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# *Living Water*

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## MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES — SARDIS

**“And to the angel of the assembly in Sardis write: These things says he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars:**

**“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die, for I have not found thy works complete before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and keep it and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I shall come upon thee. But thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, because they are worthy.**

**“He that overcomes, he shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.**

**“He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.”**  
(Revelation 3:1-6)

It is a striking fact that the Lord does not draw attention to anything in Sardis that He can commend. The only indication that this assembly had works is His challenging assessment, “I have not found thy works complete before my God”.

There are many examples of incomplete works in the Bible. In the Old Testament the children of Israel failed to totally dispossess the inhabitants of Canaan as they were instructed by God to do. Again, King Saul failed most terribly to deal with Agag as he had been instructed. In both cases there were serious consequences for the people of God.

In the matter that the Lord raises about their works the three words, “before my God” are important. We may think our work is wonderful and complete and even very great. What we may think about it is not what matters; it is what God thinks of it and His assessment may be very different from ours. The Lord is the pattern in all things. He could say to the Father, “I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it” (John 17:4).

Immediately after Pentecost we see a vibrant christianity operating. The gospel went out in power, persons were cared for and there was continuance in the apostles’ doctrine, the breaking of bread and prayers (See Acts 2:42). It is a picture of works being complete in the eye of God. Peter’s service to

Cornelius also shows a complete work, and very blessed results flowed from it too (See Acts 10).

The account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5 shows the opposite feature at work. They pretended to have brought the whole value of what they had sold and laid it at the feet of the apostles, but in fact they were deceitful. Their works were not complete. They wanted to have a reputation amongst believers as those who had given the whole value but it was not true. They were marked by deadness. There seems to be a very real parallel with the situation in Sardis.

It is important to see the way the Holy Spirit is referred to here as “the seven Spirits of God”. That speaks of the completeness of the Spirit’s service and all that springs from His activity. The overcomers in Sardis would have been persons who were giving real place to the Holy Spirit in their lives and service.

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who served in times of recovery, would confirm that. Haggai writes, “My word... and my Spirit, remain among you” (Haggai 2:5). The Lord’s word to Sardis was that they should, “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and keep it and repent”. The desire of the Holy Spirit would be to bring them back to the understanding that they once had of what was suitable to the Lord but which had been deadened by the circumstances that had been allowed to come in.

We all need to take these words to heart. In our localities are we ready to hear what the Spirit is saying? Are we ready to accept that these dead conditions can come in and are we prepared to do something about it? It has often been the case in the history of the church that where a company has faced its state before God and repented and cried to God, the Holy Spirit has brought in revival.

Sardis had a reputation (“a name”) to live but was dead. Outwardly they had the appearance of what was suitable to the Lord, but they had lost the understanding of what was needed to be pleasing to Him. Deadness may come in, though correct religious forms are still maintained. We do not need to look accusingly at any beyond ourselves to be aware of that sad reality.

The company in Sardis was brought to this state of affairs because they attempted to go along with the world and, at the same time, to appear as God’s people. That they had become worldly is clear from the fact that the Lord says to them that unless there is a change, He will come upon them as

“a thief”. That is how His coming will appear to the world. It should not be like that to the christian company. It shows how far Sardis had got from Him.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “we are disciplined of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:32). It is a warning that mere outward profession will come under the same condemnation from the Lord as will the world. The Lord comes on the world as a thief but Thessalonians shows us that true believers are not to be like that: “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:4). The church in Sardis is addressed by the Lord just as the world is because it had become indistinguishable from it.

A very worldly kind of christianity characterised Sardis: a name to live, self importance and so forth. We often think of worldliness as “fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred...murders, drunkennesses, revels, and things like these” (Galatians 5:19-21) but the world has many facets. Pride, self importance, self-sufficiency, and similar things are all marks of the world and do damage when they come into the christian company. Some of these features are even commended in the world and people are encouraged to develop them yet actually they are the marks of a world away from God. The challenge to each one of us is that all these things actually are in our hearts and we need to be self-judged about them.

The word to this church was: “Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die”. Unless there was action in answer to the Lord’s word, even what remained in Sardis of what was right and true to Him would die. This is a word to all of us that we need to be constantly strengthening what is right. We need to cry to the Holy Spirit so that He might work with us to bring in life according to God. What He would do in this way is in marked contrast to the deadness that characterises Sardis.

It is encouraging to see that in Sardis, despite the general conditions, there were some who were pleasing to the Lord: “But thou hast a few names...who have not defiled their garments”. We can be thankful for those “few names”, that God might use them to stir up those in the place to repentance and action.

The Lord invites those in Sardis to have a stock-taking to see what there is of the features that He would have to mark His church here on earth. Then, having found it, they were to strengthen it. These things are not easy in a state of general deadness and there is a need for earnest prayer. Habakkuk

did that; he prayed, “revive thy work in the midst of the years” (Habakkuk 3:2).

In order to put matters right in Sardis the call was to, “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and keep it and repent”. We might have thought that repentance would have been put first but the Lord brings forward that which will lead to it - the remembrance of what they had once received of His things.

Part of the promise to the overcomer in Sardis is: “I will not blot his name out of the book of life”. At first sight this seems a surprising promise but it is actually like the promise made to Smyrna, “He that overcomes shall in no wise be injured in the second death” (Revelation 2:11). It is important to see that the promises made in the Lord’s word to each church in Revelation are not things that will happen to some believers and not to others but all the promises relate to the whole church of God. The promise to Philadelphia, for instance, that they would be kept out of the hour of trial is not just for a certain group of christians but for all. The individual promises brought forward in each of the seven assemblies are selected so as to bring particular encouragement to the overcomer in the circumstances in which the Lord’s review found them.

The final part of the promise to the overcomer is very encouraging. The Lord says, “I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels”. It will be a wonderful roll call. The idea would be that such ones are acknowledged, we might simply say, where it matters. Down here they may have suffered all manner of things. The question would be, what is the Lord’s judgment and where is that judgment expressed? It is in the presence of His Father!

Based on a Bible reading at Bromley, Kent, January 2003.

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Sardis, in western Turkey, was an important and wealthy city in Roman times. It had a temple to Diana though it was not as famous as the temple at Ephesus. The ruins can still be seen.

## OVERCOMERS — SAMSON

**“And she (Delilah) said, The Philistines are upon thee, Samson! And he awoke out of his sleep, and thought, I will go out as at other times before, and disengage myself. And he knew not that Jehovah had departed from him. And the Philistines seized him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gazah, and bound him with fetters of bronze; and he had to grind in the prison house. But the hair of his head began to grow after he was shaved.**

**Then the lords of the Philistines gathered together to sacrifice... to Dagon their god... And it came to pass when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house...Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and upon the roof...men and women, who looked on while Samson made sport. And Samson called to Jehovah, and said, Lord Jehovah, remember me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may take one vengeance upon the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood...And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines! And he bowed himself with might; and the house fell on the lords, and all the people that were therein. So the dead that he slew at his death were more than those whom he had slain in his life” (Judges 16:20-30).**

Samson was famous for mighty exploits; for instance, with the jaw bone of an ass he killed a thousand men. On another occasion he ripped up the gates of a city and carried them miles away to the top of a hill. Yet Samson got into a moral mess through his own fault. Samson had a good father and mother and had a good upbringing. He was a Nazarite which meant he was consecrated to God. He had long hair, an outward sign in those days of being a Nazarite of God. As a result he had remarkable strength and achieved great victories with God’s help several times during his life. Yet he had what we might call today a roller-coaster kind of life: up and down, up and down. Sometimes he was on the crest of the wave, sometimes he was in the depths of sin. That was Samson!

Foolishly, he betrayed the secret of his strength to a woman, Delilah, and

he lost the support of God. She shaved his head and as a result he was delivered into the hands of the Philistine enemy. He also lost his eyesight: his eyes were gouged out by the Philistines. Instead of being an overcomer, instead of achieving exploits on behalf of God, he became an object of derision and Philistine people called for him at one of their feasts so they could make fun of him. It was very sad.

I often hear Christians nowadays, referring to the current situation amongst God's people, as 'Very sad', but the Bible does not say about Samson, 'It is very sad'. It says, "the hair of his head began to grow". If the work of God is in a soul, it can assert itself again.

I would like to use this scripture for an encouragement to each one of us. I am not saying that anyone here has done what Samson did but we may, and should, feel sorrow and shame because of past sins. When we feel conscious of failure we may get very depressed and feel we are finished and cannot be of use any more. Many of us look back in our lives to past events where we wish we had acted differently.

I do not know what thoughts went through Samson's mind when he was in that prison, with his eyes gouged out. Yet where we read it says he achieved more at the end of his life than he had done earlier! I would like to stress that feature as an encouragement to every believer here. Even if you have failed — and I am not trying to glorify failure — remember the scripture that says: "But if we confess our sins (as believers), he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

It is possible to achieve something for the glory of God at the end of our lives even if our lives have been marked by weakness and failure. I say this for the encouragement of every believer here. Do not just look at the situation you may be in and say: 'It is so sad'. That is not the language of faith. Look to God and our great model, our Lord Jesus Himself who said, "as I also have overcome and sat down with my Father in his throne..."

As we see from the scripture we read, Samson becomes an object of derision and entertainment for the Philistines who were making fun of him. What does Samson cry? 'Oh, it is finished? I can't be of use any

more'. No, he did not! He prayed to God. Think of what he said. I love the language he uses to God. This short prayer of Samson is an earnest and wonderful prayer: "And Samson called to Jehovah, and said, Lord Jehovah, remember me". If you are a believer in Jesus, God remembers you. You are precious to Him. You are precious to Jesus. He has bought you with His own precious blood, irrespective of what mistakes you have made in your life.

"Remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God". Think of that prayer. His consecration to God was coming back. His hair had begun to grow again, his strength returned. We believers, whatever our time of life, should consecrate our lives to God, and present our bodies a living sacrifice as Paul exhorts in Romans 12. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God". Paul uses the mercy of God as He has reached out to us in Jesus as a lever to motivate believers, to present their "bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service."

Blind Samson could not even feel the pillars of the house without the help of a lad yet he brought down the whole house of these Philistines. The scripture says he slew in his death more than those he had slain in his life. Remember that and think how we can each be an overcomer, in the situations in which we find ourselves today.

I wonder about this christian era and the ruin of the church as a unified witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, her Head in heaven. I wonder sometimes what might happen before the Lord comes but I am sure that each one of us, in faith, has to take up a scripture like this and seek by God's help to be an overcomer in the circumstances we find ourselves in now.

*Ken Hollands*

*Extracted from an address in Glasgow, 8 September 2001*

*The next in this series will be Naomi and Ruth*

## THREE POEMS CONCERNING THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

### The Mount of Olives

**“And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God...”**  
Luke 19:37

Hark! Hark! The sound from Olivet,  
The loud triumphant psalm!  
Raise heart and voice! Cry louder yet!  
Wave the victorious palm!  
Hosanna! Peace in heaven! sing:  
Glory to the Most High!  
From great Jehovah comes the King,  
Deliverance is nigh

**“And He came out, and went, as was his custom, to the mount of Olives”**  
Luke 22:39

The chosen three are hushed in sleep,  
And silence reigns around;  
The dark green olive shade lies deep,  
We stand on holy ground!  
Who shall declare the agony  
Of Him — the subject Son?  
Or tell of what those words imply:  
Thy will — not Mine be done!

**“And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives...at evening time it shall be light”**  
Zechariah 14:4-7

Again upon that Eastern hill  
His glorious feet shall stand;  
His splendour shall the whole world fill,  
And shine through Judah's land.  
Known to the Lord alone that day,  
But known to none beside;  
When gloom and shadow pass away,  
With light at eventide.

*Edward Bevir*

## **Hands Uplifted**

### **Luke 24:50-51**

No fiery chariot was sent —  
The Lord, in right divine alone,  
Up to the heaven of heavens went,  
Ascending to the Father's throne.  
From Bethany, by Zion set;  
How blest thy memories, Olivet!

The parting benediction said,  
O glorious attitude of love!  
His piercèd hands o'er every head  
He raised, and slowly rose above.  
That blessing lingers with us yet;  
How bright thy memories, Olivet!

With lifted hands, as from that hill,  
Light, mercy, from a loftier sphere,  
From the high throne — He showers still  
On every waiting pilgrim here;  
All fears allayed, all sorrows met,  
As when He rose from Olivet!

Lord, give us to receive of Thee  
(Should e'er our fainting spirits fail)  
Fresh power, fresh grace and energy,  
That fleshly things may not prevail!  
O give us never to forget  
That blest return from Olivet!

*Edward Bevir*

## **By way of Olivet**

### **2 Samuel 15:23 & 30**

Weeping, the monarch left his home  
And covered was his head,  
Barefoot in exile must he roam  
Through Kidron's stony bed.

And every faithful Israelite,  
Absorbed in woe and grief,  
Followed King David in his flight,  
The well-beloved chief.

**John 18:1**

More than ten centuries were sped,  
Another sorrowing band  
Again was crossing Kidron's bed,  
Towards the desert land;

Towards the ascent of Olivet  
To dark Gethsemane,  
Another Exile, sadder yet,  
In deeper agony!

Tis David's offspring, David's Lord,  
Israel's uncrowned King,  
Of whom, throughout the inspired word,  
The Psalms and prophets sing.

But higher glories we descry;  
This Exile is divine;  
He, He alone could truly cry:  
'Thy will be done, not Mine.'

These sacred words we oft repeat,  
His name supreme we tell;  
The subject Son alone could meet  
The powers of death and hell.

**Zechariah 14:4-5**

His bright return is surely near,  
All shall confess Him yet!  
The Lord in splendour shall appear  
By way of Olivet.

*Edward Bevir*

## HOW THE BIBLE HAS COME TO US

It has pleased God in His wisdom to bring to us the Scriptures through human vessels; first through apostles, prophets and others who spoke or wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then through the many scribes who copied these Scriptures over the centuries and, lastly, through those who translated the Scriptures so that they might be read in various languages. Translation requires a great deal of labour, and in the case of a sacred text like the Bible, prayer and dependence on God. Translation from ancient manuscripts means that they need to be carefully studied and compared in order to establish the most authentic text and, as many Biblical scholars have noted, the oldest manuscripts are not necessarily the most accurate.

**THE OLD TESTAMENT** was written in Hebrew, a language with many complex word forms but with simple sentence structures. Small parts in the Old Testament were written in Aramaic. Both Aramaic and Hebrew were in use in early Bible times. When Jacob and Laban built a cairn and called it the “heap of witness”, Laban used the Aramaic name for this — Jegar-sahadutha, while Jacob named it in Hebrew — Galeed (See Genesis 31:47-48). As a result of the Babylonian captivity from 606 BC Aramaic became the common language of the Jews. It was this language that was used in Palestine at the time of Christ.

### **282 BC — The beginnings of the Septuagint.**

According to tradition, King Ptolemy II commissioned the translation of the first five books of the Bible into Greek. This translation became known as the Septuagint — Greek for seventy — because it is said that seventy scholars worked on it. The Septuagint was added to gradually over the next 200 years until it included all the books that we now know as the Old Testament plus some others which make up the Apocrypha that are not part of the true Scriptures. It is noticeable that while the Lord Jesus quoted extensively from the Old Testament, He never once did so from the books of the Apocrypha.

(Around 100 AD a council of Jewish Rabbis meeting at Jamnia established a definitive version of the Old Testament. Subsequently this became known as the Masoretic text. None of the books of the Apocrypha were included in this text. [The apocryphal books do not exist in Hebrew and appear to have been almost always been written in Greek.] Subsequent copyists went to great lengths to ensure that the Masoretic text was adhered to. The Dead Sea scrolls discovered in 1949 provided a further demonstration of just how accurate this copying had been.)

The Septuagint became the accepted version in use and would have been

used in the time of the Lord. The New Testament writers also used this version and this generally accounts for the difference in wording that is found when the Old Testament is quoted in the New, since the Old Testament is from the original Hebrew and the New Testament quotation is based on the Septuagint. As a simple example of this, here are two scriptures:

Zechariah 9:9: “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (As translated from the Hebrew).

Matthew 21:5: “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass” (As translated from the Greek of the Septuagint.)

These variations between the Old Testament and the New rarely affect the sense of the Scriptures concerned.

**THE NEW TESTAMENT** was written in Greek. This was the major language of the eastern Mediterranean, a legacy of the conquests of Alexander the Great. Even in the Roman Empire Greek was spoken extensively. There are occasions however when the original Aramaic words are carried forward in the gospels, for instance: “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani”, and “Ephphatha”.

### **125 AD and onwards — Earliest known manuscripts of the Gospels**

During the 20th century there have been a number of discoveries, particularly in Egypt, of early papyrus manuscripts containing parts of the New Testament. The earliest so far discovered is a small fragment of John’s gospel with John 18:31-33 on one side and John 18:37-38 on the other. This is preserved in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

Around 170 AD Tatian, of Syria, assembled a collection of texts from all four gospels. This is referred to as the Diatessaron, a word which means “from four” in Greek. Discoveries in the 1880s and subsequently proved the existence of the Diatessaron.

The significance of the Diatessaron and finds like the papyri in the John Rylands University Library is that they show that all four gospels were in circulation at a very early date. This is further confirmed by Irenaeus (about 180 AD) whose writings show that the four gospels were well known to him.

In the late 19th and the 20th century various other papyri dating from very early times have been found containing accounts of the life or sayings of the Lord Jesus. In many ways this should not surprise us since Luke opened his gospel by saying that many had already undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been believed by us. Among the findings of the 20th

century were two almost complete copies of John's gospel dating from 200/300 AD.

A collection of ancient Egyptian papyri manuscripts purchased en bloc by Alfred Chester Beattie in 1931 was found to contain most of Paul's epistles, though, due to the state of the papyri, in a fragmentary form. These papyri were dated to AD 200 and make them among the earliest copies of the epistles to be discovered. They are held in the Chester Beattie Library, Dublin.

### **Circa. 230 AD — Origen (185 – 254) produced the Hexapla.**

The Hexapla was a remarkable study Bible that gave various Hebrew and Greek versions of the Scriptures in six parallel columns for comparative purposes. Jerome, when he was translating the Scriptures into Latin about 382 AD, records that he found the original of this interesting document at Caesarea. Because of its complexity, it was rarely copied.

### **334 – 337 AD — Reign of the Emperor Constantine**

Early in his reign the Roman Emperor Constantine professed himself a Christian. There is argument about how real his commitment to Christianity was, but there is a record of his commanding that fifty Bibles should be produced to place in churches in Constantinople.

### **Early 4th Century — Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus**

These two manuscripts — codex is a word meaning a manuscript in book form, rather than a scroll — are the first known complete Bibles ever produced. Codex Sinaiticus is the oldest complete New Testament in existence. Probably Codex Vaticanus originally contained all the New Testament but some of the latter books are missing. These two books, together with the Codex Alexandrinus (see below) and a 5th century text of the gospels discovered in 1906 and now in the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, are major evidence for the text of the Scriptures, though they do have to be considered with other manuscripts as well. They are written in a style called uncial that uses only upper case letters and with minimal punctuation, most of the words being run together. The familiar words at the beginning of John's gospel would appear rather like this:

THEWORDBECAMEFLESHANDDWELTAMONGUS.

It is possible, though by no means certain, that Sinaiticus and Vaticanus could have been among the fifty Bibles produced on the orders of Constantine. One of the correctors of Sinaiticus added a note that the Old Testament text from 1 Samuel to Esther had been compared with a manuscript that Pamphilus (d.309) and Antoninus (d.310), two Christina martyrs, had checked against

the Hexapla manuscript of Origen.

Codex Sinaiticus was discovered in the monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai by Constantine Tischendorf in 1844. In 1859 the monastery was persuaded to part with the book and it was presented to the Tsar of Russia. In 1933 the Russians sold the book to the UK Government and it is now preserved in the British Library, London. Codex Vaticanus gets its name from the fact that it is housed in the Vatican in Rome.

### **382 AD — Jerome (342 – 490) translates the Bible into Latin.**

In 383 Jerome commenced translating the Bible into Latin. The work went on over a number of years and some parts of the New Testament may have been translated by others. Jerome consulted various existing Old Latin translations and Hebrew and Greek documents including Origen's Hexapla. The resulting translation by Jerome became known as the Vulgate and was used for many centuries. The work however did contain various errors, as Erasmus was to show later. These errors were compounded because various copyists over the years added back to the text much of what Jerome had removed as unreliable.

Jerome began to translate some of the books of the Apocrypha, but he abandoned this and rejected these books as not being truly Scripture. Perhaps having laboured so long over books that were true, he could see clearly that the Apocryphal books were not properly part of the Bible.

### **393 AD — Council of Hippo**

In 383 a Council was held at Hippo, which confirmed the books of the Bible, as we now know them, though this was not so much a decision as an acceptance of the view current amongst Christians at the time. For instance, Athanasius had listed the books of the Old and New Testaments that he considered were authentic twenty-three years earlier.

### **5th Century — Codex Alexandrinus produced.**

This is another most important version of the early Greek text of the New Testament. The Patriarch of Alexandria presented it to King Charles I of England in 1624. Apparently the gift had been intended for his father, James I, who initiated the translation of the Bible in 1604, but James had died before the Codex reached England. The Codex is in the British Library.

### **1084 AD — Copying the Bible**

In 1084 we have a record of the completion of a copy of Jerome's Latin version of the Bible (the Vulgate) by a scribe called Goderannus. It took him three years. Goderannus was involved in making another copy in 1097, and

in this case he records that it took him and a colleague four years to make the whole Bible including writing, colouring and binding. Such copying by hand must have happened many times until the invention of printing.

Two of the most famous copies of the gospels that have been preserved are the eighth-century Book of Kells in Trinity College, Dublin and the Lindisfarne Gospels, now in the British Library. Both are written in Latin, but interestingly, the latter has an Anglo Saxon translation written between the lines of the original. A priest called Aldred added this in the 10th century.

### **1330 – 1384 AD — John Wycliffe, Morning Star of the Reformation**

John Wycliffe was a teacher and preacher at Oxford University. He maintained that the Bible was the source for Christian teaching and the guide for Christian conduct. He believed that the Bible should be available in English so that all could read it for themselves. Wycliffe's views caused a number of others who thought the same to associate themselves with him and as a result a translation of the Latin Vulgate was made. It is not certain how much of the work of translation was done by Wycliffe himself. We do know that Nichols of Hereford translated much of the Old Testament and that a revision of the whole was carried out by John Purvey (1353 – 1428) after Wycliffe's death.

### **1450 AD — The first printed Bible**

Around 1450 Johann Gutenberg (1400 – 1468), the man who invented printing, completed the first printing of the Bible. The print run was a mere 180 copies and the Bible was still in Latin and based on the Vulgate but the invention of printing opened the door to the vision of many of the reformers to have the Bible widely available.

### **1516 AD — Desiderius Erasmus (1466 – 1536) translates the New Testament**

In 1516 Erasmus published the result of five years study of the Greek text. His New Testament consisted of two parallel columns, one showing the original Greek text as accurately as he could edit it, and the other being a precise translation into Latin. This Latin translation varied from the text of Jerome's Vulgate, still in regular use. Erasmus provided a commentary on the changes he had made to the Vulgate. In this commentary he showed conclusively, for instance, that the Greek word 'metanoieite' could not be translated 'do penance' as it was in the Vulgate, but that it should be rendered 'repent'.

### **1521 AD — Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) translates the New Testament into German**

Luther originally intended to be a lawyer but after a traumatic experience during a thunderstorm he promised to become a monk. He kept his promise

and on 17th July 1505 he entered the Augustinian priory in Erfurt. Luther was strict in his observance of the rules as he could say later; 'I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I can say that if ever a monk could get to heaven by his monkery that was me'. The story of how Luther came to see that he could be justified in God's sight only by faith in Christ is well known. In 1520 he went on to denounce the Roman Catholic Church and many of its doctrines, and in 1521 he was taken into hiding in Wartburg Castle. Here in eleven months he translated the New Testament into German from the Greek edition made by Erasmus. The book was published on 15th September 1522 and it is a translation still used by many German speakers today.

Later, Luther translated the Old Testament, but due to other pressures on his time this took him eleven years. Part of the delay arose because he sought a detailed understanding of what he was translating. For instance, when he was dealing with the offerings as set out in Leviticus, he got a local butcher to cut up an animal for him so he could identify the parts that were being referred to.

Luther's work provided a basis for translations into other European languages as follows:

- 1523 Dutch New Testament (the whole Bible by 1550)
- 1524 Danish New testament
- 1526 Swedish New Testament (the whole Bible by 1541)

1525 AD — The first printing of William Tyndale's New Testament

Some time before 1525, William Tyndale (1494 – 1536) had expressed himself forcibly, possibly to a priest, 'If God spare my life, before many years I will cause the boy that driveth the plough to know more of the scripture than thou dost'. His aim was that the Bible should be available in clear and easy to read English. In 1525 it looked as though his vision was about to come to pass. His New Testament translated into English was being printed in Cologne but the work had hardly begun when the printer was raided on the orders of the local magistrates, bent on suppressing publication. Tyndale escaped to Worms taking with him the sheets that had been printed and in 1526 the work was ready.

Tyndale knew Greek and Hebrew and also drew on the work of Erasmus in 1516 and on Luther's German translation. Copies of the English New Testament were smuggled into England and sold furtively. Bishop Tunstall in London tried to seize all the copies and many were publicly burnt at Smithfield. Later Tyndale published a carefully revised edition that had a wide circulation.

Tyndale began work on translating the Old Testament but before this was completed he was arrested and imprisoned at Vilvorde Castle in 1535. While there he preached to his gaoler and as a result this man trusted in Christ. Tyndale was condemned as a heretic and on 6th October 1536 was executed and his body burned at the stake.

There is an interesting record of the effect of the Tyndale translation from William Maldon of Chelmsford. He recounts that some who could read used to sit at the back of the church on Sundays and read aloud from the Tyndale Testament, “And many would flock about them to hear their reading of that glad and sweet tidings of the gospel”. As a result of what he heard, William Maldon decided to learn to read himself so that he could read the scriptures whenever he wanted.

It is striking, too, that within two years of Tyndale’s death, King Henry VIII of England ordered that a copy of the Bible in English should be placed in every parish church in the land, though this was not Tyndale’s translation but a version known as the “Great Bible”.

### **1532 and onwards — Other translations**

As the Reformation spread, so translations into the various languages of Europe continued. In particular:

- Italian New Testament (1530) — the work of Antonio Brucioli (1495 – 1566) taken mainly from the Latin of Erasmus. The complete Bible was available by 1532.
- Various Bibles in French were published from 1530
- The Bible in Spanish (1569) — the work of Cassiodoro de Reyna (1520 – 1594). He was a former monk who fled to London in the 1550s.

In 1604 at the Hampton Court Conference, called by King James I, a new translation of the bible was commissioned; this resulted in the Authorised Version, or King James version of the Bible, as it is sometimes called, and was first published in 1611. This drew heavily on the work of Tyndale and others.

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So, under the good hand of God, the Bible has come down to us. May we each value it and learn from it. In the fourth century Athanasius wrote: ‘These are the fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied by the living words which they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of Godliness. Let no one add or take anything from them’.

## THE WILL OF GOD

**“And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may be able to prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God”**

Romans 12:2

I want to say something about the will of God. It is wonderful to think of being let in to the secrets of the Divine will. One blessed Man here below, even Jesus, loved that will, cost what it may. God has revealed Himself as a Trinity of three Persons, but I do not want to give the idea that one Person in the Godhead thinks of something and the other two concur with it. That is not the way. They each have the same thought at the same time! The greatest part of the present testimony is the knowledge of the three Persons in the Godhead. That was not known, and could not be, until Jesus came. There was a voice from heaven on the banks of the Jordan. “Thou art my beloved Son” (Mark 1:11): That was the Father speaking to the Son. Then Jesus on coming up from the Jordan is saluted by the Spirit. For the first time you see the Trinity named as together. They have a common will but it is put into operation by all three of Them. Remember what I said, I am not suggesting that one Person thinks, ‘We will do something’, and the others agree, like some kind of committee, but there is one thought and one will.

Romans 12 gives us the exhortation not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind so that we might prove what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. What a challenge it is. How easily we become conformed to the habits, dress and ways of the world. As believers we are to be on the side of the Nazarene, the One who is rejected here. That does not mean that we are miserable about it. We each need to call on the strength of God to keep us from being so like the world that people cannot tell the difference between a Christian and a person of the world. It is not that you think yourself superior, not at all. But there is to be a difference and it is to be seen.

“Be not conformed” is a very definite statement. Let us each make up our minds to consider whether the things we say and do have anything of the character of the world from which the Lord has delivered us. The Lord said of His own, “They are not of the world” (John 17:16). I would not want to be different from the world just for a medal, so to speak. Christians are different because our tastes are changed. As believers, we are to know the presence of the Lord and to get the perfume of heaven by the Spirit into our

lives and ways. If you follow that way, God will help you in a special way circumstantially.

The test is, whether we can be trusted when the circumstances are good! More often when things are hard we turn to God, but looking to God is to become a habit of soul. Let me encourage you to keep on with prayer. Do not let that go. "At my prayers", Paul could say (Romans 1:10) as though it was a definite time set aside when he thought of matters and brought them to God. We are told not to cease in prayer. What are your prayers like in secret? I find great pleasure to get away from everybody and know how to pray alone. Jesus had that exact experience. He prayed to His Father.

Then this matter of not being conformed to this world but being transformed by the renewal of the mind is to have a result. It leads us to prove something as to the will of God. We find in this passage in Romans 12, a threefold description of the will of God; it is: "good", "acceptable", and "perfect". You could not be a christian at all if you did not think the will of God was good. In the goodness of God you have been led to repentance, to start with. That is something, to get away from the aspirations of self and to feel what I really am in the presence of God and to name it as Paul did.

It is over the next point that we often fall. We recognise God's will as good but is it acceptable? Sometimes His ways are difficult to understand but His heart never changes toward us whether we have a poor idea or not about His will. There is a good deal of mystery in the ways of God but the great thing is to accept it. Let your own will go and delight in the will of God. Have to do with God, I beseech you. Do not judge Him by circumstances. The very times when all seems wrong and against you are the times when God is getting down to the depths in your heart, discovering things to yourself.

Then the end in view is perfection. The word 'perfect' in this Scripture means 'full grown'. God's operations are in view of what is mature. God is looking for that in each of us, whoever we maybe and whatever difficulties we may have. Perhaps a good analogy is a ship coming home in full sail. I would like to be like that. What maturity there will be in the church, untold millions all put together in the twinkling of an eye.

*Frank Woodford*

*Extract from an address*

## WORSHIP — PART 1

Many Christians tend to have very vague notions as to worship... True worship is the grateful and joyful response of the heart to God, when filled with a deep sense of the blessings that have been communicated from on high. The Holy Spirit causes the feelings produced by the revelation of God, of His glory, His love in Jesus and of all the blessings that He gives us, to respond to God in adoration. Surely, the heart full of the grace of God will find delight in rendering back to Him the homage of its adoration and gratitude for all these blessings which are so many proofs of the infinite and eternal love which He has for us... Worship then is the honour and adoration that is rendered to God, by reason of what He is in Himself, and what He is for those who respond with worship.

Worship is the employment of heaven; and it is a blessed and precious privilege for us upon earth to enter into it. One might add to the above definition, by describing it as rendered together with others.

In so speaking, I would not overlook the possibility of worship from an isolated individual. But it is not, therefore, the less true that worship is homage rendered together with others, whether by angels, or by men; hence communion in adoration is part of the essence of worship, because the blessing is a blessing common to all, and part of one's own joy is rejoicing in the blessing of others. The blessing of others forms part of the grace to which my heart responds and love is defective if I do not enjoy their blessing as well as my own.

Preaching the gospel to the unconverted is not worship. It may produce it, as being the means of communicating that knowledge of God in grace that awakens the spirit of adoration in the heart. The preaching itself (however blessed it may be) is not worship. [The more, however, we ourselves enjoy the spirit of worship, the better fitted we shall be to testify to others, for it is only in the intimacy of communion with God that we are fit to render suited testimony as to His love.]

Praises and thanksgivings, and the making mention of the attributes of God and of His acts, whether of power or in grace, in the attitude of adoration, constitute that which is, properly, worship. In it we draw near to God, and address ourselves to Him. The redeemed delight to have God Himself in their thoughts. They delight to address themselves to Him, to

to speak to Him, to adore Him personally, to converse with Him, to open the heart to Him, to tell Him that they love Him. They delight to speak to Him of the sense they have of His greatness and of His goodness. In this case the communion is between ourselves and God and God is more precious to us than are even our own brethren.

The honour and adoration to be rendered to God on the ground of what He is, and that which He is for us, must depend upon the revelation which He makes of Himself.

All that God is has been manifested at the cross; we can now enjoy God Himself as our portion according to His infinite love in Christ. Such is the basis of worship. In Christ sin is no longer ours since He has cleansed us from it, cleansed us by a work which could not possibly be done a second time, the efficacy of which is at once perfect and eternal. This alone gives freedom to the spiritual affections. For us God is perfect love, and He introduces us into "the light, as he is in the light". But who can fully enjoy that love if there be a bad conscience? Such a one may be attracted but he cannot find enjoyment in God's presence. His affections cannot have free play, if his conscience reproaches him with offences against the God who loves him. In such a case there would be fear in his soul. The heart must be free if the affections are to be moved. But the work of Christ cleanses the conscience, and the heart is set free by the knowledge of that perfect love of God, which He has for us, of which Christ is the proof and the fullness. The light of His holiness is thus the joy of our souls.

The relationship of God to the Church is presented to us in a most striking manner in the title the "God of our Lord Jesus Christ". This title has peculiar significance. When God is called the God of anyone, it indicates that a tie of intimacy is formed between that person and him who bears His name added to his own. It indicates a relationship based upon what God is to the one whose name He has thus assumed, and it implies a purpose to bless and honour according to that relationship. Such purpose of God must stand. God cannot be unfaithful and hence the relationship becomes the source of enjoyment, by faith, to him whose name is added to the name of God. This is illustrated in the title "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob". God placed Himself in relationship to them according to that which His name expressed. Thus the idea expressed in the title

“God of our Lord Jesus Christ” is what God is in relation to us because we, as believers, are made one with our Lord Jesus Christ, and are brought into the same relationship to God.

When this truth is understood, we can comprehend what a wondrous and glorious position is ours by virtue of this title – “God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory”. For here Christ is viewed as a man, as being the head of a new family, and as having ascended up to His God and to our God. The God to whom we draw near is, for us, all that He is for Christ, and Christ, having perfectly glorified God upon earth, has entered into His presence. He is the beloved Son, in whom we are accepted, and in whom God is always well pleased. This truth stands out in full prominence in chapters 1 and 2 of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

And you, says Paul, who were dead in trespasses and sins, He has made us to live together with Him – raised up together, and made to sit in heavenly places in Christ, in order that He might show, in the ages to come, what are the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2). What are the relationships that God has with Christ Jesus? Who can tell of the love of God towards Christ? What claims He has upon the affection of His Father! Now all that is His is made ours in Him. What a wondrous place then is ours in the presence of God! Even the glory that God has given to Him, He has given to us, in order that the world may know that we are loved, even as He is loved (John 17:22-23). We are “in Christ”. That is our position before God.

But there is yet another truth connected with the work of Christ, on which worship necessarily hangs. Not only has Christ borne away our sin, cleansed us from all defilement, and made us fit for the presence of God, but, in order that we may enjoy the blessed reality, He has gained for us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Not only do we, when being born again, receive a new nature, which is holy and capable of sentiments suitable to the position in which grace has placed us before God, but we receive the Holy Spirit, who reveals and communicates to us divine things, and inspires sentiments which those divine things should awaken. We are strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man, in order that, being rooted and grounded in love, Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, and that we may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth,

and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God (Ephesians 3:16-19). The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us (Romans 5:5). He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us; the Lord says, "All things that the Father has are mine". This brings out the greatness of what the Holy Spirit reveals to us (John 16:15; 17:10).

That which eye has not seen, which ear has not heard, which came not into the heart of man – the things which God has prepared for him whom He loves – God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

The Holy Spirit is "the unction" which we receive of God, by which "we know the things which are freely given to us of God" (1 Corinthians 2:12); by which we "know all things" (1 John 2:20). He is the seal which God has put upon us unto the day of redemption; God has set His appropriating mark for that day of glory on those who believe. The Holy Spirit is also "the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession". He gives us the full assurance of the efficacy of the work of Christ. He imparts to us the knowledge of the position in which we are placed, as cleansed by the blood of the Saviour and therefore without spot in the sight of God. The Holy Spirit sheds the love of God — from which all these blessings have flowed — abroad in our hearts. He is the originator in us of all the thoughts and of all the affections that respond to this love. But He is more than all this for us. We read, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:17). This is not an imagination, it is a fact. The same Spirit, whose fulness is in Christ, abides in us, and we are united to Christ as members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones (Ephesians 5:30). By one Spirit we have all been baptised, that we might be one body (1 Corinthians 12:13). Not only is He the power, the link, of this union, but He gives us the consciousness of it. "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20)....

Knowing what God is, and what He is for us, we render Him worship responsive to the revelation which He has made of Himself.

But there remains yet another element of our intelligent service – the character of "the Father". God must be worshipped "in spirit and in

truth” for He is a Spirit, but it is as the Father that He “seeketh such to worship Him”.

To worship “in spirit” is to worship according to the true nature of God, and in the power of that communion which the Spirit of God gives. Spiritual worship is thus in contrast with the forms and ceremonies and all the religiousness of which the flesh is capable.

To worship God “in truth” is to worship Him according to the revelation which He has given of Himself.

The Samaritans worshipped God neither in spirit nor in truth. The Jews worshipped God in truth, so far as this can be said of the limited revelation of God that applied in Old Testament times, but there was no sense in which they worshipped in spirit. Now to worship God both are needful. He is to be worshipped according to the true revelation of Himself (that is “in truth”), and according to His nature (that is “in spirit”).

Then the Father seeks such worshippers. It is grace that makes worshippers now. Worship, therefore, is not rendered under a responsibility imposed by the flames of Mount Sinai, which, while demanding worship in the name of the holy majesty of the Lord, placed a barrier in the way of access to God, which no one could pass, under penalty of death. That barrier left the worshipper far off from God, trembling under the sense of responsibility, even though they were encouraged by the benefits received from Him whom they dared not approach. How different is our position. Love seeks worshippers, but it seeks them under the gentle name of “Father”. It places them in a position of freedom before Him as the children of His love. The Spirit, who acts in them and produces worship, is the “Spirit of adoption” which cries, “Abba, Father”. It is not that God has lost His majesty but that He, whose majesty is far better known, is known also under the more tender and loving character of the Father. The Spirit, who leads to worship the Father, leads us also into the knowledge and enjoyment of all the love of God, who would have us to worship Him as His children...

“I write these things unto you”, says John, addressing himself to the little children in Christ, “because ye have known the Father” (1 John 2:13). The feeblest Christian is therefore perfectly competent for worship...The simple fact that God is our Father, and that we possess the enjoyment of

such a relationship with Him by the Spirit, is in itself an immeasurable privilege for creatures such as we are. Every child of God has this privilege...but it is in Christ, and with Christ that we possess it...

What grace in Him! And what a position for us! The very glory which is given to us is presented to us by the Saviour as a proof of this love. "The glory", said He, in John 17, "which thou hast given unto me, I have given unto them...that the world may know that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me". Such is His affection towards us, that He desires that we may enjoy the Father's love. So Christ renders us capable of this enjoyment by revealing to us the Father's name. "I have declared", says He in the same chapter, "thy name unto the men thou gavest me out of the world; ...and I will declare it, in order that the love wherewith thou lovest me, may be in them, and I in them". Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus (see 1 John 1:3). This fellowship expresses itself in adoration towards Him who is revealed, and towards Him who reveals.

It will be easily seen how the work of Christ is the foundation of all this blessedness, whether in order to introduce us without spot and without fear into the presence of the God whom we adore, or in order to place us in the relationship of children towards the Father. It was after His resurrection that Christ could say, "I ascend to my Father, and to your Father; to my God, and your God". Then it was that He could say, "Go to my brethren" (John 20:17). Now in the present time, the Spirit that He gives from on high answers to this blessing. He is both "the Spirit of adoption" and the Spirit of liberty. We are "accepted in the beloved", and we enjoy a redemption which has "made us the righteousness of God in him", and therefore placed us in God's presence without a spot or stain of defilement.

These then are the great foundations of christian worship.

*J. N. Darby*

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