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# *Spiritual* Blessings

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## *Wonderful Words Of Life (4)*

*By Athol Walter*

In the previous studies in this series, we have looked at the subjects of atonement, reconciliation and redemption. These words describe aspects of the overall work of salvation that God has carried out, not only on our behalf, but to deal with sin in the universe, and ultimately bring about the situation where He, God, is all in all.

These words are not synonyms. They describe different things, and while there is overlap between some of the subjects, it greatly helps our understanding of God's work if we distinguish as much as we can between them. We have seen that the atonement effected by the Lord Jesus, when He became obedient to the death on the cross, is the foundation of everything else that He gained for us. Because the Lord's death paid the price for all sin, thereby satisfying the demands of God's holiness and justice, God was reconciled to the world, and sinners, in turn, can be reconciled to God.

Then again, the Lord's death was the price that redeemed us – that bought us back from the bondage of sin and death in which Adam's sin, as well as our own sin, had enslaved us. These are all tremendous blessings, but there is much more. So we move on to the

next wonderful word of life to be considered, which is :-

### **Justification**

As the English language developed over many centuries, it has freely drawn on many other languages. So we have ended up with words which mean the same thing - synonyms. While this is a great strength, it can also cause some problems in understanding. Now we have a case in point with the word justification.

Justify, the verbal form, comes from the Latin root which gives us our word justice as well as just, justify and justification. No problem so far, but what many English readers do not realise is that the words righteous and righteousness not only mean exactly the same as just and justification, but they translate exactly the same Hebrew and Greek words. So the first point to remember is that justification and righteousness mean exactly the same thing.

Another small problem is that while we can use the verbal form of justification and say justify, the noun righteousness does not have a verbal form. English does not allow us to say righteousnessify. We must say 'make righteous'.

By the way, these two words provide us with a good example of the danger of building our doctrines

on English words and their dictionary definitions. I looked up two thesauruses to see if justification and righteousness were considered to be synonyms, and they were not. The more important point for us, however, is that the Bible uses the two words interchangeably, and the fact that our modern references do not link the two words shows just how far we have moved away from the original meanings.

### **Tsadaq**

The Hebrew word translated righteous and just is TSADAQ. This is the root word from which all the other forms of the word come. The first occurrence is in Gen, 6:9 which tells us that Noah was a just man. It would be equally correct if it was translated that Noah was a righteous man.

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**“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Eph. 1:3**

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# The President's Word



Greetings once again to all of our readers. Welcome back.

This first issue of *Spiritual Blessings* for 2008 sees the return of Athol Walter as the magazine's regular editor. Athol had some health issues late last year which prevented him from overseeing the last issue, so I am very pleased he has recovered sufficiently to take up where he left off. The work of the BBFA is the Lord's work, and Athol has been a very diligent workman for the Lord over many years. His substantial input to our fellowship, as both this magazine's editor and one of the BBFA's regular speakers, has been missed. We are grateful to the Lord that he has allowed Athol the strength to take up both roles again with renewed vigour.

## Web site

Have you visited the BBFA's web site lately ... or ever?

[www.spiritualblessings.org](http://www.spiritualblessings.org)

is the address. Literally thousands of people the world over have looked at our site and many have commented that the articles, charts and books have helped them in their Christian walk and understanding of God's Word rightly divided.

So what exactly is on our web site? For a start, there are plenty of back issues of *Spiritual Blessings* which you can read or print out. Then there are hundreds of great Bible study articles covering a wide range of subjects. If you like charts, you'll find something of interest here.

Several books and booklets by Charles Welch, Stuart Allen and others are on our site, free of charge to read or print out. You can view catalogues of our huge range of literature, tapes and CDs, and find out when and where all of our meetings are held, and more. Everything on our web site is free to view, and may be printed out.

The web site has taken on a slightly new look of late, thanks largely to the hard work of Frank Haegler. It's now much easier to see what's there and find what you're looking for, and we are adding new articles regularly. Even if you

are not a regular computer user, I'm sure you would know someone who would benefit from a look at what is offered there, so why not pass on our address to a friend or relative?

## Meetings for 2008

In Hebrews 10:25, Paul exhorted his readers to continue "the assembling of ourselves together", encouraging one another. The principle is one which is still sound today, and the BBFA conducts several opportunities for people to meet together around God's Word. Our annual conference to be held at Camp Toukley on the NSW Central Coast September 20-22, is always a great time of study and fellowship. There are also our regular meetings, and a few special events which everyone is welcome to attend free of charge. Queensland readers might especially like to consider attending the weekend of meetings held at Boronia Hts in Brisbane on the Queen's Birthday long weekend, June 7th-9th. See page 12 for details of all BBFA meetings.

## Pass it on

Finally, do you know someone who would enjoy reading our magazine? These days, we distribute *Spiritual Blessings* by regular post and also by email. You can forward your friends' postal / email details to one of the addresses below and we will send them our magazine free of charge and free of obligation. The BBFA wishes to respect people's privacy, so please tell your friend you have done this first (see our privacy statement on page 12) We think our magazine is worth reading, and if you've read this far, maybe you do, too. So why not spread the word, and share quality Bible study material with those who might be interested and benefit from it?

Until next time, may the Lord be glorified by our witness, our walk, and the study of His Word.

*David Tavender.*

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## Special Events For Your Diary

**Newcastle Study Day, Sat May 31st, 2008, 10.00 am - 3.00 pm**

Charlestown Community Hall. Free of charge. Co-ordinator : John Hutton (02) 4943-5694

**Brisbane Study Weekend. Sat 7th, Sun 8th, June 2008, 9.00 am - 5.00 pm**

Queen's Birthday Weekend. Boronia Hts State School Hall, 194 Middle Rd., Boronia Heights.

Free of charge. Co-ordinator : Frank Haegler (07) 3297-1981

## 2008 Annual Conference, September 20-22, 2008

Plan now to join us at Camp Toukley for the BBFA's Annual Conference, a time of great studies and Christian fellowship. More details in future issues of *Spiritual Blessings*.

# Wonderful Words of Life

cont from Pg. 1

The basic meaning of TSADAQ is to be straight, balanced, equal, and this is what is meant by the famous expression in the Law, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' In other words, fair and equal treatment and compensation. Isn't it interesting, and also a little surprising, that this notion of straightness, fair dealing and proper weights and measures, is the underlying thought behind righteousness? We tend to treat words such as justification as special or holy words, but I believe we take a large step forward in our spiritual life when we see how practical and down to earth these subjects are. If we claim to be justified in Christ and yet are guilty of deception or dishonest behaviour in our relations with other people, we are kidding ourselves, and certainly will not bring glory to the Lord.

Let's look at the ways Scripture uses 'justify'. Deut. 25:1, "If there be a controversy between men, and they come into judgement that the judge may judge them; then shall they justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked."

Think carefully here. The phrase 'they shall ... condemn the wicked' is literally, 'they shall make him wicked'. Does this mean that if a judge declares a person guilty that he thereby makes the person wicked? No, of course not. It is simply a form of expression and means 'he shall declare him wicked'. If a jury in a court case finds the accused guilty, they do, in a sense, 'make him wicked'. But no one believes that the jury's verdict caused the wrongful action of the accused.

It is exactly the same with the righteous. If someone before the court is found to have acted honestly and/or legally and is acquitted, there is no thought that

the verdict somehow fills that person with morality and goodness. No, it simply declares that in the matters before the court, the person acted rightly.

Consider these verses. Matt. 12:36,37. 'But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof on the day of judgement. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.'

Luke 10:29. "But he willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?"

Luke 16:15. "And He said unto them, You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

The way these verses use our word shows that a strong part of the meaning of justification is to be

wondering what it is that makes us better people, it is some of the other parts of the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, such as the breaking of the power of sin in our lives and the transforming that comes with the renewing of our minds. But the truth is that much of the work of making us better people has to be done by ourselves. We are the ones who have to mortify our members upon the earth. We have to remove wrong thoughts and actions from our lives like taking off a coat. (Col. 3:9) The work of the Lord Jesus has made it possible for these things to be done, but we are the ones who must do it. God does not do it for us.

## Dikaioo – Righteous

The Greek word that is used to translate TSADAQ and its derivatives is the root word DIKE and from this we get DIKAI00, which means just or righteous. Because we are so used to seeing

the words just, justify and justification in their Scriptural setting, we tend to forget that they are terms of the lawcourt, and if we

look carefully, we find that this is the case in the Scriptures too.

## The Courtroom of God

God is said to be the judge. The one who is to be justified is said to be guilty, exposed to judgement and without any plea. There are said to be three accusers in Scripture: 1. The Law (John 5:45), 2. Conscience (Rom. 2:15), and 3. Satan (Zech. 3:2 and Rev. 12:10).

Colossians 2:14 tells us that the charges against us have been drawn up in legal writing, and if, when you read Romans 8, you miss that its setting is God's court of judgement, then you will miss the teaching of the chapter. We'll come back to some of that in a moment or two.

Here is a quote from a man

*We tend to treat words such as justification as special or holy words ...*

declared right, whether we do it ourselves or someone else does it. But being declared righteous does not necessarily change our nature and make us good from then on.

Consider Abraham. He believed God's pronouncement that he and Sarah would have their own son when he well knew it was a physical impossibility. And the Scriptures tell us that God counted Abraham's faith in this matter to him for righteousness. Did that change Abraham's nature? Read the account. Abraham often faltered and vacillated in his walk with God after that point, but God had declared him to be righteous or just. And if God says it is so, who can argue?

I said above that being declared righteous does not change our sinful natures, and if you are

named Scott (and that is all I know about him): "When a man is tried before an earthly tribunal he must either be condemned or acquitted: if he be condemned, he may be pardoned, but he cannot be justified; if he be acquitted, he may be justified, but he cannot stand in need of a pardon."

Now what has happened in God's court goes against all the rules of our earthly courts. The Gospel tells us that we were forgiven, which means we were guilty. Then God is said to justify the ungodly (the guilty), which in earthly courts is not only illegal, but really impossible.

So in God's court, the Gospel provides the guilty child of Adam with a plea that is all-sufficient. The Lord Himself, the One who paid the price demanded by the righteous Judge, is our advocate and not only that, He also occupies the prosecutor's place on the right hand of the Judge. Then, not only are we completely forgiven and our debt paid in full for us, but we are fully justified, fully accepted, and given life and an inheritance. And what is more, the righteousness of Christ is ours by imputation.

Remember the verse back in Deut. 25? God declares us righteous, not because we perform righteously, but because we have received the righteousness of God in Christ.

When God declares us righteous or just, what has happened is not that our sinful nature changed, but that our standing before God changed. Justification changes our standing, not our state.

One of the simplest definitions of justification that I have heard is that given by Charles Welch, who would say in his own particular humorous way, "To be justified means that God treats me just-as-if-I'd never sinned".

## Basis of Justification

So what is justification based on?

1. We are justified by the blood of Christ, and it is through redemption. Romans 3:4, 5:9.

2. We are justified freely by grace. Romans 3:24, Titus 3:7.

3. We are justified by faith. Acts 13:39, Romans 3:28.

On the negative side, no one can be justified by keeping the Law of Moses or by works of any kind. Romans 3:20, 28, 4:2. Gal. 2:16, 3:11, 5:4.

So we can say that free grace is the source of justification, the atonement is the meritorious cause, and faith is the only means through which justification is received.

## Habakkuk 2:4.

Three times the Apostle quotes from Hab. 2:4, and if it had not been for the inspired use Paul makes of the verse, we would all pass it by, not realizing the great foundational truth that it is.

Hab. 2:4. "Behold, his soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith."

The Septuagint(LXX) translates it like this, "If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him, but the just shall live by my faith." I cannot explain how the Hebrew version becomes what it is in the LXX, but Paul uses the LXX version for his quotes, and in the book of Hebrews, he uses the whole verse except for the word 'my'. The three quotes are: Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11, Heb. 10:38.

The important point here is for us to see that Habakkuk's faith rested on God's faithfulness. It appeared to Habakkuk, as it has and does to many of God's saints, that God had gone to sleep and that His promised salvation would never come. But Habakkuk learned that through the trials of the believer's

walk he can be quietly confident, for the answer will not be delayed longer than the appointed time and meanwhile, the just by faith shall live.

## Philippians 3:9

In conclusion, I want to take you back into the courtroom. Imagine for a moment that you are watching a trial being conducted. The jury has just returned from their deliberations, and the judge has asked the foreman of the jury to announce their verdict. The foreman stands and says, "We find the defendant ...". Just a moment. What do they mean they find the defendant? He wasn't lost, was he, so how could they find him? Of course, if the verdict goes against him, he will be lost, but that is another matter.

No, the word 'find' means more than to find something that has been misplaced. In this context it means to come to a conclusion, a verdict, after the searching and sifting of evidence, of weighing up pros and cons. The result of all this is called ... a finding. So the accused in a trial is found ... either guilty or not guilty. Now let's turn to Philippians 3:7-9.

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be **found in Him**, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

The verdict in the believer's case is neither to be found guilty or not guilty, but to be found ... **in Him**. And, wonderful news, this finding is more than enough! ☐



## Editorial

This issue brings us to a new year as well as to no. 1 of a new volume of Spiritual Blessings.

I must express my appreciation to David Tavender who produced the last issue of SB while I was recuperating from an operation. David's willingness to jump into the breach meant that we kept faith with our readers.

For those who don't know the details, I had a heart attack at the end of September, followed by triple bypass surgery. As I write this, it is just on 3 months since the operation, and I am getting stronger each day. The prayers and support of my wife, family and friends has been wonderful and is greatly appreciated. I thank the Lord very sincerely for His presence and help throughout.

In this issue, we continue the Wonderful Words of Life series, and there is a reprint of a pamphlet published by the Philadelphia Bible Testimony of the USA. Our President, David Tavender, has written two articles, dealing with the position of Gentile believers during the Acts years and then the Greatness of God. A sermon from a Preacher's Notebook and an extract from a study by Bob Davidson completes this issue's contents.

Two booklets dealing with prophecy as it relates to our own times are reviewed briefly on p. 12. Both are well worth reading.

We occasionally print poems or articles from the writings of the Late David Fryer. David, who passed away several years ago, was a long-time member of the BBFA. He was an avid collector of verses, hymns and poems that appealed to him, and he wrote quite a few things himself. After his death, his family passed these papers on to us. It is hard, however, to tell which are his own writings and which are by others, as David seldom put a name down with the particular piece. This is the reason why we simply describe any of these verses etc. as 'from the collected writings of David Fryer'.

I hope you read the information about the various meetings we have. If any of these meetings are in your area, you would be very welcome to attend.

Once again, we pray that you will find this issue enjoyable and helpful, and please remember that we would like to get any questions or comments you may have.

Remember to apply Paul's command in 2 Tim. 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

*Athol Walter.*

## The Great Surprise

### Ephesians 3:9 & Colossians 1:26

The subject - Bible references speak of the mystery which was 'hid from ages and generations' and 'hid in God'. This mystery, or secret, was revealed to Paul the preacher, apostle and teacher of the Gentiles (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11).

The apostle Paul was made a minister concerning the mystery, and he alone is the one to whom and through whom the risen, ascended and seated Lord in glory revealed the surprise of the ages (Ephesians 3:7-11; Colossians 1:23-29).

When God made the promises in the Old Testament concerning Israel or the Gentiles, Satan was aware of these predictions. After the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, the preaching of the prophets and Moses continued right through the period covered by the book of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 26:22, 23; 28:23)

It was during the Acts period that the Gospel was sent to the Jew first (see Acts 3:26; 10:36). In some instances, the word was preached to none but unto the Jews only (Acts 11:19).

Even Paul, during the Acts period, went to the Jew first before he turned to the Gentiles. It was during this period that the believing Gentile partook of Israel's spiritual things (Romans 15:27). When the Gentile believed, he was made to partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree (Romans 11:17).

Paul declared that "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers; and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, for this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and laud Him all ye people, and again He saith, Rejoice ye Gentiles, and laud Him all ye people. And again Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him shall the Gentiles hope. Now the God of (that) hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." (Romans 15:8-13). The hope of the Gentiles in the above Scriptures is linked up with the hope of Israel. This hope must not be confused with the one hope of our calling (Eph. 1:18; 4:4).

When Paul was in prison in Rome, he said he was there for the hope of Israel (Acts 28:20). This he said before pronouncing the judgment of the Holy Spirit by Isaiah that Israel would not hear, understand or see (Acts 28:25-27).. It was just at this time that Paul made the great declaration that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles (Acts 28:28).

No longer is the word of this salvation sent to the Jews

## *The Great Surprise*

*cont. from page 5.*

(Acts 13:26). The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles independently of the Jewish nation, and this is the Great Surprise of which Satan was not aware. This secret was 'hid in God'. It was not known by the prophets and is not found in the Scriptures except in Paul's epistles written after the close of the Acts period. It must be understood that the mystery of the one body, the church, can only be found in Paul's later epistles and not in his epistles written during the Acts period. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, now says that he is the prisoner of Jesus Christ *for you Gentiles* (Eph. 3:1). No longer is he a prisoner for the hope of Israel. He is the mouth-piece for the ascended Christ with a message for us who are Gentiles.

The Church which is Christ's Body is distinct from every other church in the Scriptures. It is not the church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38); neither is it the church (congregation) spoken of in Psalm 22:22 and Hebrews 2:12. It is a

*New Man*, and its goal is to grow to a FULL GROWN MALE (Eph. 2:25; 4:13). Hymnology must not take the place of the pure word of Scripture.

Christ is the Head of the Body, the Church, (Col. 1:18), and no member of this Body is in the Head. We are exhorted to test or distinguish the things that differ (Phil. 1:10 margin). We are admonished to study (labour) for God's approval and to be an unashamed workman, rightly apportioning the Word of Truth. (2 Tim. 2:15).

The revelation of the Mystery, the

*The mystery of the one Body can only be found in Paul's later epistles, and not in his epistles written during the Acts period.*

Church of the One Body, was a GREAT SURPRISE to Satan, and many of God's dear people today know nothing concerning this secret made known to and through Paul the preacher, apostle and teacher of the Gentiles. The Lord Jesus Christ made Paul a minister of the Gospel and a minister of the Body, the Church,

even the Mystery, so that he might preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable (untraceable) riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship (dispensation-administration) of the Mystery which was hid in God (Eph. 3:6-9, Col. 1:23-26).

May the reader search the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11), and may the eyes of your understanding be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of His calling (Eph. 1:18).

If the reader is unsaved, then trust only in Christ as the all-sufficient Saviour. It is in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace (Eph. 1:7). Christ is alive forever to give us power over sin (Rom. 5:10). He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:25). Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

*(This article is from a pamphlet published by the Philadelphia Bible Testimony. The author is not known.)*

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# *Gentiles During The Acts Period*

*by David Tavender*

The New Testament is full of occurrences where Gentiles are said to be either blessed or dealt with in some way by God. Gentiles are non-Jews or non-Israelites, and are often referred to in the Scriptures as "the nations", and sometimes as "the heathen". The term "heathen" is one we often associate with idol worshipping savages, but there are several instances in Scripture of God actually looking upon "heathen" with favour, so we should take care to understand that the term refers simply to one who was not of the Israelite nation.

Care also should be taken when considering whether you and I are the Gentiles being referred to in a particular passage of Scripture. Gentile Christians of Acts period times (approximately AD 29 to AD 62) had a different place in God's plans back then – one which also saw a different role for Israelite believers.

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

which has now been told. So, what was this secret?

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

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

From the time of the conversion of Cornelius (a Gentile) in Acts 10, until Israel was set aside in God's plans in Acts 28, there were in fact two categories of Christians: Jews in Christ and Gentiles in Christ. Note that the common feature was being "in Christ". In regard to salvation there was equality between believers of all nations. However, there were still some differences between the two groups during the Acts Period, and we can see some of these played out as we read the historical account known as The Acts of the Apostles. It is important to note, though, that the books and letters written during that time also reflect the different ways in which God was dealing with believers. The books written during the Acts period may be seen in the chart below.

I will now outline some of the differences between Jews and Gentiles during the Acts period.

**(1) Jews held the prior place**

Jews held the prior place in God's plans for mankind, because the promises were to be fulfilled through that nation. You'll

remember that, way back in Genesis, Abram was called to father a nation through which God would bless all nations (Genesis 12:1-3), and for the rest of the Old Testament, no Gentiles are even mentioned unless they come in contact with Israelites.

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

Contrary to popular opinion today, Israel were not finished with after the death and resurrection of Christ, and they continued in the Acts Period, through God's longsuffering, to be the instrument through which He would bless the world. Hence we find that the

salvation of Israel was still the major goal, and this is reflected in the fact that during the Acts period, Paul preached to the Jews of each town first in his journeys (as illustrated in Acts 13:5,14,45,46; 14:1; 17:1,2,10; 28:17).

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

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

"There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

*Continued on page 8*

<b>The Books of the New Testament</b>		
<b>Historical</b>	<b>Letters written <i>during</i> the Acts Period approx 45-62 AD</b>	<b>Letters written <i>after</i> the Acts Period approx 62-68 AD</b>
Matthew Mark Luke John Acts	Romans 1 & 2 Corinthians Galatians 1 & 2 Thessalonians Hebrews James 1 & 2 Peter 1,2,3 John Jude Revelation	Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 & 2 Timothy Titus Philemon

## *Gentiles During Acts* *Cont. from p.7.*

“What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew ... much in every way.” (Romans 1:16; 2:9,10; 3:1,2)

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

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

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

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

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

On this point, it should be noted that keeping the law was of no value as regarding salvation. Galatians 3:11, also written during the Acts Period, says, “that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident, for the just shall live by faith”. The law was still required to be observed by the Jew for reasons more to do with signifying holiness of God’s chosen people, and because the law was a shadow or picture of heavenly things (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1). Clearly, at that time, there were two different sets of laws in place for Jewish and Gentile believers, even though members from both groups were Christians and blessed equally in regard to their hope of salvation.

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

Romans 11:11-13 tells us that Gentiles were given these blessings in order to provoke Israel to jealousy. Jealous, because non-Israelites were now being blessed in ways which were previously exclusive to Israelites. In this way it was hoped that the Jewish nation as a whole would repent; however, the majority rejected Christ as the Son of God. This situation remained right up until the final few verses of the book of Acts.

So far we have seen at least four ways in which the Jews of the Acts period were being dealt with differently to the Gentiles at that time. However, at the end of the Acts period, around 62 AD, there was a change in those conditions, and a new dispensation (or a new “set of conditions”) came into force.

### **The Mystery - Equality**

After Acts 28, Israel were set aside for their continual unbelief as a nation. Naturally, we should expect that the letters written after Acts 28 would reflect this change

- and they do. One of the first letters written after this change was Ephesians, and we read about a mystery or secret which was newly revealed:

“That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” (Ephesians 3:6) In other words: equal in every way.

These are the conditions which operate today, and we find that those national differences, so prevalent during the Acts period, have now disappeared.

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

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

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

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

Personally, I think the passage which best illustrates this “oneness” between Jewish and Gentile Christians today is Ephesians 2:11-18. Note how Jewish and Gentile believers, who were once separated because of race, have now been joined in every way through Christ. The priority of the Jew, which was a part of God’s dealings during the Acts period, is no longer in operation today.

If you would like to see a summary of many other different conditions before and after Acts 28, write to us, or visit our web site at [www.spiritualblessings.org](http://www.spiritualblessings.org), and view the article, “Different Conditions Before and After Acts 28”.

## "Likemindedness To Christ"

### Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

The text I want to focus on is verse 5 of the above reading: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus ...", but I must emphasise the importance of the context here. If we simply lift verse 5 out of the passage and think only of that one verse, we will most likely miss the important lesson the Holy Spirit would have us learn. Verse 5, while being perhaps the centre of Paul's argument, is still part of the wider line of thought, and we must take notice of that.

Vv. 1 to 4: "Therefore if there be any consolation ... any love ... any fellowship ... any affection and mercy ... be likeminded ... be of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition ... but ... let each esteem others better than himself. ... look out for ... the interests of others. LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS ..."

There is a little problem in v. 3. In spite of Paul's exhortation, the Lord could not think of others as 'better than Himself'. Weymouth's translation helps us here: "Let everyone regard the rest as being of more account than himself." The Lord could, and certainly did, regard others of more account than Himself. Paul sets Christ forward as -

### The Great Example.

**The Lord Jesus.** V. 6. "He was in the form of God ... but ... taking the form of a servant (the Greek word here is actually 'slave') ... He humbled Himself and became obedient ... to the death of the cross."

The word 'form' refers not to shape, but rather to status, authority, position. Whatever the phrase 'form of God' means, it was His by right, but He gave up that which was rightfully His, voluntarily suffering degradation and shame, because He thought we were of more account than His own rights.

While it is almost unbelievable that He would do this, it is truly the measure of His love for us. And Paul tells us to have this same attitude of mind! He then goes on to present -

### Some lesser examples.

**Paul himself.** V. 17. "Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all."

**Timothy.** V. 19 & 20. "But I trust ... to send Timothy to you ... for I have no one likeminded, who will sincerely care for your state."

**Epaphroditus.** Vv. 25 – 30. "Yet ... I send Epaphroditus ... since he was ... distressed because you had heard that he was sick ... For the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life ..."

So, can we be likeminded to Christ? Yes, if we trust in His strength and commit ourselves fully to walk worthily of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

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## The Greatness of God

by David Tavender

Greatness is a word that rolls off the tongue a little too easily sometimes. In these days of hasty, and often fleeting, overpraise of sporting and entertainment personalities, the term "great" has become somewhat trivialised and cheapened.

Anyone who releases a successful three minute single, or can score a goal with ease, or act out a part in a movie, has the chance to be heralded as a "great" in their field, and few will argue against it. 20 or so years after the event, one of two things happen to those "greats". They are either magnified way beyond their true merit, or they are forgotten almost

completely. Thankfully, the attribute of greatness in the Scriptures is not used so frivolously. Rather, it is spoken of sparingly, and always very appropriately.

The following thoughts on the greatness of God are offered merely as a starting point from which the reader might like to then ponder further. It must be said from the outset, though, that an article of such a short length as this could hardly begin to adequately describe the greatness of God. At best, this should be taken as a broad introduction to the subject.

### What Does "Great" Mean?

Simply put, the terms "great" and

"greatness" are used in several different contexts in the Bible, but mainly describe the large size or number of something. In that sense, we could talk about either the great number of people in a crowd, or a great big tree that towers over us. In Australia we have the Great Barrier Reef, the Great Sandy Desert, and the Great Australian Bight – all geographical features considerably larger in size than some whole countries.

Secondly, there is the idea of importance or magnificence. Many leaders down through the centuries were given this title by their subordinates, and some just

## *The Greatness of God* cont. from p. 9.

decided to take it for themselves, no matter what anyone else thought about it! There has been Alfred the Great (King of England), Alexander the Great (Greek conqueror), Peter the Great (Tsar of Russia), and many, many others.

There are a number of other common usages of the word today, which we will not delve into too deeply here. For example, there is the idea of great meaning "very good". However, this is a definition that came about as recently as the mid-1800's, and was not really the first intention of the Bible writers when they spoke about God being great. It must be said, that only a fool or a blasphemer would suggest that God is not "very good", of course. Suffice to say, if you have the idea of the word "great" in the Bible meaning "very large", sometimes with a sense of "magnificence" in certain contexts, then you are on the right track.

### **How Great?**

Perhaps all of these definitions and usages come together when we consider what greatness is in such passages as Psalm 104. The Psalm begins with a simple, and yet profound, word of praise – "O LORD my God, Thou art very great" (v.1) – and then proceeds to describe something of this greatness by observing God's mighty deed of creation. A short selection of that description is printed below, so as you read the following verses, bear in mind that the Psalmist is telling us how great God is, and that this is one way we can learn something about Him.

We read in that Psalm that God "stretchest out the heavens like a curtain". He "maketh the clouds His chariot". He "walketh upon the

wings of the wind". He "laid the foundations of the earth". "He appointed the moon for seasons". When "the waters stood above the mountains (imagine that!) ... they fled" at God's rebuke (imagine that, too!). And we could go on; such is merely one aspect of the greatness of God. (Psalm 104:2-35). Did you notice something as you read? There is not one action mentioned in those verses that a man could ever come close to accomplishing.

As I write these words, I can't help wondering how awestruck the Psalmist must have been as the Holy Spirit moved him to write those words, "O LORD my God, Thou art very great", and the passages which followed. The man who penned the first version of the hymn, "How Great Thou Art", though not divinely inspired, also drew upon the wonders of God's creation for the lyrics, and probably felt the same way.

O Lord my God, when I in  
awesome wonder,  
Consider all the worlds Thy  
Hands have made;  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling  
thunder,  
Thy power throughout the uni-  
verse displayed.

Then sings my soul, My Saviour  
God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great  
Thou art....

(by Carl Gustaf Boberg, English translation by Stuart K. Hine)

In a similar vein, the writer of Psalm 77 asks, "Who is so great a God as our God?". This was a pertinent question, especially when many of his fellow countrymen were bowing down to idols carved from chunks of wood and stone. This Psalm then goes on to tell of the mighty wonders God performed, particularly for Israel, as opposed to worthless carvings

that couldn't perform anything for anybody. Again, not one of those magnificent deeds – mostly related to the Exodus story - could possibly be performed by the hands of mere humans, no matter how "great" they were thought to be. It's not really a very close comparison when you think about it, is it? There are men who may be considered to be great ... and then there is the God who truly is great.

### **Great Power and Love To Us**

In the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul refers to one particular aspect of greatness, that of God's power, when he writes about "the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe". We then go on to read a description of just how great this power is when we learn that it is "according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 1:19,20) We can either be friends or enemies of God, and if you are in Christ, this inconceivably great power of God has been directed towards you. Ephesians 3:20,21 tells us more about this.

Notice the words "exceeding" and "power" again in these verses: "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory ..."

Further to this, in the same epistle, Paul speaks of God's "great love wherewith He loved us" (Ephesians 2:4). Yes, I certainly think the idea of God's "goodness" is an essential part of God's great love, but consider those words in the light of what we have seen earlier; how greatness in Scripture is primarily about size, largeness and volume, with an overtone of magnificence.

How great - how "big", if you like

- must God's love for us be? The passage which follows Ephesians 2:4 tells us how great that love is - that He has "quicken us (made us alive) together with Christ", He has "raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus". And the goal of all this involves the word 'exceeding' again: "... that in the ages to come, He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-7).

God is called great. His power toward us who believe is called great. He loves us with a love that is called great. And each of these is far beyond what any of us humans are able to comprehend, I am sure of that; which is where faith comes in. We must trust that

the One who "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think", really is able ... because He is truly qualified to be called "great" in every sense of the term.

Have the words written in this article given you a deep understanding of the greatness of God? I doubt it! The sheer magnitude of the issue is something I certainly struggle to understand as these wonders are contemplated. The extent of God's greatness is not something we are likely to grasp easily, especially when that greatness is further described by the word "exceeding" in some passages, suggesting areas of which we have no prior experience or knowledge to compare it with.

It's almost a lost cause from the start to try to understand the greatness of God. Nevertheless, let us continue in our quest to know God and His greatness as revealed in His Word. Just as Moses was permitted to see something extra of God's glory from the cleft of the rock (Exodus 33 & 34), perhaps we may be permitted to perceive something of God's greatness if we approach our God in like manner, as Moses did, in humble obedience. Along the journey, though, there are times when, being confident of the things we can affirm with certainty, we really should just stop and throw our hands in the air, joining with the Psalmist in his simple exclamation - "O LORD my God, Thou art very great!".

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## *Some Thoughts on God's Name*

# *Jehovah*

Jehovah is the name of God which the Jews would not pronounce, and frequently would not write. The Massorah, (notes that accompanied 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 (i.e. four letters) for the Hebrew 'Yahweh'. Jehovah is merely an attempt at the pronunciation of the name in English. We do something similar with the name 'Jesus'. In Hebrew, the name is 'Jehoshua', which is shortened to 'Joshua'. In Greek, this becomes 'Iesous', which in turn, becomes 'Jesus' in English. Nobody seems to be troubled by the pronunciation 'Jesus', so why the fuss over 'Jehovah'?

Jehovah is the proper name of God and should no more be translated 'Lord' than 'Samuel' should be translated 'heard' or 'Ephraim' translated 'fruitful'.

The name Jehovah first occurs in Gen. 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 Eve 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 Gen. 22. In verse 2, Elohim tells Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, and throughout the narrative it is Elohim who is God, until, in verse 11, it is Jehovah who intervenes. In verses 15-18, it is Jehovah who makes further promises to Abraham.

Jehovah is especially the God of Israel in covenant relationship, 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. 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 'Jehovah' 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.

**(Taken from an article titled 'The Names of God', in 'Spiritual Blessings', Nov/Dec. 1995, by the late Bob Davidson.)**

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