

Spiritual Blessings



Vol. 23 No.2 Mar/Apr. 2009

The official journal of the Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia

What About Life Hereafter?

Extracts from an article by Pastor William Campbell (N.Z. 1974)*

Prepared by David Tavender.

Many Christian speakers and writers aver that the “souls” of Christians who have died go immediately to “Glory”, and that the “souls” of the unsaved go immediately into fiery torment, to remain there for ever without hope. Is it all true?

The Question of Authority

Upon what solid authority does the universal belief in “soul-immortality” rest? NONE. Ancient Egyptian belief and Hindu tradition do not prove it. Plato was a famous Greek philosopher about four centuries before Christ, and is quoted as an authority on this theme. His short article on “The Immortality of the Soul” is so full of “ifs” and “supposes” and “must-be’s” that it is not worth the paper it is printed on.

The only adequate authority reposes in Him Who created mankind to begin with. He alone knows for certain exactly what is the composition of human personality. And God has given His Word to tell us about Himself, about ourselves, and our relationship to Him for time and eternity.

Many sincere Christians, even students of the Bible, adduce “texts” from which they infer “soul-immortality”. But if the human soul risks an eternity in fiery torment, the fact of possessing such an all important element in our “make-up” which can so suffer, must be stated in clearest terms. It cannot possibly be left to inference. God does not leave His own immortality to inference. It is clearly stated over and over again; as in Psalm 90:2 - “From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God”.

The authoritative Word of God does not contain one statement that man has an immortal soul or has immortality in any part of his being.

The Matter is Important

Why bother? Because:

(1) “Eternal Torment” gives atheists a bludgeon to belabour the Christian Faith;

(2) They insist that “death is an eternal sleep”, with nothing beyond for anyone;

(3) Godly people, thinking “eternal torment” to be true, are distressed;

(4) To soften its awfulness some try to “spiritualise” the Bible expressions used to teach it to mean banishment from God’s presence, rather than actual torment;

(5) Spiritualism argues not illogically that if immortal souls forsake their bodies they can communicate back with their friends who are still in flesh and blood, and claim to prove it. (However, 1 Timothy 4:1-5 shows Spiritualism to be 100% deception by demonic beings, and some experienced Spiritualists have voiced themselves as of the same conviction);

(6) The Eastern doctrine of Reincarnation could not exist without a belief in something surviving bodily death;

(7) Some reckon that all religions - all equally depending on man having something which survives

Continued on page 3

In this Issue:

What About Life Hereafter? p. 1; President’s Word. p.2; Bible Study Tools. p.5; Poem: “Then,” God said. p. 7; Characters & Places from the NT. p.8; Words of the Holy Spirit. p. 11.

“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



President's Word

Greetings to all of our readers.

It's always a pleasure to sit at my office desk here and write about what our Fellowship has been doing recently or has coming up. Over the last two months though, sadly, many Australians have been adversely affected by savage bushfires and major floods, and many have even lost their lives. The immediate danger has subsided in most cases, but the after effects are still a present threat to the wellbeing of many, and the healing process on many levels will no doubt take a long time. The Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia wishes to extend its deepest sympathy to any readers who may have suffered loss or been touched by these devastating events.

At times like this, we may be tempted to ask, "How could a loving God allow such things to happen?". Let us not forget that it was the same God - the same loving God - who "so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Suffering, loss, pain, even death and the "unfairness" of life on a planet tainted by sin's touch, are all experiences which our God knows and can relate to only too well. Remember, we can only call ourselves Christians because we have been "purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28) - not with just a snap of the fingers, but with His own blood. Far from being painless, it was horrible, and accomplished only after a great deal of angst, torture and turmoil to both the Father and His Son.

For a Biblical perspective on this important issue, I would recommend that Christians of all persuasions read the booklet "Natural Disasters" advertised on page 4. In it is a consideration of similarly awful events in Scripture, and a demonstration of how we, today, can make some sense of these things, and still confidently look to our God as a source of refuge and comfort.

Optional Subscription

On to the specific affairs of the BBFA, and I have to say a big "thank you" to everyone who has responded to the Optional Subscription for Spiritual Blessings. As you know, we will keep sending our magazine free of charge to anyone who asks for it. However, if you would like to help us cover the costs of printing and postage (approximately Aus\$20.00 for a year) but haven't done so yet, please consider making a donation via one of the methods described on page 12.

BBFA Book Agency Website

We are still putting the finishing touches on the promised BBFA Book Agency website, but it should be accessible shortly. When it is up and running, you will be able to view hundreds of great Bible study resources - books, CDs, MP3 audios, and other items - many of which will be available to read, print or download for free. In the meantime, the BBFA's regular website www.spiritualblessings.org continues to be a source of Bible study material for thousands of people all over the world. Have you visited our website lately?

Michael Penny Visit

As suggested in the previous issue, I can now confirm that Michael and Sylvia Penny from the U.K. will be visiting our shores in September and October next year (i.e.2010). Many of our readers will know that Mike is the author of over 35 books and booklets and an excellent speaker to boot. We'll keep you posted with specific details of Mike's speaking engagements in future editions.

Online Bible Study

Recently some of our Sydney friends have been sitting in on our regular weekly Newcastle meetings via the internet - a live broadcast, in a sense. This has worked fairly well, so we thought we'd better tell more people about it! If you have Broadband internet access, and would like to be part of our "live" Bible study meetings (wherever you live in the world), please drop me a line at

admin@spiritualblessings.org

and ask about how you can meet together with us in your own home.

Dates for your diary

Be sure to check page 12 for our regular BBFA meeting times and venues, but there are a few dates I'd especially like you to bear in mind. First is a Newcastle Study Day on Sat. May 30th. at Charlestown Community Hall, James St. Charlestown. Next, a Maitland Study Day will be held on Sat. July 11th at the Rutherford Community Hall, Arthur St, Rutherford. A second Newcastle Study Day will be held at the Charlestown Community Hall on Sat. August 29th.

A Study Weekend was held in Brisbane recently, and it went very well. A report will appear in our next edition.

Please note also that the Brisbane regular meetings are now held on a Monday evening. For the particulars, ring Frank Haegler on (07) 3297 1981.

Well, once again, I've run out of space, so until next time, may the Lord be glorified by our witness, our walk, and the study of His Word.

David Tavender.

Editorial

We have a wonderful mix of articles in this issue by various authors, submitted by different members of our Fellowship. A wide range of subjects is covered.

Quite a number of readers have said how much they enjoyed the 'Covenant' studies in the last issue. It is encouraging to know that others are thrilled and inspired by studying God's Word as I am.

One pleasant aspect of sending this magazine out is the many contacts made with believers in so many parts of the world. It reminds me that God's love and grace are not restricted to any one area or class of people.

I pray that our daily walk and witness will show something of that love He has shed abroad in our hearts to the people we meet.

Athol Walter.

cont from Pg. 1

death - are just different pathways to the same goal as the Christian Faith, and should therefore be equally considered.

A careful examination of Bible Truth proves every one of these ideas to be completely wrong.

What is the Soul?

The Word of our Creator is the only authoritative statement. The former portion of the Bible was originally given from God in the Hebrew language, and the latter portion in the Greek language. The Bible in English is a translation. To get at the actual words used by God's inspiring Spirit necessitates examination of the Hebrew and Greek words for "soul" (also "spirit"). Concordances are available - in English writing - by which this examination can be made. "Soul" occurs 754 times in Hebrew, and 106 times in Greek. The study is laborious, and few undertake it.

But it is for want of that very study that the doctrine of "soul-immortality" persists in Christendom. It constitutes a theological education in itself. The present writer has undertaken it, and hereby asserts that no one making that study with any thoroughness can possibly emerge from it and still retain conviction that human beings have immortal souls. Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon gives 150 lines to the Hebrew word for "soul" and never asserts its immortality. In every particular, this study agrees with it.

A Bible Definition

The primary definition of the human soul forms itself into a simple equation. "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). No immortality is here. But some aver that God's breath must convey immortality. There is no such necessity. Eve was formed quite differently, therefore she would not be immortal. That reduces the argument to nil.

Man IS a soul, not HAS a soul; that is proven by the words of Genesis 1:20,21,24, where beasts, fishes and reptiles are termed "living souls" the same as Adam. "Soul" fundamentally denotes the entire personality as an indivisible entity. Adam's personality was manifested in a bodily organism, and in no other way, here or hereafter. Thus Numbers 31:28 classifies human beings, cows, asses and sheep, all as "souls" without distinction. Acts 27:37 enumerates the passengers on board a ship as 276 "souls", not phantoms, but in flesh and blood. That is the fundamental doctrine of the significance of the word "soul" in the Bible. "My soul" is "Myself".

Among the hundreds of occurrences of the word, a subsidiary usage is found, whereby the word is used of "the life principle". Thus Leviticus 17:11,14 asserts

that "the soul of the flesh is in the blood". Deuteronomy 12:23 says "the blood is the soul"; this statement refers to the cow, the sheep, the roebuck and the hart. If we have immortal souls they must flow through our bloodstreams.

What is the Spirit?

It is common (but uninformed) usage to identify "soul" with "spirit". The basis for understanding is the usage in the Old Testament. Here is a learned definition: "The invisible commotion of the air (wind); the active principle of life (breath), and its higher sense, 'spirit' ". The word is used personally of the Holy Spirit of God, and angels and other supernatural "spirits"; and impersonally of the wind and the breath. The alternations in the English translation between "breath" and "spirit" can mislead those who think the human spirit is a personal entity which can survive the death of the body. Thus Psalm 104:29 ("Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust") is the clue to Ecclesiastes 12:7 ("Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God Who gave it").

Immortality is never connected with "spirit". It primarily means "breath", and secondarily, in its hundreds of usages, what is said of the spirit sometimes comes close to what is said of the soul, in significance. "Soul" is often used in connection with individual characteristics which distinguish one soul from another; and "spirit" is used to signify the animation which the soul puts into "the art of living", like "a spirited horse". Thus, John the Baptist "waxed strong in spirit" (Luke 1:80); not listless, but full of animation.

What Happens at Death?

Fundamentally, the Bible teaches that human beings die like animals. This is "brutally" stated in Ecclesiastes 3:18-20, that man in death has no pre-eminence over animals - all are of the dust and return thereto in death (and Ecclesiastes consists of "words of truth", see 12:10). Accordingly, the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4); therefore it cannot be immortal. "Death" here means the event that requires an undertaker. Thirteen times a corpse is termed "a soul". Joshua's soldiers slew "souls" with their swords (Joshua 11:11).

In the Hebrew Old Testament the word "sheol" occurs many times of the place where the soul goes at death. Many have inferred that this word signifies a mysterious place where human phantoms remain "till further notice". But several other times the soul is said to go to "the pit", the actual grave. Therefore sheol simply means the death-state or "gravedom", encompassing the unburied. The whole human indivisible entity goes there;

as witness the 250 who were swallowed up alive in the earth (Numbers 16:30,33); that being "sheol".

Further, the soul in death dwells in silence (Psalm 94:17). The godly Hezekiah spoke similarly in Isaiah 38:18 - "the grave cannot praise Thee, death can not celebrate Thee". Therefore Ecclesiastes 9:5 truly says, "The dead know not anything". There is therefore neither heaven, hell, purgatory, nor paradise, nor sheol, nor hades (the NT equivalent for sheol) as a place of conscious life in phantom form. The souls of good and bad alike go to the oblivion of death when the body dies.

The Exit From Death

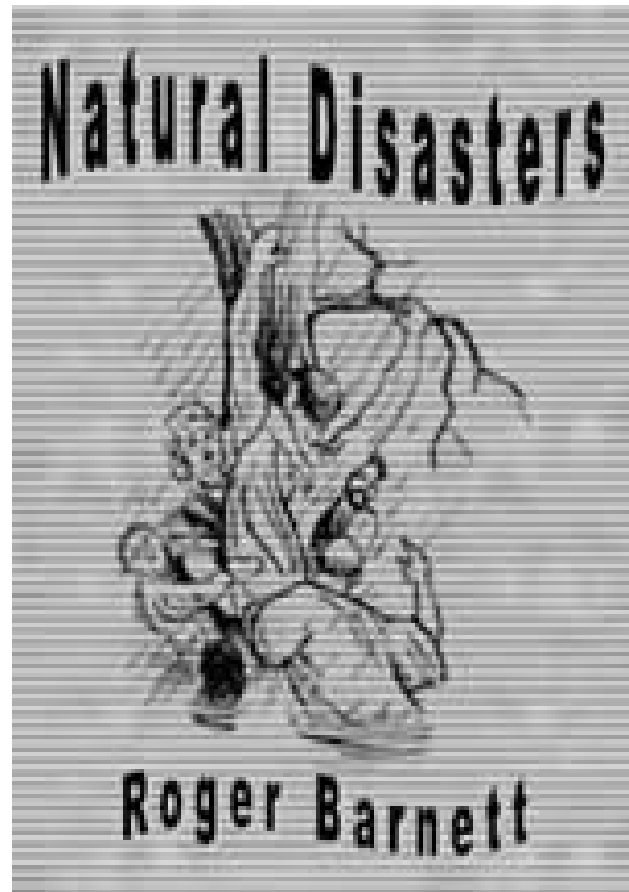
The doctrine of "soul immortality" obscures a most important and fundamental Bible doctrine - the resurrection of the dead. Isaiah 26:19 states it - "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise"; Daniel 12:2 asserts it - "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake"; the Lord Jesus proclaimed it - "the hour is coming ... when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live" - and claimed that the authority and power to bring it about reposed in Himself - "as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself". (John 5:25-29 and frequently in John 6). **This dismisses from the stage every other religion in the world, and leaves the Lord Jesus Christ the one solitary Hope for those who have died.**

It is essential to understand what resurrection is. The Greek word means "to make to stand up, to raise"; that is, the rising again of what has been laid down, necessitating its resuscitation. To grasp this definition is essential, for subtle attempts are made to distort it and confuse it with the idea of the survival of an immortal soul. It is nothing of the kind.

Consider the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. (1) He died; (2) He was buried; (3) On the third day His grave was empty; (4) He showed Himself alive to His disciples; (5) He displayed the marks His body had received on the cross; (6) Therefore His resurrection body was exactly that which had been crucified and buried; (7) He said He was not a spirit (Luke 24:39); (8) He now possessed qualities of immortality (Hebrews 7:16) and of a celestial nature (Acts 1:9); thus demonstrating to His disciples the new qualities to be theirs in that eternal life He promised them who believe in Him (1 Corinthians 15:40,49). He was "this same Jesus" with Whom they had companied for 3 1/2 years: the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). If it was not the same body that had been crucified then the display of the supposed cross-marks constituted the most cruel hoax this world has ever known - they would have been fakes.

Without resurrection there is no future for the dead, good or bad, of humankind. As an act it seems incredible: but God has said it shall be; and it will.

**This article is based on a short booklet of the same title by Pastor William Campbell. Some editing of these extracts has taken place in preparation for publication in this magazine. Although the original booklet is now out of print, the reader may view an exact reproduction of the booklet in its entirety on our website - www.spiritualblessings.org - where other articles on this subject may also be found.*



Natural Disasters

by Roger Barnett

Whenever there is a Natural Disaster anywhere in the world, a single point often recurs in the minds of many people: is there a loving God? If there is, where is He and what is He doing at times like this? Why does He allow such things to happen? This booklet is an examination of this important issue. Paperback 13 pages

To obtain a copy of this booklet, please forward a cheque / money order for \$5.00 (payable to "BBFA Book Agency") to:-

**BBFA Book Agency,
P.O.Box 3141,
Glendale NSW 2285
Australia**

Bible Study Tools

By Frank Haegler

One of the vexing questions in and about Christianity is this. "If there is only one Bible, how did so many denominations come about?" Put another way, "How do all those different denominations get so many different (and sometimes conflicting) beliefs from the one Book?"

Certainly one way that it happened is that although there have been many *Statements of Belief*, *Confessions* and *Systematic Theologies* throughout time, these were generated with a fixed view in mind and Scripture was not allowed to speak for itself.

Is there a way to study the Bible that will give us (as much as possible) a guarantee that we are on the right track? Are there general rules that will help cement thought without the bias that comes from any theology, no matter how well meaning? How can we read the Word without denominational bias raising its head?

Below are 16 Bible study 'rules' for your use in Bible study. Each is followed by one example from many possible ones. Of course, these are for your consideration, but any or all you adopt will help you gain more from the Bible as you study, and for that matter, even as you have a casual read. Even knowing that these rules exist will make you pause as you read the Word of God and also as you read/listen to what others have said about it.

Sixteen rules! Really; do I expect you to remember them each time you just sit down and have a casual read of the Bible? No actually, but I believe that being aware of them will help greatly, and besides, they are really common sense rules and most Christians will be doing them without conscious thought anyway.

1. Approach the Bible believing that it is God's revealed Word.

Of course, if we don't believe that the Bible is God's Word to us then we will not get anything out of it. The Book will be closed to us and will seem as though it is a set of unrelated books all jumbled up into one volume. Not only should we believe that the Bible is God's Word, but when setting out to read/study it, we should do so prayerfully asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate it to us.

2. Aim to discover the meaning of the original text.

Now I know that very few of us are Hebrew or Greek scholars and we probably aren't going to become such either, but in this information age there is no excuse for not having a good exhaustive concordance.

Anyone with a computer can get a free programme (or you can pay for one if you wish), which will give a variety of Bible versions at your fingertips. Reading different versions brings out shades of meaning that are lost when only using one version, and it is probably the next best thing to reading the original.

3. Aim to discover what the text meant to the original readers.

What I mean is, find out the background of whomever it was that was spoken to originally. When was the book you are reading written? Where were the people it was written to? If written to Jews, then were they in the Land at the time of writing or were they in captivity? Get a Bible atlas and use it to gain a better understanding of the layout being spoken of. For example, how far did Joseph and Mary have to travel from their home to Bethlehem before Jesus was born and how long would that journey have taken them?

4. Take the Word of God literally in its simplest meaning unless it contradicts other Scriptures or known facts.

The Bible uses symbols quite often, of course, but most of the time it doesn't. Almost always what is said is quite plain. The Bible is written to simple people remember, you and me, and although we may never plumb its depths, it is in essence a fairly simple Book. Scientists have a rule they call Occam's razor, which states, in layman's terms, that "all other things being equal, the simplest solution is the best." May I rephrase that for Bible study and say "all things being equal, the simplest meaning of a passage is the best."

5. Always interpret the Scripture in context.

Nothing is written that exists outside of a context. Except for two very obvious verses, there is always a verse before whatever we read and one after it. When reading, and especially when studying, we *must always* take the context into consideration. For instance, Romans 8:1 starts by saying that *there is therefore now no condemnation* etc. The phrase may be hackneyed but *when we see a therefore in the Bible we really should go back and see what it is there for*. Reading something (Romans 8:1) that starts with *because of that (therefore)* we should be asking "because of *what?*" and going back to the previous chapter to find out what the *that* is. Reading a text out of context is a pretext, as has been correctly said.

6. Compare Scripture with Scripture.

There is no need to go outside of Scripture to find the meaning of Scripture. For instance, when studying the book of the Revelation, we get much help from referring to Daniel, Isaiah, most of the Minor Prophets and other OT Scriptures. I would go so far as to say that without at least a basic understanding of these OT books, any understanding of the Revelation is all but impossible.

7. What is the great theme of the Bible?

It is the Lord Jesus Christ and God's revealed purpose in Him, and also the purpose of the ages. Reading the Bible with this in mind can help make sense out of what might otherwise be a daunting task, and turn it into a somewhat simpler one.

8. Truth for the past must not be read into the present.

Although salvation has always been a free gift, there were a people that were given the Law and they were told to keep it or face dire consequences. Galatians chapter 3 talks about the difference between the works of the law and grace. I don't think that anyone would disagree that we are now in an age of Grace. But what happens if we try to bring truth from the past (the Law) into this age of Grace? What was surely true for then cannot be true for now, because, by bringing the Law into this age of Grace, we make Grace a mockery.

9. The present must not be read into the past.

In Ephesians 3:3-5 and Colossians 1:26, we are told that Paul was given the revelation of the Mystery. We are also told in Ephesians 3:3 & 5 that *'by revelation He made known unto me the mystery...which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed'*. In verse 9 it says that *'the mystery...was hid in God'*. Since it was **hid in God** then saying we can find this truth anywhere in the Old Testament or in the earlier books of the NT cannot be true and must be sheer unbelief.

10. The future must not be read into the present.

In Isaiah 2:10-12 & 17, we have the first mention of The Day of the Lord. The LORD must be put into His rightful place. That will not be a time of Grace but of judgement. Isaiah 13:9 says that this time will be *'cruel both with wrath and fierce anger'* and verse 10 states what Jesus said of His second coming in Matt 24:29. Zephaniah 1:14-16 says of this time that *'this day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness'*.

These events are in the future - it is a nonsense to think that God can sit on a throne of Grace and sit on a throne of Judgement at the same time. One day God's mercy will run out and when this day of opportunity is finished He will then judge in righteousness.

11. One part of the future is not to be confused with another part of the future.

The great truth of the resurrection will help us here. Rev 20:4-5 speaks of the first (or former) resurrection, so this must be preparing us for another resurrection to come. And although we may not understand fully what these resurrections mean, at least we can say with safety that there are two resurrections in the future as revealed in Rev 20. Otherwise, what the Apostle John has written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit means nothing at all. If they are one and the same thing and there is no difference, why would John say *the rest of the dead lived not again until the 1000 years are finished?* And even if someone says, "Well, I don't believe in a literal 1000 years", you still have the fact that there are two different resurrections. So even if the 1000 years is symbolic, then there are still two resurrections, which must not be confused. And 1 Cor. 15:23 says *'every man in his own order'* will be raised, so again, while both the resurrections are future, we must keep them apart.

12. Recognise figures of speech.

What is a figure of speech? Many people use "figures of speech" as a sort of trump card. "Oh, you can't take that literally, that is just a figure of speech", and to their minds, that finishes the argument. A figure of speech is definite and it can be recognised. No one should say that a passage is figurative unless they can prove it. There are certain rules for figures of speech, which we won't go into here, but simply put, a figure of speech is a *warm and vivid way of presenting literal fact*. So what we need to do when we see one is to determine what is the literal fact that it is trying to portray. The figure hasn't emptied the literal fact or promise. You recognise it is a figure and you seek to look underneath it to find the literal statement or fact. If you really want to get into *Figures of Speech in the Bible* then the book of that name by EW Bullinger is invaluable.

13. Don't read into the Bible what isn't there.

In Acts 2:47, the KJV and others say *'and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved'*. However, the word *church* is not in the original and a better rendering would be like one from Weymouth who says *'also, day by day, the Lord added to their number those whom He was saving'*. Those who "know" that the church started in Acts 2 "know" that the church is meant here and so they supply the word.

But even if they are right, the bottom line is that the word *is not* in the original, no matter how much one may want it to be and so it should not be supplied.

14. There is a difference between the interpretation of Scripture and its application.

Isaiah is written to Judah and Jerusalem and so when reading that book, we should keep that in mind. Whilst remembering that, however, I am sure we can apply Isaiah 53:6 to ourselves when it says *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.* The question "what does this passage mean to me?" (application) should only be asked after establishing *what the passage actually means* (interpretation).

15. Do not spiritualise the Scriptures.

Recently I had occasion to review a book in which the author put forward the idea that all the prophecies to do with the end times were fulfilled at the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD70. There were, he admitted, Scriptures that argued against that viewpoint. His answer was to say that if these passages were interpreted spiritually then all was solved. So we have a 'spiritual' return of Christ, a 'spiritual' lamb and lion lying down together, 'spiritual' peace on earth, even a 'spiritual' New Jerusalem I guess! Where might it end, I wonder? If there is any part of the Bible that doesn't agree with my set of beliefs, and all I need to do is "spiritualise" it to get rid of the problem, then language becomes of no use at all and we might as well throw the Bible out as a bad joke.

16. Rightly divide the Word of Truth.

2 Timothy 2:15 tells us that if we want to be approved workmen, then we must rightly divide the Word. If you would rather a modern translation that says *correctly handle* because you don't like the KJV way of saying it, then that is fine. But you won't be correctly handling the Word of God unless you do what I have tried to point out above. Every Christian does this at least in part without even realizing it. Most happily accept the division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments. Dispensationalists are accused of 'chopping the Bible into pieces', but is not recognizing Old and New Testaments, chopping the Bible in half?

Conclusion

Every time we *don't* keep these rules, we run the risk of doing what Hymenaeus and Philetus did as recorded in 2 Timothy 2:17-18. They destroyed the faith of some. Why? Because they said that the resurrection had passed already. Oh, they believed in the resurrection alright and they were believers, but they took something from the future and put it into the past and so turned the truth into an error.

To sum up, let us always remember that the Bible should be read as no other book. It is the Word of God and should be approached with the reverence it deserves. My prayer is that, by using the tools above, no matter how well versed in the Bible we may be, we will get still more from our study of God's Word.

"Then" Said God

By Barbara Parsons

"Who," said God, "Loves these sinful people enough to die for them?"

"Not I," said the psychologist.
"All sin and guilt is in the mind
And there is no iniquity in reality."

"Then who," said God, "Does love these sinful people enough to die for them?"

"Not I," said the social worker,
"With homes and jobs there'd be no sin,
For all defilement's in environment."

"Then who," said God, "Does love these sinful people enough to die for them?"

"Not I," said the communists.
"For the workers and the cause I might.
Just the brothers ... not the others."

"Then who," said God, "Does love these sinful people enough to die for them?"

"Not I," said the atheist.
"For one short life is all I have.
After death and suffering, nothing! nothing!"

"Then who," said God, "Does love these sinful people enough to die for them?"

"Then," said God, "I will die for them
Myself."

(Taken from Search magazine, No. 14, June/July 1986.)

Bible Study Day

Saturday, 30th. May, 2009

Charlestown Community Centre

17 James St., Charlestown, Newcastle, NSW.

10 am. Assemble

10:30 am. Study: "Miracles Then & Now"

Speaker: David Tavender

1:30 pm. Study: "Gentiles in Scripture"

Speaker: John Hutton

3:00 pm. Study: "The Mystery"

Speaker: Athol Walter

Lunch is provided at 12:30 pm.

CHARACTERS AND PLACES FROM NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

(The following article is a condensation of a series of articles by Brian Sherring, published in 'The Berean Expositor', entitled "The Background to the New Testament" . The full series of articles is in Vols. 45 & 46. This condensation is by Rom Harper, Brisbane.)

The New Testament was written about 2000 years ago. It is the history of Christ on earth dealing with His people Israel, His death and resurrection and then letters etc. written during and after the period of time we call the Acts period. Reading through the pages of the New Testament, we come across many groups of characters and many different places. We, as westerners or whatever you want to call yourself, often pass over these characters and places without much thought as to who or what they were in those far-off days. Thus much is missed, as those times passed into obscurity a long time ago.

We will go back then and look at some of those groups and institutions which existed at that time. This will, it is hoped, build a better understanding of the New Testament era, giving a more complete picture for you as you read through the pages of Scripture in the future.

The Pharisees

The party of the Pharisees arose between Old and New Testament times. They are mentioned over 20 times, along with the Scribes, throughout the New Testament. They were very active in opposing the Lord's ministry. This party was formed to defend the position of Israel but fell into traditions which they then made law. The word 'Pharisee' is related to the Greek word 'aphorize' which means 'separate'. They exercised great influence over the common people in religious matters. The Apostle Paul was a Pharisee (see Phil 3:5).

Christ states, in Matt 23:1, that they sat in Moses seat and we see in Acts 23: 9 that some Scribes were of the Pharisees. It appears then, that even though the Scribes were a separate group, they were also a part of the Pharisees. It seems that they may have been a more learned section of the Pharisaic Party.

The Pharisees can be summed up as being religious, ritualistic, rabbinic, associated with the Synagogue and the common people and having religious influence over the People of Israel.

The Scribes

The first occurrence of the word 'Scribe' is in 2 Sam. 8:17. The Hebrew word used in this verse is 'Saphar' and it means 'to count or number'.

In Ezra's day, the Hebrew Bible was beginning to be set in order. Mr. Welch states that when the texts were completed – a work which took over a hundred years – these scribes ceased to exist and were succeeded by the 'Teachers of the Law'. These are what we find in the New Testament or, as Strong's Concordance states, "A man learned in the Mosaic Law". We find the Greek word used in the N.T. for 'scribe' is 'grammateus'. We get our English word 'grammar' from this.

The duties of the Scribes included reading, copying, and explaining and protecting the Law. They performed these duties in schools, synagogues, outer courts of the Temple and the streets. The law was often read as a commentary, the complete opposite to Christ's teaching. We see in Matt 7:28 and 29 that Christ preached with authority, not as the Scribes preached, and the people were astonished.

The word 'Scribe' can also include lawyers and doctors or teachers of the law. During Christ's ministry they watched Him like hawks, ready to pounce on any mistake He made. They falsely accused the disciples and passed judgment on the Lord as a blasphemer (see Matt 15:2 and Mark 3:22).

Along with the Pharisees, the Scribes tried to trap Jesus with a woman taken in adultery, and in counsel with the Chief Priests, they sought how they might destroy Him, for they feared Him.

Having their connections with the Old Testament, and being teachers, they should have recognized their Christ. For their utter disbelief and attitude towards Christ, His retort to them, which occurs nine times in Matthew alone, are the words; "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites."

The Sadducees

The origin of the Sadducees party, like the Pharisees, cannot be traced with accuracy. It is likely they arose at around the same time and in opposition to the Pharisaic party. As the Pharisees tried to narrow the Spirit of Judaism, the Sadducees were inclined to rationalize it. When a culture of Grecianism (customs, culture, and rule of the Greeks) began to prevail in Israel, the Sadducean Party was inclined to accept it and compromise the economy of Israel in order to be at peace with the ruling power.

This explains the reason that most Sadducees were drawn from the nobility and, in Christ's time,

some were associated with the family of Herod. In Matt 16:6, we read the word 'Sadducees' but in a corresponding verse in Mark 8:15, we read the word 'Herod'. As these verses appear to be the same instance, it appears then, that the Herodians, which we will look at next, were a branch of the Sadducees.

According to Rabbinical tradition, the name 'Sadducee' derives from one 'Zadoc' thought to be the founder, but another view is that the name comes from the Hebrew word 'Tsadeq' meaning 'righteous'. Strong's has the meaning as 'righteous', but Charles Welch states that both are tradition and thus you can't be sure.

Mr. Welch also states that it is interesting to note that the Pharisees were more active during the Lord's ministry, and the Sadducees became more so after His resurrection. Acts 4: 1-2 and 5: 17 are two examples after the resurrection.

During the lifetime of Christ, the Sadducees may well have treated Him like a zealot and ignored Him. But Christ's actions in the Temple, such as casting out all those who bought and sold, over-throwing the tables of the money-changers and then stating that His "*house of prayer had been turned into a den of thieves*", would have made the Sadducees recognize the political implications.

Also Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:5) with the crowds crying, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord", fulfilling the prophecy that here was the King of the Jews (Zech. 9:9), appears to have aroused their hatred to a new level.

We can sum up the Sadducees as being political, rationalistic, priestly, associated with the temple, associated with and drawn from nobility and having a worldly influence.

The Herodians

The New Testament has very little to say about the Herodians. Only three verses contain the word. In Matt. 22:15-16 and Mark 12:13, we find the Pharisees and Herodians planning to entangle Christ in His talk. Mark 3:6 shows the Pharisees and the Herodians planning how they might destroy Christ.

It is quite evident from their name that they were either attached to, or the champions of, the family of Herod. They certainly promoted the interests of Herod and would have been disturbed and troubled by the suggestion that this Jesus of Nazareth was none other than the King of the Jews. Hence their opposition to the Lord was largely on political grounds. We saw in Matthew and Mark that they were seen with the Pharisees, acting together with them, in order that they might catch Christ out.

In Matt. 22:15-22, we find representatives of two parties standing before Christ. They were: the

Pharisees who, being champions of the religion of Israel, did not take kindly to paying tribute to Caesar, and the Herodians, who would take the contrary view.

If the Lord had said that tribute was not to be given to Caesar, then He would be in trouble with the authorities, and the Herodians would be witnesses against Him. If on the other hand, He had maintained that tribute was to be given to Caesar, then the Pharisees could claim that He was not the people's Messiah, for that would be submitting to a ruling power. The Lord's answer, which you can read in verses 20-21, silenced both parties.

In the second reference in Mark 3:6, we see the same two parties taking counsel to consider how they might destroy Christ. This should be read with John 18:31 where the Jews say, "*It is not lawful to put any man to death.*" It would appear then, that at the time of Christ, the Jews were unable to exact the death penalty, except through the medium of the Roman power. Hence the Pharisees were seeking the favour of the Herodians, who having strong connections with the throne, would be in a position to bring about the death of the Lord.

Summing up, we see that the Herodians, although perhaps a small party, were powerful indeed, and their attachment to the throne of Herod made them useful allies to the Pharisees. It is important to note how the devil can draw opposing factions together when it suits his purpose.

The Zealots

This party is not referred to anywhere in the New Testament as such, but one of the twelve apostles is called 'Simon the Zealot' in Luke 6:15.

The Zealots have been identified with that party described by Josephus the Historian, as "the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy", the founder of which was Judas the Galilean. This man led a revolt against Rome in AD 6 (Acts 5:37), and his party sought to be free from the Roman yoke, even by dubious means. The Zealots seemed to have been more than ready to lay down their lives for this cause. Josephus says, "...they also do not value dying any kinds of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man Lord".

Another insight comes from H. A. Meyer, a German theologian. He refers to them as "a class of men who were fanatical defenders of the theocracy, and who, while taking vengeance on those who wronged it, were themselves frequently guilty of great excesses."

Although they suffered a crushing defeat in AD 6, they kept the spirit of the party alive for many years. It is interesting to compare the zealots of

old with the modern Zionist movement. The aims and objects of the Zionists are stated in more refined terms, but the basic desire remains the same. The zealots of old sought to achieve their ends from inside the land whereas the Zionist movement prosecuted its course from outside the land and, of course, were very active in bringing about the state of Israel in 1948 in their own land.

Proselytes

Ex. 20:10. Provision is made on the Sabbath day for *“thy stranger within thy gates”*.

Ex. 22:21. Further we see, *“Thou shall neither vex a stranger nor oppress him, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”*

The word ‘proselyte’ is not found in the AV of the Old Testament, but the Greek ‘proselutos’ occurs frequently in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament). The equivalent Hebrew word is ‘geyr’, generally rendered ‘stranger’ and is the Hebrew word in the verses from Exodus above.

These strangers within Israel, were forbidden to eat unleavened bread during Passover (Ex. 12:19), to work on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10), to eat blood (Lev. 17:10), to practice idolatry (Lev. 20:2), or to blaspheme the name of the Lord (Lev. 24:16). Their lives were, therefore, very closely bound up with the people of Israel.

There were however ‘strangers’ and ‘strangers’ . In Ex. 12:43 there is an ordinance of the Passover which said *“no stranger shall eat thereof”*, whereas in verse 48 of the same chapter we read that *“when a stranger shall sojourn with thee and shall keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised and then let him come here and keep it”*. Two different Hebrew words are used with the latter, ‘geyr’ seeming to indicate the willingness of the stranger to be identified with the people of Israel i.e. to make Israel their home. An example of such a stranger is Ruth, the Moabitess.

I mentioned the above example because we also find in the New Testament that a twofold division of proselyte became apparent: those who by circumcision had obtained access to the privileges of temple worship, and those who only professed a respect for the Mosaic religion and attended as hearers in the synagogues.

Brian Sherring states that the proselytes who are referred to in Acts 2:10, 6:5 and 13:43 probably belonged to the first group since other terms seem to be used by Luke to describe the latter group as in Acts 10:2 (*devout man that feared God*) Acts 16:14 (*worshipping God*) Acts 13:50 and 17:4 (*devout and honorable*) – also many of them appear to have been

women, and Dean Farrar writing of New Testament days says: “ Greek proselytes were at this period, common in every considerable city of the empire.”

That Gentiles became proselytes during both Old and New Testament days is probably attributable to their recognition of the superiority of the religion of Israel. When, because of the dispersion, Jewish communities sprang up in all parts of the then known world, Gentiles, unsatisfied with the heathenism around them, attached themselves to these communities.

Although many Gentiles joined themselves to Judaism of their own volition, it must be remembered that the Pharisees had a certain zeal for proselytism as seen in Matt. 23:15. Believing that the end justified the means, the Pharisees had few scruples as to the means they employed to make a proselyte. Consequently, although conforming in some degree to Judaism, many of the proselytes still held heathen ideas and so were hypocritical and reprobate.

Those who appear in the Acts of the Apostles were evidently not of this character, for many of them embraced the faith and showed their works were not evil.

The zeal of even the believing Pharisees to proselytize was still present for the new converts during the Acts period as seen in Acts 15:5. They viewed the coming in of the Gentiles as a making of proselytes for the church and this caused trouble, especially in Antioch and the south Galatian churches. Such misunderstanding called forth the council of Acts 15 and the Galatian epistle. The demand of these Pharisaic believers with respect to the Gentile converts was that they needed to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses. The result of the conference, recorded in Acts 15:28-29, was that the Gentiles only had to obey four rules as given by the Jerusalem Council. This conflict of Gentiles coming into the Acts church caused trouble throughout the whole Acts period for Paul and all the apostles.

Although we see the position of the Gentile was clearly defined at this time, and despite the later revelation given to the apostle Paul in Eph. 3, showing that the Gentiles today have nothing to do with Israel whatsoever, this Pharisaic tendency has remained in all ages of the professing church. There have always been those who have sought to add to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the command to keep the Law of Moses. The proselytes of old were limited in their approach to the Lord by type and shadow. At best, they basked in the reflected glory of Israel. Compare this to the Church which is His Body (the present Church), Eph. 2:19 “Now therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners”.

Words Of The Holy Spirit

(A series of studies on important Scriptural words which may not be well understood by modern readers.)

“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual”. 1 Cor. 2:13 (NKJV)

“Lo-Ammi”

Every group of people, whether it be a church, a business firm, a sporting club, or branches of Academia, all have a specialized language of their own – their jargon. Our Fellowship is no different, and we use our jargon words amongst ourselves without any difficulty, while ‘outsiders’ will not understand us. It is important to remember that, if we wish to communicate effectively with those not of our group, we must use words understood by all, not jargon.

One of our jargon terms that we use quite frequently, is the strange looking compound word, ‘lo-ammi’. If you are familiar with the prophecy of Hosea you will have come across it, for it is the name he had to give one of his children.

Scriptural names have meanings, which is so with the term lo-ammi. It is a compound Hebrew word meaning ‘Not my people’; the ‘lo’ is the negative not, and ‘ammi’ means my people.

Hosea’s Witness to Israel

The Lord used Hosea to witness to the people of the northern Kingdom of Israel. From the start, the history of the breakaway ten tribes was a tale of apostasy and rebellion against God. He used a number of prophets to warn them and call them back to repentance, and it was Hosea’s unenviable task not only to speak the prophecies, but to have his family, in effect, be a living drama of God’s call to repentance and the punishments that were on their way if the people did not respond positively to God’s call.

Hosea was told to marry an unfaithful woman. Their first child, a son, was called Jezreel, which means ‘God scatters’. There is a double meaning to this name. The inherent warning was that God would scatter them amongst foreign nations because of their faithlessness. But later, it is used in the sense of ‘sowing’ as of seed. To sow a field, the seed is scattered over the ground. So the same word is used as a warning of punishment and a promise of restoration and blessing.

The next child born was a girl called Lo-ruhamah, which means ‘Unloved’. Imagine the effect of this name on the child concerned! But don’t miss the significance. God was saying to His people that they were fast approaching a time when He would not love them as He once had done.

The next child, another son, was called Lo-ammi, ‘Not My people’. Here again, like his sister and brother, the child was a living and ever-present warning to Israel that if they did not turn back to God, they would go into a period when they would not be the people of God, and out of His favour.

If you know the history of Israel, you will know that the judgements bound up in the names of Hosea’s children came true when the Assyrians invaded Israel, and with great cruelty, slaughtered many and carried most of those who were left away into captivity.

Notice, however, the promise of restoration in the last verse of Hosea 1 and the first verse of ch. 2. They would be resown in their own land. They would become again the loved of the Lord, and in the place where they had been called ‘Not My people’, they would be called ‘My people’.

Lo-ammi again

As we know, the people did return from captivity under leaders such as Zerrubabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. The centuries rolled by, and when God’s clock struck the appropriate hour, the Messiah was born in Bethlehem. He grew to manhood, and over a period of three and a half years, witnessed to the people, called them to repentance, and offered Himself as their King. But they crucified Him.

Instead of them immediately becoming ‘Lo-ammi’ as we might have expected, they were graciously given a further chance. This is covered by the Book of Acts, and it is at the end of that Book that we read of the climax being reached the second time. But once more, there is no national acceptance and Paul dismisses them. So starts another ‘Lo-ammi’ period, which has so far lasted nigh on two thousand years.

It is because the witness of the BBFA is particularly to do with the revelation given to Paul after the close of the Acts period that we often refer to the end of Acts as the time when Israel started another ‘Lo-ammi’ period, and the truth concerning the ‘Church Which Is His Body’ was revealed for the first time.

This point is the great difference between our interpretation of Scripture and the ‘orthodox’ position. It is usually taught that Israel went into their present ‘lo-ammi’ condition following the Crucifixion, and that therefore, the events recorded in Acts are to do with the early years of the Christian Church. We believe that the Scripture indicates otherwise, showing that Israel were still ‘ammi’ during Acts, and that the judgement for their refusal of their Messiah fell at the end of Acts, not the beginning. Recognizing this point is vital to a correct understanding of the New Testament and our future place of blessing.

As we saw briefly when speaking of Hosea, the promise of restoration was stated at the same time as the promise of punishment. It is relevant to note that in Acts 3:18–21, Peter states that repentance will bring ‘the times of restoration ... spoken by the prophets’.

This Lo-ammi period for Israel has been long and painful, but ‘the fig tree is starting to put forth its leaves’. Strange and wonderful things are taking place on the world’s stage, and the day when Israel will be restored to her rightful position as Ammi, is much closer than many realize.

Think on these things!

For your diary....

BBFA 2009 Annual Conference

Camp Toukley (NSW Central Coast),
September 19th, 20th, 21st, 2009.

**Plan now to join us for study and fellowship.
Further details in later issues of Spiritual Blessings.**

BBFA Regular Meetings

You are invited to attend

Regular Bible study meetings are held in Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle and Maitland. Most meetings include some singing, prayer, and a Bible study, approx. 45-60 mins. in length, followed by refreshments. Questions and comments about the study are encouraged. These meetings are free of charge and everyone is welcome.

Brisbane:

Every Monday 7:00pm.
Boronia Hts. State School hall.
194 Middle Rd. , Boronia Hts.
Group Co-ordinator: Frank Haegler, (07) 3297 1981

Sydney:

4th. Sunday each month 3pm.
25/20 Philips St. Cape Cabarita.
Group Co-ordinators: Peter & Anne Ward, (02) 9743 3452.

Newcastle:

Every Monday, 7:30pm.
34 Aroona St., Edgeworth.
Group Co-ordinators: David & Janelle Tavender, (02) 4950 6708

Maitland:

Alternate Wednesdays, 10.am.
20 Short St., Lorn.
Group Co-ordinator: Susan Hall, (02) 4933 9009

Spiritual Blessings

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

Visit our Web Site:

www.spiritualblessings.org

Articles which honour The Lord Christ Jesus and acknowledge the principle of right division will be considered for publication. All articles are accepted on the basis that they may be used as the BBFA sees fit, unless otherwise requested by the author. The interpretation of Scripture by various authors is not necessarily the one held by the majority of the Fellowship.

BBFA Postal Address:

Box 3141
GLENDALE NSW 2285
AUSTRALIA

The journal is registered by Australia Post PP255003/00975.

The BBFA Tenets:

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

The BBFA Committee:

President: David Tavender.
Vice President: John Hutton.
Treasurer: Julie Milgate
Secretary: Janelle Tavender.
Committee members: Allan Gallaher,
Frank Haegler, Rom Harper

Privacy Statement

The BBFA wishes to respect your privacy. If you contact us, your personal details will be treated with the strictest confidence and will not be passed on to any other organisation, company etc.

At anytime, you may request to be removed from our mailing list by emailing a brief message to **admin@spiritualblessings.org** or by writing to BBFA, PO Box 3141, Glendale NSW 2285 Australia.

DONATIONS. The BBFA has no paid pastors or staff members, and is run on a purely voluntary basis. If you find our ministry helpful, please consider making a donation to help us cover our costs. This may be made in one of three ways:

- (1) In person at any of our meetings.
- (2) By cheque or money order payable to "BBFA".
- (3) Direct deposit online. Our bank details...

Account Name: "The Berean Bible Fellowship of Australia."
BSB No: 062-821 Account No: 00904671

Thank you.

Visit our web site: **www.spiritualblessings.org**



What's there?

Great Bible study articles & charts,
printable back issues of Spiritual Blessings,
catalogue of our huge range of literature, tapes, etc
and so much more.