dreamed, God gave to Daniel the interpretation. God showed him the plan of the ages, revealing to him the changing Gentile dominions right down to the coming of the Messiah the King. Thus to some, the failure of Israel meant the Secret revealed. In those days of darkness Daniel the beloved was initiated into the Mystery. FAILURE – MUSTERION.

Now we must go to the passage in Matthew to which we have already referred. Messiah the King has come to His people, but as John says, "His own received Him

not." By signs and wonders He manifested His power and His Godhead. By His great proclamation from the mountain He declared the constitution of the Kingdom, but the more widely His claim became known, the greater grew the opposition against Him, until in Matthew ch. 12, we find Him rejected in every one of His offices – as Prophet, 12:41; as Priest, 12:6; as King, 12:42. Once again the Jew had failed. So in Chapter 13 we meet once more our word Musterion. FAILURE – Musterion.

To the surprise of the disciples, our Lord began to speak in parables. Ver. 10, "Why speakest Thou to them in parables?" Our Lord's reply is, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom" and thus the disciples were initiated into the secrets.

Leaving the occurrences of the word Mystery which are found in the other Gospels, we come next to the epistle to the Romans. Here it occurs in Romans 11:25 and 16:25. The earlier passage speaks of the good olive tree and the wild olive. The breaking off of some branches, the blindness in part happening to Israel are parts of the secret being revealed. Ver. 25, "For I would not brethren that ye should be ignorant of this mystery – that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." Again Failure of Israel and Mystery revealed.

In Romans 16:25, the word musterion occurs again. The last two or three verses of this epistle just summarize all that has gone before. It is the secret made known to all nations (in contrast to the one nation only) and for the obedience of faith (in contrast to the obedience of the law). So the Jew fails (for the second time) and the secret is revealed. FAILURE – MUSTERION.

The next epistle to use the word is 1 Corinthians. Five times the word is used there but three of these only use it in a secondary sense, such as "The Stewards of the Mysteries" so we will deal with the first and the last of the five, viz., 1 Cor. 2:7, and 1 Cor. 15:51. In chapter 2, Paul speaks of those to whom "he determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." To them he could not speak "as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ" (3:1). These had failed to grow up. "Howbeit", says Paul, "we speak wisdom among them that are perfect" (those who have gone on to a full end). Ver. 7, "The wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom – things which eye hath not seen nor ear heard." Again we see the failure of some and the secret revealed to others.

In ch. 15 we have the glorious subject of resurrection – His resurrection and our resurrection, but Paul exclaims, "Behold, I show you a Mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed", and thus was another secret revealed to those who were able to receive it.

I want now to come to the great secret, THE MYSTERY of Ephesians and Colossians. Ten times does the word occur in those two books alone. This was the secret, Paul declares, "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men." This was the secret of which Paul insists so emphatically, that he alone had the stewardship. Eph. 3:1 "I, Paul"; 3:2 "given ME"; 3:3 "unto ME"; 3:4 "MY knowledge"; 3:7 "Whereof I was made a minister ... unto ME"; 3:8 "Unto ME" and so on. It was THE Mystery.

You see, all through the Acts of the Apostles, God was again dealing with Israel. He gave them another

Failure - Musterion

chance, but in the last few verses of the Acts we see how sadly the Jew failed, and as a nation, Paul had to give them up. "Be it known therefore unto you that the Salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles." But already the Gentiles were coming in. They were being grafted into 'the good olive tree', Rom. 11:17. Now Israel, the olive tree itself, had failed, so what now? Why, once again, it is Failure – Musterion. Paul reveals the Secret. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians are 'Prison Epistles' written after Acts 28. These tell us of the MYSTERY, the great revelation of Paul. No longer is there a 'Middle Wall of Partition between Jew and Gentile'. No longer is there a good olive tree with wild olive branches grafted in. No longer do we look for a Heavenly Jerusalem with its gates of pearl. No, these things are not for us – God has revealed to us His secret and Paul prays 'that ye may know what is the hope of His calling'. (Eph. 1:18) Well, what is that? Why, that "He has raised us up together and made us sit together in Heavenly places in Christ", (Eph. 2:6), and these Heavenly places are "far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that

is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come". (Eph. 1:20, 21). What a wondrous revelation! Do you know 'the hope of His calling'? Have you been initiated into the Mystery? If so, then -

Sing of the grand Revelation,
The Secret more fully made known,
Wonderful new dispensation
Of Grace abounding alone.
God's riches of mercy
Shewn unto every race
Unto the praise of His Glory,
Wonderful Glory of Grace.

(From the Berean Hymn Book.)

Nevertheless, this glorious secret has been mostly ignored for the past 1,900 years. Paul writes in his last letter (2 Tim. 1:13), "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me"; ver. 15, "all they which are in Asia be turned away from me". Paul, the great Steward of the Mystery, found himself and his message forsaken. Centuries have rolled by – millions have entered life, praise God, by believing – but few have been initiated into the Mystery. How few ever know, or knew, 'the hope of His calling'. The Churches and

Chapels of Christendom seem to know nothing of it and today Christendom largely has turned away from the divinely inspired Word of God.

Have you accepted the revelation the Lord gave through His messenger Paul? Do you know something not only of the various mysteries of God, but of The Mystery in particular? Are you clear as to your Hope? Or do you think that being blessed by inheriting the earth because you are meek, Matt. 5:5; walking the streets of gold in the New Jerusalem, and being seated with Christ in the Heavenly Places far above all, are just different ways of saying we will all go to Heaven?

The same Apostle who revealed this great Secret to us is the same one who tells us in 2 Tim. 2:15 to 'be diligent to gain God's approval, (to be) a workman who will not need to be ashamed, (by) rightly apportioning the Word of God'. Or as he says in Philippians 1:9 and 10, 'I pray ... that you may abound still more and more in knowledge and discernment (in order) that you may approve the things that are excellent, (so) that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.' □

From a Preacher's Notebook

My Lamb. Exodus 12.

In the exciting account of the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt, one of the most significant passages is that dealing with the provision and use of the Passover Lamb. It is significant because the events in Egypt point forward very clearly to the Lord Jesus Christ, who became our Passover Lamb, slain for us.

Moses is given explicit instructions in Exodus 12:1-13 as to how the lamb for each family was to be chosen on the tenth day of the

month, kept till the fourteenth, and then slain 'between the evenings'. The expression 'between the evenings' is what the Hebrew literally says, but it has a curious sound to Gentile ears. Because of the different way that we count the hours of the day, we could not use it. The Jewish day, however, starts and finishes at sunset, so it is a perfectly natural expression.

A statement in v. 13 should be noticed. 'The blood shall be to you for a token (a sign) upon the houses where you are.' Several points emerge here. The first is

that it is not the actual blood that would save them. That statement is not as heretical as it may first appear. Rather it is the life that had been taken, of which the blood is a token, that would save them. V. 30 says that on that Passover night '...there was not a house in Egypt where there was not one dead.' This included the houses of the Israelites as well as the Egyptians. It was either a LAMB or a MAN, the firstborn.

.....cont Pg. 12

From a Preacher's Notebook

The other point we need to remember here is that the killing and eating of the lamb was not enough in themselves. The blood, the sign of the death of the substitute, had to be sprinkled on the doorposts of the house. It was only then that they were safe. To use the modern evangelical phrase, they had to 'put themselves under the blood'. While there are spin-off benefits from the Lord's death to unbelievers, people must, by a deliberate act of faith, put themselves under the blood or the sacrifice of the Lamb avails them nothing in the long run. The final point to be made concerns Moses' references to the lamb. Whether he was aware of this progression or not, we don't

know, but there is certainly food for thought here.

In v. 3 Moses refers to 'a lamb'. It is, of course, a lamb for each family. And that is as far as many people go in their approach to the Lord. He is 'a saviour', 'a God', even 'a good man', but He remains vague, undefined and impersonal. In v. 4, Moses moves on to 'the lamb'. This is more particular. Was his eye of faith already looking down the long corridor of time? Remember, he was a prophet. We too, must get past 'a lamb' to 'the lamb', because there is no other Lamb provided than the Lord Jesus.

In v. 5, it becomes 'your lamb'. It is a great and vital step to move from 'a lamb' to 'the lamb', but unless Christ becomes the Lamb who died for you personally, i. e. 'your lamb', the effects of that shed blood, that life given, won't really touch you.

Then v. 6 states that the whole congregation of Israel shall kill ... IT. There would have been thousands of lambs slain on that first Passover, but Moses seems to have lost sight of the many types and sees all Israel slaying not them, but IT. What a prophetic statement, and it was truly fulfilled on that awful day outside Jerusalem centuries later. They took the One whom John the Baptist called 'the Lamb of God' and shed His blood. We must remember that we can't point the finger at them, for He also carried our sins there on the Cross.

Behold, for me the Victim bleeds,

His wounds are opened wide;
For me the blood of sprinkling
pleads And speaks me justified.

C. Wesley.

HALLELUJAH! □

Correction

An alert reader has found a typographical error in the booklet 'That Wonderful Redemption'. On page 7, first paragraph, the Bible reference 1 John 2:22 should read 1 John 2:2.

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(07) 3802 1262

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Study 1:30pm.

Various Venues. For details
ph (02) 4996 4455

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Every Monday.

7:30pm

34 Aroona St

Edgeworth.

(02) 4950 6708

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