


Spiritual Blessings



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Predestination

By David Milford

This article is the text of studies presented by David to the Newcastle Group of the BBFA recently.

I have recently come to learn that the term 'predestination' has different meanings for different believers. I once believed that all Christians thought as I did. I was surprised to learn that there were titles for the different views. Those who believe as I do are known as Arminians, while those who hold the opposite view are known as Calvinists. So what do these different labels mean? How are the conclusions arrived at? What are likely consequences of the differing views? I will try to answer these questions in this article.

I think that the following brief descriptions accurately describe the two views:

Those who ascribe to the Arminian camp believe that God has allowed humanity to *make up its own mind* as to whether to accept Christ as their personal Saviour. Arminians subscribe to what is commonly known as *freewill*.

Those who believe that *God makes individuals believe in Him*, so that the individual has no say in the matter and cannot exercise freewill, are known as Calvinists.

There are some who hold a position somewhere between the two extremes, and without trying to sound disrespectful, that seems illogical to me. God either does, or does not, allow humanity freewill. If there is anything but freewill, then it cannot be called freewill.

As stated before, I subscribe to the way of thinking known as Arminian and obviously believe that this is the point of view that is best supported by Scripture.

I find that many Calvinists start with Gen. 6:5 to support their view.

Gen. 6:5. "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that **every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.**" (emphasis added).

The argument put forward by the Calvinist is that God has stated that the thoughts of humanity's heart is only evil, and not only evil, but evil all of the time. As a result, no humans are capable of belief in Christ unless God acts supernaturally upon them. But I can think of innumerable instances where humans have displayed behaviour that is spontaneous and not evil. Examples include the interactions between mother and child, or the helping of a complete stranger who is in need. And it goes without saying that the above-mentioned behaviours are not only done by Christians who do possess the Holy Spirit, but is displayed by all manner of people across the world. I also believe that even if Genesis 6:5 is taken literally, it does not preclude people from making a conscious decision to accept Christ as their Saviour. I believe that the Scriptures make it perfectly clear that salvation is found in Christ through faith in Him alone, not through works.

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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



President's Word

Greetings once again to all of our readers across the world.

I am reminded of Paul's words in Philippians 4:4 to "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!". No matter what circumstances you may find yourself in right now as you read these words, may you join with me in taking a moment to lift up the Lord's name, and to proclaim these words: "Rejoice in the Lord, always, and again I say, Rejoice!"

Annual Conference

Along with this issue, you will find details of our 2009 Annual Conference. We encourage you to plan today to put aside your regular routine and join us around God's Word at Toukley on the NSW Central Coast on September 19, 20 and 21. Come for all or some of the time, but the earlier you let us know your plans, the easier it is for our Conference Convenor to make the appropriate arrangements with the venue, so please return the registration form as soon as possible. This is always an excellent way to get your spiritual batteries recharged (so to speak!). Don't put it off, plan today to join us there. You'll be glad you did.

Rutherford

Recently the BBFA held another successful Bible Study and Fellowship Day, this time at Rutherford, near Maitland in the NSW Hunter Valley. See page XXX for a fuller report. Day meetings such as these are proving to be popular - not only are they a great time of Bible study, providing an opportunity for further questions and discussion, but tasty refreshments are always a part of a Berean meeting, too, and many people use the free time available to catch up with old friends in Christian fellowship over a cup of tea and a plate of lovingly prepared delights (food for both the inner man and the outer man as well!) We intend to schedule more such days into our calendar for 2010, so watch *Spiritual Blessings* or visit www.spiritualblessings.org for details about upcoming days like this one.

Regular Meetings

Don't forget to check page 12 for details about our regular meetings, which are all free of charge .

Everyone is welcome, so bring a friend.

Book Agency web site

As advertised in the last issue of *Spiritual Blessings*, there is now a new section of the BBFA's web site devoted solely to making available literature and other Bible study resources, much of it free of charge. The BBFA Book Agency web site address is www.spiritualblessings.org/book - you might be surprised at how much is on there, so visit our new site today.

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

David Tavender.

Editorial

I am delighted to be able to offer our readers a veritable smorgasbord in this issue of *Spiritual Blessings*. Different writers have varied approaches to their chosen subjects, so there should be something for everyone.

Some of the writers appear in our pages for the first time, and if their present offerings are anything to judge by, we should be in for good things from them in the future.

David Milford's subject of Predestination is one that often stirs strong feelings, and both David and myself would welcome your responses, should you feel you want to write in. As long as letters are not too long, we will certainly publish them.

We enjoyed an excellent day of study and fellowship recently at Rutherford, a suburb of Maitland. Maitland is a city in the lower Hunter Valley region. My wife, Eveline, has written a good report about the day. The number of people who attended was very gratifying, even though several regulars were unable to attend for various reasons. I am always surprised - although I shouldn't be, for we pray about them - that our study days are so good, and we give the Lord heartfelt thanks for His goodness to us in this way. A big word of thanks is due to Sue Hall and her team of helpers for the wonderful refreshments that were heartily enjoyed by everyone.

I also thank the Lord for answers to prayer in many other ways, and for evidence that folk in many places in the world receive help and encouragement from our magazine. Glory be to God!

Athol Walter.

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having **believed**, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,...” (emphasis added)

Ephesians is one of many books that make it very clear that salvation is something that is gained through belief in Christ. Is it possible to believe that Christ is who He says He is, based upon evidence, though your heart may be “...**evil all the time**.”? I would argue yes. Let me use an analogy to explain myself. Irrespective of whether someone is good or evil, they are still capable of coming to correct conclusions about different issues when provided with evidence. For instance, a good or bad person is capable of coming to a logical conclusion of which type of car is the most reliable. The individual will look at the evidence in an objective way and make a conscious decision. The consequence of such a decision, if made wisely, is that the consumer will end up with a more reliable car. I would argue that the same logic **can** be used in making a decision for Christ. An individual will look at the evidence and then make a decision. If that individual decides that the Scriptures are true and Christ is the Son of God, that person will receive the Holy Spirit as promised **and be transformed by the formation of the new nature within**. It is at this point that good deeds will start to flow in accordance with the ‘fruit of the Spirit’. My point is, that an evil individual should be able to make a logical decision as to whether Christ is who He says he is. Salvation is based upon this decision, i.e. *faith*.

A Calvinist may argue that Ephesians states that *faith* is a gift from God.

Eph 2:8-9: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Careful study of the Greek words used in this translation show that the words ‘grace’, ‘saved’ and ‘faith’ are of mixed gender, i.e.

grace is feminine;
saved is masculine;
faith is feminine;
and the word ‘this’, is neuter.

What does this mean? It means that the *salvation by grace through faith* is all grouped together and the neuter *this* indicates that **all** of this grouping, i.e. salvation by grace through faith, is “...the gift of God...”, not just the faith as the Calvinist argues. This is not an example of Scripture supporting the idea that faith in God can only be a result of God giving faith to the individual

who would otherwise be completely unable to believe, even though the evidence for Christ might be completely overwhelming.

I have found that Romans is used extensively to support the Calvinistic argument. Particular emphasis is placed upon such words as ‘foreknew’, ‘predestined’ and ‘called’. Here is one such passage.

Rom. 8:29-30: “For those God **foreknew** he also **predestined** to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he **predestined**, he also **called**; those he **called**, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” (emphasis added.)

Careful consideration of the words used will show that Paul is not indicating that individuals have no ability to make a *freewill* decision to follow or not to follow Christ, but rather he is saying that God foreknew before the beginning of time, the destination of certain individuals. God did not *make* those He foreknew go to that particular destination but rather, He knew before the beginning of the ages, what or where that destination would be.

The Scriptures contain many examples of texts indicating that the individual has a choice in the matter of believing or not believing. The following references can be read at your leisure: Deuteronomy 30:19, Joshua 24:15, Ecclesiastes 7:29, 1 King 18:21, Matthew 23:37 & Luke 13:34, John 3:16-17, Luke 13:3, Acts 17:27, 1 Timothy 2:4, Titus 2:11 and Revelation 3:20. This is just a sample of many such Scriptures.

If the Calvinist interpretation is correct, if humanity has no freewill, and if those who love God only do so because they are compelled to do so because God has chosen to reveal Himself to them, - then what kind of love is it that God wants. Love, by definition, is something that is freely given and that fact is what makes love so special to every human. If we are created in God’s image, then surely He would appreciate this fact even more. Would He be satisfied with love that was forced? Would He be satisfied with worship that was forced? How could He claim that unbelievers were deserving of punishment with death/destruction if they had no say in the matter, but were only behaving in accordance with the way that they were made? Even as a sinner, I can appreciate how unjust it would be to set an individual up to fail and then punish them for it. How much more then would God state such a fact?

The consequence of Calvinistic thought is that God becomes the *author of sin*, as

he makes all people and He has made them such that they cannot choose Him unless He chooses to supernaturally reveal Himself to them. This is in direct conflict with Scripture which clearly states that;

1Jn. 3:5: "...And in him is no sin."

and

1Jn. 1:5: "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."

There is no possibility that God has created all so that they are completely incapable of making a freewill choice to follow Him for the above mentioned reason. God has not made sinners to be sinners. Scripture **never** states that humanity has no choice in the matter but it says a lot about belief. Scripture, if kept in context, shows us that...

Jn. 3:16: "...God so loved the **world (not just the elect)** that he gave his one and only Son, that

whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (emphasis added)

One final thought. If Calvinists are correct, it would mean that God created a world in which He forced individuals to rebel against Him so that He would have to send His Son to die for the sins of the **elect**, who sinned because they were forced to and who only love Him because they were forced to. This doesn't make sense and indicates that God is not powerful enough to have his plans come to be, unless He controls every interaction.

The God I read of in the Bible is sovereign and not in danger of having His plans thwarted by humanity having freewill. The God I know is logical, loving, supremely just and holy. And He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of the **whole world**, so that **whoever** believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Amen.

Personal Testimony

Finding Our Way

By Neville Ward.

I was born in Adamstown, a suburb of Newcastle, NSW, in 1937, and have remained in this city to the present day. I was born of Christian parents, my mother being an Anglican, and my father a Methodist. At age 5-8 years I attended the local Methodist Sunday School and was to remain with Methodist churches (later to be called the Uniting Church due to amalgamation) for the next 40 years. My most significant memory of that local church was a sign on the wall which said, "Jesus said I will come again. Be ye also ready." Was this an early sign of the search which was to follow?

At age 9, we moved to Waratah, a neighbouring suburb and there I attended the Methodist Sunday School. I became aware, as I grew older, that this church was a young person's paradise, with young adult groups aplenty, such as Christian Endeavour, Rays and Comrades for girls and for boys, the Order of Knights. There were trips away, camps, socials, dances, tennis club, sports days, concerts, visits by other church people from Sydney (our State capital), and many other activities. At age 14, I taught Sunday School for a year or so. Then due to a policy change, I was withdrawn from this. This was my first encounter with church politics.

At 19, I was called to National Service with the army. This involved 178 days spread over 2 years, 98 days of which were spent at Holsworthy Military Barracks in Sydney. My Christian involvement did not stop here, as I became friends with a fellow from my hut who was the son of an Anglican minister of a Sydney suburb. On weekend leave, I would stay with them at their home and attend church on Sunday mornings.

At 20 years of age, I found the love of my life, Robin, who had also been attending the same church at Waratah for some 5 years. By this time, I was searching for something more 'spiritual', as it were. I felt something was missing and I needed to grow in my faith. I found that Robin was searching also. Two people with the same needs coming together. Was this the hand of the Lord?

Because we both felt this need, we visited our minister at his home, and asked him for guidance. His advice was to forget about it and it would just happen. Well, we left feeling that something was still missing. At this point, I did not pick up on the fact that all we needed was to hear the words, 'Read God's Word.' Our feelings were such that we availed ourselves of quiet time in the church before services, as the church design permitted this solitude and contemplation.

As far as my working career was concerned, after completing high school at age 14, my Dad said, "Come with me. I'm taking you down the street to get you started as an apprentice mechanic." I continued in that career for 47 years till my retirement at age 61. This career "choice" proved to be the right decision as I enjoyed every moment of it.

Now at Kotara, another Newcastle suburb, with our 3 children, we were continuing in our Christian life. I was then in my late thirties. I had a family friend who had become a Methodist Pastor, who returned to Newcastle to take up duties in a nearby suburb. One evening, after working on the parish vehicle at his home, I met with him in his office and asked for his advice about our perception that something was missing in our Christian faith. He asked me if I was 'speaking in tongues' yet? I said no. He said, "When you do, come and see me." I left feeling more confused than ever. Again, the message I was missing was to read God's Word.

As time went on, the Kotara church embarked on a program put forward by our minister to carry out certain tasks as per instructions. One was Bible study groups (about 12 in number) which we attended weekly for a short period of time. We looked forward to these each week. Then came the news that these classes were to cease. Some of our group met with the minister and requested that the studies continue. Much to our disappointment, we were denied permission and told to cease forthwith. We had to move to the next task. I have to say that this was a strange result, to say the least.

I knew we enjoyed the Bible study, but still failed to grasp the meaning of reading God's Word. You see, we had been brought up on a culture of John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." True enough, but I really couldn't think past that.

Our church was a modern building, with a foyer adjacent to the church entrance. So solitude and quiet contemplation before the service was out of the question, due to the noise level. It got worse as the people spilled over into the church itself. I made several requests to those in authority for something to be done, but it just fell on deaf ears.

The last day at church for Robin and me came one morning when the minister stood in the pulpit for a minute or so, wanting to start the service, but was

ignored to the point that a steward came forward, raised his arms and cried out over the noise, "BE QUIET. The minister wants to start the service."

However, this is not a condemnation of the church or the ministers, for it provided us and our children (who incidentally stayed on for many years), with a splendid grounding for Christian life, which overall, was life-changing for all and invaluable. But for us, it no longer fulfilled our needs.

I was now 45. Robin and I needed more. It is at this point I believe God intervened and said, "I will just have to show them the way." I can remember saying

I found out that the Bible is not just for the minister to study at college —it is for us all.

to Robin, "I can get more out of reading the Bible at home." At the last, the realization of what was needed had arrived. I read the Bible at home for some

15 years to great satisfaction, but really having no idea about interpreting it correctly or putting the Old Testament with the New. I found out that the Bible is not just for the minister to study at college, it is for us all. I wonder what God is thinking about it all? Perhaps, "Why don't they read 2 Timothy 2:15?"

In my opinion, spirituality or deeper understanding and knowledge were not something that was encouraged in any of the churches we attended. The Old Testament was, mostly, conspicuous by its absence. Some years before my retirement, my son Peter and his wife Anne, were attending BBFA Bible study meetings, and every time we saw them we would talk and learn about things we had never before encountered, It started to make sense. Bit by bit we gained insight and a pattern emerged. We jumped out of our comfort zone and started attending the BBFA studies.

I came to understand that reading the Word at home without the correct interpretation, and believing that everything I read applied to me, was false. For the first time, at the BBFA I encountered Miles Coverdale's famous words:

"It shall greatly help ye to understand scripture, if thou mark not only what is spoken, or written, but of whom, to whom, with what words, at what time, were, to what intent, with what circumstance, considering what goeth before and what followeth."

Well, I know many of you are familiar with these words. What was it like for you when you first heard them? It was, for me, like a light was switched on! Robin and I slowly felt our way, and it took time, but

slowly a pattern of God's words and instructions emerged. That was 11 years ago.

Many of you will know that 2 Timothy 2:15 says:

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth." And 2 Timothy 3:16 reads:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

These verses, together with Miles Coverdale's words, have been wonderful helps in our study of the Bible.

In conclusion:

Well, Readers, if some of you are asking the same questions that Robin and I asked, or if you have knowledge as limited as ours was, I've just given you my answer. Read God's Word. Believe me, it's a knockout of knowledge!

Don't miss out as long as I did. Get the tools required and study the Word as the Lord would have you do. Find out what is in it for you and soon enough, you will be so contented, you will feel as if you are lying down in green pastures beside the still waters.

Words Of The Holy Spirit.

(A series of studies on important Scriptural words or phrases 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)

The First Day Of The Week.

By Athol Walter

The phrase 'the first day of the week' occurs 9 times in the New Testament. For a long time, it has been taken to refer to Sunday, especially as this was the day on which the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead. Sunday replaced Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, as the day of Christian worship quite early in the history of the Christian Church, and this practice has continued with us to this day.

Sunday observance was the strict practice in the denomination in which I was reared, although it certainly was not a day of rest! We were busy all day with morning and evening street meetings, morning and afternoon Sunday Schools, as well as morning and evening services. So with that strong early conditioning about 'the first day of the week', it came as quite a surprise to me later in my spiritual journey to learn that there is much more behind this phrase than I had been taught or had realised.

An example from those early days, that the 'first day of the week' was assumed to mean Sunday, is found in the envelopes that were provided for our weekly pledged offerings. Printed on these envelopes was the following verse: "Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him." (1 Cor. 16:2, KJV.) We all

regularly made our offerings each Sunday, never realising that the verse meant something quite different.

Here are the NT references where the words 'the first day of the week' occur: Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1 & 9; Luke 24:1; John 20: 1 & 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2. The quote of 1 Cor. 16:2 above was from the KJV because that was the version in use those many years ago. So what do the later versions say? The NKJV has the same – the first day of the week. The NIV is a little different, having 'On the first day of every week!' The Amplified Version follows along in the same vein. But what did Paul and the Gospel authors actually write? Here are their exact words, transcribed into English letters: 'Kata mian sabbaton', which is 'On the first of weeks'.

Two things should be noticed. Firstly, there is no word for 'day' in the phrase. It must be said, however, that the word 'day' can certainly be supplied to help the sense, providing that we don't thereby fall into the trap of saying, 'On the first day of THE week.' There is no definite article. It also must be said that there is one exception to my statement above, that in every case, the Greek words are 'Kata mian sabbaton'. The one exception is Mark 16:9, which has 'protei sabbaton'. Protei is just another form of protos. Mia means one, while protos means first. So

what the phrase means with the word 'mia' in it, would be something like 'On day one of weeks'.

Secondly, the word 'sabbaton' is plural, weeks not week. Now don't ask me why our translators have not been accurate in the translation, because I can't tell you. I suspect that tradition has led them astray. There is, however, no excuse for us to remain in ignorance of the correct translation, for we have many aids at our fingertips.

But What Does It Mean?

So what does the phrase 'the first day of weeks' mean, if it is not a reference to Sunday? We only have a problem here because, as with many other things in the New Testament, we do not know enough about the teaching of the Old Testament. No Jew, certainly not in the first century AD, would have any problem with understanding what the first of weeks meant. There is a clue for us, in the New Testament, in Acts 20, if we will but see it. The first six verses describe some travels of Paul and his team, and we learn in v. 6 that they were at Troas. Here, on the 'first day of weeks', Paul preached to the assembled believers.

Keep in mind that Paul was in Troas on the 'first day of weeks'. After finishing the short stay in Troas, the party moved on and bypassed Ephesus, for, as v. 16 says, 'Paul ... was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost'. Here again, no Jew would need to have the connection between the first day of weeks and Pentecost pointed out, but it escapes the Gentile mind unless we have been properly taught.

The reference to the weeks takes us into the subject of the feasts of the Lord which were enshrined in the Law God gave Israel through Moses. These feasts governed Israel's religious year, and also have typical and prophetic significance. This is a wonderful subject which we cannot go into in this article, but a brief summary is necessary. By the way, 'feast' in this context does not necessarily mean having a big meal!

Passover is the first of the feasts, and did indeed involve a special meal. Closely associated with Passover is the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Firstfruits. The Feast of Weeks followed Passover and Firstfruits. Seven 'sevens', or weeks, had to be counted from just after Firstfruits – 7 x 7 being 49 days, of course – and then on the 50th day, the Feast of Weeks was celebrated. This was called Pentecost in New Testament times, that being the Greek word for 'fiftieth'.

The other feasts that followed were Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles. You can read about the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 and the other feasts in Lev. 23. Back to the Feast of Weeks.

So when the Gospels tell us that the women came to the Lord's tomb on the first of weeks, the point being made is that it was 'day one' of the fifty days of the Feast of Weeks, not Sunday. In Acts 20, when Paul finished preaching at Troas on day one of the Weeks, he left rather quickly and bypassed Ephesus because he wanted to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost – the fiftieth day. It certainly would not take fifty days today to make that journey, but in those days, when travelling by sea and being totally dependent on favourable winds, it could not have been guaranteed. Also, when he told the Corinthians believers to lay aside their offerings for the suffering believers in Judea on day one of the weeks, both he and they knew that he meant one offering on that one specific day in the year, not a weekly offering every Sunday until Paul arrived. We certainly should make regular offerings to support the work and worship of our respective Fellowships, but 1 Cor. 16:2 is not the right verse to quote in that connection!

What is the significance?

As I said earlier, the various feasts of the Jewish year have typical and prophetic significance. For a fuller exposition of this theme, I suggest you consult the article entitled 'Festival Year' by Charles Welch in *The Alphabetical Analysis*, Vol. 8. I will make just a few comments here to put the Feast of Weeks into context.

The first Feast is Passover which, as we all know, was instituted in Egypt the night before the Exodus began. 1 Cor. 5:7 reads: "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, OUR PASSOVER, was sacrificed for us." (My emphasis.) The Lord Jesus was indeed the Passover Lamb who died to deliver those who respond in faith from the penalty of death. Remember also that the Lord is called the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Wonderful truths are embodied in this type of Christ, but the only comment I would make now is that, whether we are Jew or Gentile, all must start at this point. Christ is the ONLY way to God, and "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin." (Heb. 9:22)

1 Cor. 5:7 also shows the close link between the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover. If you read the following verses to the end of the chapter you will

get an idea of what Paul meant – indeed what the ritual of Unleavened Bread meant – when he told his readers to ‘purge out the old leaven’. Sorting out the days involved in Firstfruits and Unleavened Bread can be tricky, but the important thing to understand now is that three days after Passover – i.e. three days after the Crucifixion – the Lord rose again and became ‘the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep’. (1 Cor. 15:20.) This passage is important enough to quote in full.

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.” (1 Cor. 15:20–23.)

The Lord rose at the end of the third day following His crucifixion. That would have been at sunset on the Saturday. That Saturday, therefore, would have been the day when the Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled. The next day was Day one of Weeks, when counting of the fifty days to Pentecost began. The significance

of Pentecost was tied up with the beginning of the main harvest, and if you keep that in mind, you will see what Pentecost in Acts 2 was about. It was the beginning of the ‘harvest’ of the people of Israel. Through the Apostles, the nation was offered Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah for the second time.

Three thousand Jews believed on that first day, with thousands more following later. But in spite of those large numbers, it was only the ‘beginning of the harvest’. However, as Acts records so clearly, the national leaders, and the nation at large, rejected the offer again. Because of that rejection, the full harvest, when ‘**all Israel shall be saved**’, awaits the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement which is followed by the Feast of Tabernacles, when the full – the complete – harvest will be celebrated.

These are just some of the truths connected with the ‘first day of weeks’. I am painfully aware that I am not able to explain all these points as fully and as clearly as I should, but I hope and pray that what has been said will send you on a voyage of discovery in the ocean of God’s wonderful Word.

Rutherford Study Day

Report By Eveline Walter.

About three years ago our daughter, Sue, asked her Dad if he would start a Bible Study in her home. Athol readily agreed, and Sue invited a couple of friends whom she knew were interested in the Scriptures. We met each fortnight in the evenings at Sue and Greg’s home at Hilldale, a beautiful spot in the country, north of Newcastle NSW. The folk were very keen and gradually the numbers increased. Then a couple of years ago, Sue and Greg moved into Maitland, a city closer to Newcastle, and the studies were started there. It was decided to meet in the mornings, as this meant that it was easier for the folk to come, and so the numbers grew, until Sue’s back room was full.

Everyone is eager to learn, and ask Athol many questions. The atmosphere is studious, yet great fun is had at the same time, and strong support and friendships have developed.

Meanwhiile, at the Newcastle Study, John Hutton had regularly organised a Saturday Bible Study day once or twice each year, so it was thought we should have such a day held close to Maitland. Sue arranged this and organised catering etc. Studies

were presented by Athol and David Tavender, and the two meetings were led by Peter Ward. Thirty five people filled the meeting room to capacity for the 10am start, and right from the beginning when we all lifted up our voices and sang Wesley’s hymn: “And Can It Be”, the day immediately became what it was meant to be: a day of praise and glory to God, acknowledging His amazing love.

“Amazing love, how can it be,
That Thou my God shouldst die for me.”

After more singing and prayer, Athol reminded us of some Gems in Genesis. Firstly, he spoke of the substitutionary sacrifice that was made in the Eden, reminding us of the animals that died instead of Adam and Eve, thus providing the coverings of skin for the guilty pair. This sacrifice, as with all the Old Testament sacrifices, pointed forward to the Lord’s death on the Cross.

This same truth is shown in the offerings brought to the Lord by Cain and Abel. Abel, in faith, brought a blood offering, but Cain would not. This also demonstrates the two ways of life for us to choose from: God’s way or our own.

Among other 'Gems' Athol reminded us of was the account of Nimrod – the Rebel – and the Tower of Babel. In Romans 1, Paul says that because the rebellious people turned from God, He turned from them, and turned to one man – Abraham – through whom His purposes would be fulfilled.

We then enjoyed a beautiful lunch of various soups and goodies per favour Sue and her excellent cooking and organising, and with plenty of time arranged for folk to be able to fraternise, we were able to get to know the new folk and share fellowship.

The afternoon study was given by David Tavender was "Revelation – An Introduction". David's aim was to give an overview of the Book of Revelation and its general structure, emphasising that much could be established about the book by carefully noting it's the words of the book's first three verses. These opening words help to confirm the book's purpose, and even it's time of writing, which has a large bearing on how one views the contents of the book as a whole. Accompanied by several charts, David's main talk covered Revelation in general, and after a short interval, some brief thoughts were offered concerning some often talked about specifics, such as the meaning of terms like Armageddon, the mark of the beast, 666, and the 144,000 who are mentioned a few times.

Audio recordings of each talk are available in CD or MP#, along with printed charts. To obtain these, please forward \$5 to the BBFA Book Agency. See p. 12 for the address.

Some of those present had travelled long distances. It was with great pleasure we welcomed Rom and Mary Harper from Queensland, Ilma Bishop and Anne and Peter Ward from Sydney, and Ken Grice from Gosford. It was also very good that two old friends who have not been well of late, John Hutton and Ron Grice, were able to make it to the studies.

Ruth Andrew, a regular attender at the Maitland Study with her son Tim, was there also. Many other old friends came, and some who had never been before, accepted the invitation and enjoyed the day immensely. A young man saw our sign outside the hall, came in to see what the Berean Bible Fellowship had to say, and stayed for the morning study.

The atmosphere was of warmth and love throughout, of gratitude to God for His love and goodness to us each one, and for making it possible for us to meet in this way.

He Was Called To Preach

A story tells of a man – we'll call him George – felt he was called to preach. He applied for the ministry and submitted himself for examination. This proceeded as follows:-

"Can you read, George?" "No, Sir, I can't read."

"Can you write?" "No, Sir, I can't write, but my wife is a good writer."

"Well then, do you know your Bible?" "Yes, Sir, I'se pretty good in the Bible. I knows my Bible from lid to lid."

"What is the best part of the Bible, George?"

"Well, I like the New testament best, Sir."

"What part of the New Testament, George?"

"The Book of Parables, Sir."

"Which of is your favourite parable, George?"

"Which parable? Why, I like the Good Samaritan best of all, Sir."

"Well, George, tell me the parable of the Good Samaritan."

"Yes, Sir, I will. Once upon a time, there was a man went from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among thieves, and the thorns grew up and choked him, and he went on and he didn't have no money and he met the Queen of Sheba, and she gave that man one thousand talents of gold and one hundred changes of raiment, and he got in his chariot and drove furiously, and when he was droven along under a big tree his hair got caught in a limb and left him hangin' there. Yes, Sir, he hanged there many days and nights, and when he was hangin' there asleep, his wife Delilah came and cut off his hair, and he dropped and fell on stony ground. It began to rain and it rained forty days and forty nights and he hid himself in a cave. Then he went on and met a man who said come and take supper with me, but he said, No, I won't come, I married a wife and I can't and the man went out into the highways and hedges and compelled him to come in and have supper. Then he went on and came to Jerusalem and saw Queen Jezebel sitting high up in a window, and she laughed at him, and he said, Throw her down from there. So they threw her down, and he said, Tthrow her down some more, so they threw her down seventy times seven and the dogs came and licked her sores and of the fragments they picked up twelve basketfuls. Now, Sir, whose wife do you think she will be in the judgement?"

The story doesn't say whether George passed the test or not.

Wondrous Meeting Places

By Charles Welch.

It is not our purpose to discuss the merits of any particular "Place of Worship", nor to advocate the attendance, or non-attendance, at the meeting place of any one sect or denomination; we desire to "preach Christ", and by so doing we shall strike a more powerful blow at sectarianism than by all the denunciations that we might pour forth, and at the same time, feed the Lord's people with the true bread which cometh down from heaven.

This wonderful meeting place to which we wish to draw attention is found in Isaiah 53, being symbolized in Exodus 25:21 & 22. Let us turn to Exod. 25:16–22. The ark of the covenant has placed within it the *unbroken* tables of stone. Let it be remembered that Israel in reality *never received the ten commandments*, they were broken before they could be given to them. God's answer was, "Make an ark," not "Give them another chance", or "Give them an easier code". Upon this ark is placed the mercy seat, the *propitiatory*, which exactly fitted the ark beneath. Here we have Romans 3:21–26 set before our very eyes.

Atonement has a broad base of righteousness to rest upon. The blood sprinkled upon the mercy seat covers the perfect and unbroken law within, "that He might be *just*, and the *justifier* of him that believeth in Jesus". This symbol of the perfect work of Christ is the "ground of meeting" in Exod. 25:22. "There will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat." Fellow-believer, "let us draw nigh" none can say us nay if He bids us welcome. With this beautiful type in mind let us turn to Isaiah 53.

In Acts 8:35 we read, "Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him – Jesus". Isaiah 53 is the passage. It is a part of repentant Israel's confession when they look on Him whom they pierced, when the veil shall be removed, and they shall say:

"Surely He hath borne *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows ... All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath *made to meet* on Him the iniquity of us all."

Let us pause and consider this wondrous meeting place. The sufferer is the Son of God; the hands

which fashioned the heavens (Heb. 1:10) are nailed to the accursed tree; the brow which is yet to wear "many diadems" is crowned with the thorns that sprang up in consequence of Adam's sin. Why all this? Was there no other way? No! The Lord of glory stepped down from His exalted throne, became a man, a servant, and dies under the imputed guilt which the Lord *made to meet* on Him.

What a tremendous thought is here; how it calls upon us to remember that we are upon holy ground! One sin to an infinitely holy Being must be loathsome, but to think of the combined sin of my lifetime being made to converge on His sacred head is more than heart can conceive. But the writer is not the only one for whom the Saviour died. Thousands more can rejoice in Him as the great Sin-bearer for them. But this is not all.

Generation after generation have lived, and sinned, and died, and for many of each the Saviour's blood was shed. Here, like Paul at the end of Romans 11 (as he goes on to enumerate the multiplied mercy of God), we get out of our depth—we can only bow our heads and say, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God".

This is not all, however, there is still a "much more". At the end of Isaiah 53:12, we read of a second meeting place, linked to and founded upon the first one in verse 6:

"He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bare the sin of many, and made a *meeting place* for transgressors."

He was first made a meeting place for transgressions, and then having put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, where He ever liveth to make intercession for us, to whom we can go at all times by a new and living way. What a glorious meeting place! But even this does not exhaust the depth, nor scale the height, nor comprehend the love that passeth knowledge. We, who by faith, look back to that solemn meeting place of Calvary, look forward in hope to the consummation of it all, as expressed in the words of the apostle to the Thessalonians. Whether 1 Thess. 4 is to be interpreted of the church of the mystery is a question with which we must deal by and by, but one thing we know, that the redeemed

"The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all." Isa. 53:6.

God Our Help

By the late David Fryer

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble". Psalm 46:1.

The blessings that God our Father brings to us in our lives through our Lord and Saviour are not meant only to be looked upon, but to be taken up and enjoyed by the believer. God so loved us that He has given us the **gift** of His dear Son for our salvation, that we who were once dead in sins, might be made alive and brought into fellowship with both the Father and Son, and through them we now, as believers, have fellowship in Christ Jesus with one another.

Our Lord Jesus has been given to us to be provision for our lives. Perhaps there are times when we fail to look to Him as our unseen companion of whom David the Psalmist wrote, "**He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble**".

When you are in trouble, why do you not tell Him all your grief? Has He not a sympathising heart, and can He not comfort and put you at ease? Very often we don't do that, but go to all our friends except our best friend. We sometimes take our tales of woe everywhere except to the bosom of our Lord and Saviour. Are you burdened with the sins of today?

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins.
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains."

Let us then use this fountain, to His praise and glory. Has a sense of guilt returned to you? The pardoning grace of God through His dear Son may be proved again and again. We may come to Him at once for cleansing. Are you weak and heavy laden? Are you distressed because of your weakness? The Lord Jesus, your Saviour and **best friend** He is your strength. Why not lean upon Him?

Wondrous Meeting Places, cont. from previous page.
of all ages and dispensations, whether by rapture or resurrection, whether before or after the great tribulation, whether to inherit the heavenly holiest of all or the earthly paradise, they shall all meet the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17; 1 John 3:1-3; Phil. 3:20 & 21; Col. 3:1-4; Titus 2:13; Rev. 20:4 & 22:4).

(This article is from *The Berean Expositor*, Vol. 1, published by the Berean Publishing Trust and available from our Book Agent . See p. 12 for the address.)

**"My Father, this I ask of Thee -
knowing that Thou wilt grant the plea.
For this, and only this, I pray -
Strength for today - Just for today.**

**Strength for each trial and each task,
What more, my Father, should I ask,
Just as I need it day by day,
Strength for my weakness—this I pray.**

**Strength for the present hour and need,
This given - then I'm blest indeed.
For each day, as it comes, will bring -
Sufficient strength for anything."**

Before God, do you feel naked and unworthy? Come then and put on the "robe of righteousness" that of our Redeemer and Saviour, and now clad in that righteousness, we are now accepted before God in His beloved Son.

**"In the Beloved accepted am I,
Risen, ascended, and seated on high.
Free from all sin, through His infinite grace;
With His redeemed ones accorded a place.**

**In the Beloved – how safe my retreat.
In the Beloved – accounted complete.
Who can condemn me – in Him I am free.
Saviour and Keeper forever is He."**

We must cast aside our own righteousness, for it is no covering before God. We must throw off our fears, too, for His great love 'casteth out' all fear. Instead, we must put on the fair white linen which is a picture of righteousness and holiness before God, not to be 'looked upon' but 'put on' – for it was meant to be worn. We must give thanks for this robe daily.

Always remember that the Lord is "a very present help" whether it be for our spiritual help or for the material things of daily life. Yes, He is always present! Do you feel sick? Sound the 'night bell' of prayer and call the Beloved Physician. He will give the Divine Cordial that will revive you.

The Lord is our very life, and our life is hidden with Christ in God. His redeeming love and care is ever upon us. When all life is good, and "the sun is shining", may we ever remember to praise and thank Him. But also remember that, when trials come, as they do in many ways, God is our refuge and strength, **a very present help** in trouble.

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

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Alternate Mondays. 7pm start. 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

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