



Open Bible Learning

Bible Reading Plan—weeks 9-12

This document is the third in a series of fourteen that provides guidance notes in four week portions for a whole year Bible Reading Plan.

The daily portions have been selected to bring the foundation truths of God's plan and purpose before you in a way that makes them clear and straightforward.

These notes conclude the consideration of the books of Genesis and Matthew and begin looking at Acts of the Apostles and Exodus.

Chapter

Week	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
9 Matthew	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
10 Genesis	43	45	46	47	48	49	50
11 Acts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12 Exodus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The sections of the reading plan and notes are uploaded to the website at www.openbiblelearning.com/brp10 every 4 weeks.

We would always encourage thoughtful questioning and comparison of anything that anyone says about the Bible with the Bible itself. You should treat this notes in the same way, so if you have any questions about what they say please send them to openbiblelearning@hotmail.com

We hope you enjoy your Bible Study

Week 9

Introduction

These final chapters of Matthew record events in Jerusalem during the last week of Jesus' life. We read of him in conflict with the religious rulers of the Jews who were unable to meet his arguments based as they were on God's word in their scriptures. They were incensed against him and, despite being unable to bring any legitimate charge against him, they falsely accused him and persuaded the Roman governor to crucify him, an innocent man. However, Christ knew that this was in accord with God's scheme of salvation and therefore he submitted himself to his Father's will and was obedient even unto death on the cross. He knew beforehand what was going to happen and he forewarned his disciples not only of his being murdered by his enemies but also what would happen in the years following.



Nazareth in Galilee

Week 9

Matthew 22

Sunday

Jesus' parable of the marriage feast well illustrates God's purpose with his people, Israel, who made light of his call v.5 to the marriage feast of his Son v.2, so the invitation was extended to everyone in the world v.9. In due course the King took action against his recalcitrant people, and two specific events are represented: the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70 when the Jews' city was burned up v.7; and the return of Christ at the time of "the wedding feast" when judgment will be executed v.11.

The Jewish rulers rejected Jesus' teaching and attempted to trap him into making statements they could use to convict him. The Pharisees

and Herodians tried a trick question concerning taxes vs.16-22, hoping to cause him to fall foul of either the Roman authorities or the Jews, but Jesus avoided the trap and taught them a valuable lesson on duty to God and man. The Sadducees, the ruling Jewish sect who denied the resurrection, put to him an hypothetical case of a woman with seven husbands vs.23-28. In his answer Jesus showed the Sadducees' true position before God and the reasons for their unbelief: they knew neither the scriptures nor the power of God v.29. The same two causes prevent people today from believing the resurrection: they are ignorant of the Bible and they limit God's power. Jesus cited evidence from the scriptures for the resurrection vs.31-32 and he himself would be raised from the dead by God's power to give all men the assurance that they too could be raised to immortality and become equal to the angels.

This verbal trouncing of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees, normally bitter rivals, led to their co-operation to effect Jesus' death v.34. One of these, a lawyer, put a further question to Jesus which prompted him to declare the two vital commandments which encompass all God's law: love God with all our being, and love our neighbour as ourselves, vs.37-40.

Following these challenges to Jesus, he asked the Pharisees concerning the prophecy in Psalm 110 v.1 which expressed a thousand years beforehand God's words to Jesus when he went to Heaven after his resurrection: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool" v.44. Here David called the Messiah who is his descendant "Lord", a title which no Jewish father would use to address his son. The Pharisees were unable to explain this v.46 but the simple answer is that while Christ is the son of David through his mother he is nevertheless David's Lord because he is also the Son of God.

Week 9

Matthew 23

Monday

The Pharisees were the most influential sect among the Jews and were the administrators of God's law to the people. Jesus taught the Jews to keep this law, but not to follow the practices of these hypocrites. They put heavy burdens on the people by the imposition of grievous regulations v.4 while they themselves sought, not God's glorification, but their own vs.5-15, and distorted God's laws for their own benefit. For example, God required the people to pay a tenth

(tithe) of their crops v.23 as provision for the priests, and the Pharisees enforced this law rigorously, even applying it to the minutest herbs. But while they were fastidious about the minutiae of the law they discarded the vital virtues enshrined in that law, such as justice, mercy and faith v.23.

This condemnation by Jesus of apparently very religious people should serve as a serious warning to all those who claim to be religious, especially in view of the retribution pronounced on the Pharisees: “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” v.33. “Hell” here is “Gehenna” in the original Greek, the valley south of Jerusalem used for burning rubbish and a metaphor for the judgments of God. Indeed all Jerusalem would soon be burnt by fire at the hands of the Romans, the prospect of which caused Jesus to weep v.37.

Neither God nor Jesus wished for Jerusalem’s destruction, nor for its inhabitants to suffer, but these calamities came because the people continually sinned and refused God’s exhortations to return to him in righteousness v.37. Better and glorious times will, nevertheless, come to the city when Jesus returns from heaven and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will then cry: “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” v.39.

Week 9

Matthew 24

Tuesday

Jesus knew that the destruction of Jerusalem would soon take place and he told his disciples of it: “See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” v.2. They naturally wanted to know when this would take place, i.e. the time of the end of that Jewish era, for the word “world” in the original Greek is “age”.

Jesus was able to answer their questions because, inspired by God, he knew of events to take place both in the near and distant future. He warned his disciples that many followers would be deceived and turn away from the truth vs.4-5; that they themselves would be persecuted, causing betrayal and hatred among the disciples, with false prophets arising, iniquity abounding, and the love of many turning cold vs.9-12. Therefore, they would require to endure in the faith v.13. In the wider world the peace of those days maintained throughout the Empire by the Roman Legions would come to an end,

and natural disasters would disrupt the tranquillity of those times v.7. But this would not be the end of the age v.6; only the beginning of sorrows v.8. On the other hand the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the (Roman) world before the end of the Jewish age v.14, giving the people of many nations the opportunity of salvation.

The rest of the New Testament, as well as the writings of contemporary secular historians, records the events before A.D.70 which fulfilled these words of Jesus. For example, the apostle Paul writing to believers in Colosse declared: "the word of the truth of the gospel is come unto you, as it is in all the world" 1:5-6. About forty years after Jesus spoke these words, the Jews revolted against Rome, resulting in their defeat by the Legions, Jerusalem and its temple being destroyed, and the Jews being taken away captive and scattered throughout the nations of the Empire.

Jesus gave his disciples a specific sign to watch for which, if they took heed, would enable them to save their lives by fleeing into the hills of Judea v.16. This sign was related to a prophecy through Daniel given six hundred years earlier v.15 (Dan.9:27) to be fulfilled when the Romans placed their idolatrous images and abominations in the Most Holy place of God's house in Jerusalem. The disciples, observing this sign, were to flee immediately vs.17-18, and history records how faithful Christians obeyed Christ's instructions and saved themselves from the Roman onslaught.

Jesus also told his disciples to watch the signs in the political heavens v.29 because the luminaries of the Jewish world would be eclipsed. He urged all his disciples to watch the signs of the times, not only those living in the first century but also those living in remoter ages. These include even disciples living today for, he said, developments in the political heavens would also herald his return v.30 when his faithful followers, both living and dead, would be gathered to him v.31. The parable of Jesus v.32 employs a symbolism common in the Bible in which trees represent nations and, in particular, the fig tree represents Israel. When the fig tree begins to put forth its leaves, summer is near - so when Israel once more flourishes among the nations we know that the summertime of world history is close at hand. Since the First World War we have observed the gradual return of the Jews to their own land and in 1948 the formation of the State of Israel. Many prophecies in the Bible speak of the

experiences of Israel in our own times, giving us encouragement to anticipate the early return of Jesus to re-establish God's kingdom in Israel.

We can watch the signs of the times and, while not knowing exact dates v.36, we can be alert to the appearing of Christ. He says we should be enlightened by the scriptures and be aware of events in the world which demonstrate the hand of God at work among the nations. Thus we should be prepared for his intervention in world affairs, just as Noah was in his day v.37. Most people in Noah's time were ignorant of God's word, carrying on their normal pursuits completely unaware of impending judgment, and were taken completely by surprise. Christ's command is to "Watch!" v.42, for even nominal Christians will be taken unawares, with the resultant weeping and gnashing of teeth v.51. Therefore, we should take heed to ourselves and be watchful and ready so that we may be commended by Christ as wise and faithful servants: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods" vs.45-47.

Week 9

Matthew 25

Wednesday

The exhortation of Jesus to his disciples that they should be ready and prepared for his coming is emphasised by his parables in this chapter. Frequently in scripture, Jesus' return from heaven is likened to a bridegroom coming to his wedding, as in the first parable. A common practice was for bridesmaids to go out to meet the bridegroom with their lamps burning, and often having to wait long into the night. The bridesmaids represent the disciples of Christ, most of whom will be sleeping the sleep of death when he returns. Then they will awake from the grave, conscious they are about to meet their Lord. The wise among them will be those whose minds are full of the word of God, represented by the oil in the lamps, and who are ready and prepared and therefore able to go immediately with Jesus into the wedding feast v.10. The foolish, who in their lifetime neglected God's word, will find themselves shut out vs.11-12. Here is a powerful exhortation to fill our minds with the word of God, to let our light shine before men, and to be ever ready for Christ's coming: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of

man cometh" v.13.

In the second parable Jesus likens himself going to heaven to a man taking a journey into a far country and his disciples' duties in his absence to commercial trading v.14. His servants who faithfully perform his instructions will be commended by him and invited to enter into God's kingdom and experience the joy of that future age: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" v.21. The disobedient will, however, be rejected v.30.

The critical moment in the purpose of God, when the everlasting destiny of individuals will be pronounced, is at the return of Christ from heaven. This is the event to which all history has been leading: "from the foundation of the world". Then, those who have made the effort to determine the will of God expressed in the scriptures will be invited by Jesus to enter God's kingdom: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" vs.31,33,34.

A principal requirement of Christ is that his followers bless and care for fellow disciples in need, even accounting that such benevolence is done to himself: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" v.40. Those who neglect this requirement will be classed as wicked and will suffer everlasting death in the grave vs.45-46. But he will class as righteous those who obey this command, and they will enter into life eternal v.46, after receiving his welcoming invitation v.34.

Week 9

Matthew 26

Thursday

Jesus knew that he would be betrayed v.2 because the scriptures had spoken of it beforehand. For example the Psalms, written one thousand years before the event, spoke of his betrayal: "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" Psa.41:9. The very thoughts of Jesus and his anguish caused by his friend's betrayal were written beforehand: "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I

could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company” Psa.55:12-14. The amount of the blood money was also foretold: “And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver” Zech.11:12. Jesus identified the betrayer at his last supper when he also instituted a feast to be kept by his disciples. This consists of bread and wine to represent his body broken and his blood shed for them, and he asked them to remember him during his absence by partaking of this feast regularly until he returns. Then, he said, he would once more eat and drink with them in the re-established kingdom of Israel which will be his Father’s kingdom v.29.

This chapter records the fulfilment of many Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus’ trial and death which were fulfilled exactly, including the specific actions of different people during this crisis: Judas Iscariot betraying Jesus vs.14-15,47-49; the rest of the disciples running away and forsaking him v.56; Peter denying him vs.69-74; the rulers of the Jews bringing false charges against him to condemn him to death v.59; false witnesses twisting his words to concoct a charge against him vs.60-61; and the Jewish judiciary spitting at and smiting him v.67. Jesus knew from the scriptures that these events would occur, culminating in his death by crucifixion, and he was understandably fearful when anticipating what was ahead of him: “Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me” v.38. Therefore he prayed to his Father that he might be spared these agonies, but only if it was possible in accordance with God’s will because he knew that keeping this was imperative. “He fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” v.39. The intensity of Jesus’ feeling is indicated by his expressing this same prayer three times, but afterwards he set his face determinedly to do God’s will in laying down his life.

The Jews could not accept that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God v.63, i.e. the one promised by the LORD who, born of a virgin, would be both God’s Son and the son of David, destined to sit on David’s throne in Jerusalem reigning over Israel. When they asked him

concerning this directly under oath, Jesus answered in the affirmative by the colloquialism of the day: “Thou hast said”, and assured them that in due course they would see him both coming in the clouds of heaven and sitting on the right hand of power v.64.

Week 9

Matthew 27

Friday

Judas Iscariot very quickly realised he had “betrayed the innocent blood” v.4 and tried to rectify his treachery by approaching the Jewish rulers v.3. When he failed, he hanged himself v.5. The Jewish leaders were not interested in Jesus’ innocence but were determined to have him destroyed v.1. They had no authority under the Romans to execute a prisoner and so they took Jesus before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, charging him with making himself a king and, in effect, challenging Caesar. Pilate asked Jesus directly: “Art thou the King of the Jews?”, to which Jesus affirmed: “Thou sayest” v.11. Pilate recognised Jesus was innocent of the charges concocted by the Jews and attempted to release him. When, however, he failed to persuade the mob to accept Jesus’ release and, lacking the courage to act independently, he washed his hands of the matter v.24. Pilate committed Jesus to be crucified, before which he was brutally assaulted being scourged, mocked, spitted upon, and smitten about the head vs.26-30. His tormentors’ derision was provoked by Jesus’ claim to be the King of the Jews v.29, and this indictment was published above his cross: “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.” v.37. The details of Jesus’ crucifixion were, remarkably, recorded a thousand years earlier in Psalm 22, including his last words v.46 (Psa.22:1) and the Roman soldiers sharing his clothes and gambling to divide his robe among them v.35 (Psa.22:18). Only God could so accurately declare this hundreds of years in advance, so that these and many other prophecies reassure us that the scriptures are truly the word of the living God.

As Jesus died he expired, i.e. he breathed out his last breath v.50, “ghost” being the Anglo-Saxon word for breath. At that moment the veil of the temple, separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place, was rent in two v.51, and this is highly significant because the design of the temple specifically represented God’s purpose in Christ. The Most Holy represented the immortal state and the veil represented the barrier of flesh which had to be overcome that entry into immortality could be possible. Jesus, by his death, opened up

this way to incorruptibility and, by his resurrection, brought life and immortality to light.

Week 9

Matthew 28

Saturday

After three days in the tomb, Jesus awoke from the sleep of death and his body was changed into incorruptibility and immortality. This chapter describes how certain women among his disciples coming to his tomb found it empty and were informed by an angel that he had risen v.6. Later the same day, the first day of the week, Jesus met with his disciples, giving them overwhelming evidence and absolute assurance that it was he himself alive again. This was not an illusion or wishful thinking on their part, but the real experience of being in the company again of the same man who had been crucified three days earlier.

Many theories have been proposed by unbelievers to undermine this fact of Christ's resurrection, and people are often confused by false ideas of ghosts and spirits and immortal souls. Nevertheless, there were a great many individual witnesses to the fact that the very same Jesus, whose daily company they had enjoyed for more than three years, was alive again and with them. They talked with him, ate with him, and touched him v.9, and were with him for forty more days before he left them again. The Jews tried to explain away Jesus' resurrection by planting a story that the disciples had stolen his body v.13, even though they themselves had set a guard to prevent that very thing happening. This and many other false theories have been spread to undermine the truth of Christ's resurrection but it is a first principle of Jesus' teaching and, while even Christian professors may say "There is no resurrection of the dead" (1Cor.15:12), true disciples of Jesus rejoice in the word of God, saying: "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" 1Cor.15:20.

Jesus commanded his apostles to go to all the nations of their world and teach them the gospel, to baptize believers, and instruct them to observe his commandments vs.19-20. Accordingly, the consistent teaching of the apostles throughout the New Testament is that those only will be saved from sin and death who believe the gospel of the kingdom of God, are totally immersed in water, and thereafter live lives of obedience to Christ's commandments.

Week 10**Introduction**

This week we read to the end of the book of Genesis in which is recorded Israel's emigration from the promised land to Egypt, according to God's word to Abraham many years previously. We see the hand of God at work, invisible to most people but visible to the faithful, bringing events to pass according to his purpose. In particular, we read of the salvation of the world through Joseph, foreshadowing the greater salvation to be effected through Christ. "Salvation", said Jesus, "is of the Jews" Joh.4:22, and in this record we see how God's hand acted particularly on behalf of his own people of Israel. Some of these, including Jacob and Joseph, manifested that faith which is pleasing to God. They fully believed what the LORD had promised concerning the promised land so that, whatever benefit accrued to them in Egypt, their hopes were firmly fixed on the land of their inheritance and on the future when they would receive it.

Week 10**Genesis 43****Sunday**

Jacob's sons had returned to him in Canaan with food from Egypt but before long, with the famine so severe, they found themselves again in desperate need of food. The simple solution was another excursion into Egypt, but Jacob was fearful of the consequences. The great man in Egypt had shown inexplicable interest in Benjamin's welfare and would not supply food if they returned without him. This ruler had already imprisoned Simeon and there was every possibility that, if Benjamin went to Egypt with his brothers, Jacob would never see him again. This would be overwhelmingly distressful for him because he had already lost Joseph and he would not be able to bear the loss of his only other son by his beloved Rachel. But God's hand was at work.

The famine continued so that eventually Jacob had no choice but to send his sons back to Egypt, this time with Benjamin, taking presents to appease the Egyptian ruler. Jacob did not know that this was his son Joseph, and neither did Joseph's brothers when they met with him again. Joseph, however, recognised them and was overwhelmed with emotion at seeing his full brother Benjamin for the first time in twenty-two years, but he hid his reaction until he had caused his brothers to experience further adversity. This record is particularly

interesting to those who anticipate the return of Jesus, for he will not only receive the children of Israel whose fathers rejected him long ago, but will also have great love to those whom he will recognise as his very own brothers and sisters.

Week 10

Genesis 45

Monday

At last Joseph made himself known to his brethren. They, of course, were greatly shocked, especially as they remembered their previous treatment of him, and were terrified of his probable retribution. However, Joseph comforted them by explaining that all these events happened in the course of God's purpose: "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" vs.4-5,7-8. As Joseph is typical of Christ, these words are also expressive of the salvation effected through him. Jesus is the one sent by God "to save lives by a great deliverance". God made Joseph "lord of all Egypt" v.9 and "a ruler of all the land of Egypt" v.8, and he will also make Jesus a great lord and the ruler of the whole world.

When his sons brought him news of Joseph being alive and a ruler in Egypt, Jacob's spirit revived v.27 and he prepared to leave Canaan to go into Egypt with all his family and household to spend his remaining years with his beloved Joseph. A careful inspection of the detail of God's word reveals interesting facets of his providence. For example, the period of time from the entry of Abraham into the promised land to the Exodus when his descendants returned from Egypt was 430 years (Gal.3:17), a period divided exactly into two equal periods by Jacob's emigration, so that Abraham's family was 215 years in the promised land and 215 years in Egypt. Similarly, we discover that Jacob and Joseph lived together in the promised land for seventeen years before Joseph was sold into Egypt, and they lived together in Egypt also for seventeen years before Jacob's death. Only God could arrange such symmetry.

Week 10

Genesis 46

Tuesday

Jacob's father, Isaac, when contemplating going to Egypt during a

time of famine, was told to remain in the promised land where God would care for him and eventually give him all of it (26:2-5). Consequently Jacob, the inheritor of the same promise, was reluctant to leave the land for Egypt. When he came therefore to Beersheba, the southernmost city of the land, he offered sacrifices to the LORD and received assurance that God would care for him in Egypt and that, although he would die there, his descendants would all return in due course to the promised land: "I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes" vs.3-4.

Jacob then proceeded on his way into Egypt, taking with him all the members of his family who are named in this chapter and who totalled seventy. We might wonder why we are given this information, but one of the remarkable features of the Bible is the way in which God demonstrates that his dealings with mankind are closely related to his purpose with Israel, and this is an example. The scriptures say: "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" Deut.32:8. And so we find (Gen.10) that the number of nations into which the descendants of Noah were divided, to correspond to the number of Israel many years later, was seventy.

Arriving in Egypt, Jacob had an emotional reunion with his beloved son, Joseph, who prepared him to meet Pharaoh. Jacob was advised to emphasise that he and his family were shepherds because this would engage Pharaoh's empathy even though "every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians" v.34. The explanation is revealed in the history of Egypt for, at that time, the country was ruled by "shepherd kings", non-Egyptians who had established the Hyksos dynasty, Hyksos meaning "foreign rulers".

Week 10

Genesis 47

Wednesday

As Joseph had anticipated, Pharaoh effusively welcomed a fellow Semite shepherd into his land and gave him Goshen, at the north eastern delta of the Nile, for his family v.6. He also sought Jacob's help in keeping his own flocks, a problem for him because of the Egyptians' hatred of sheep, so there was a high degree of empathy towards Jacob and his family. Asked by Pharaoh as to his age,

Jacob told him he one hundred and thirty years old v.9. This seems a great age to us but Jacob recognised that it was just a short “pilgrimage” relative to the eternal life which he, like his father and grandfather, looked forward to enjoying in the land of promise. His days had been relatively few and they had been evil, but he knew that when he inherited the land he would enjoy the fruit of righteousness, even everlasting joy and peace.

Through the subsequent five years of famine, Joseph continued to administer successfully the food in storehouses with the result that Pharaoh became the owner of all the land of Egypt and obtained the right to a fifth of all the produce of the land. Israel also greatly prospered in those and subsequent years so that they “had possessions in the land of Goshen, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly” v.27. After seventeen years in Egypt, Jacob died at the age of one hundred and forty seven. To the very end of his life Jacob maintained his faith in God’s promises and knew that he would be raised from the dead when he would live again, and for ever, in the land of promise. Therefore, in an outward show of his faith, he gave Joseph commandment that his body should be buried, not in that foreign land of Egypt, but with his fathers in the land of promise v.3

Week 10

Genesis 48

Thursday

In those days fathers blessed their sons before dying, and this is especially significant in the case of these men of God because, guided by God’s spirit, they expressed the outworking of the LORD’s purpose. “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph” Heb.11:20-21. Manasseh was the elder son and Joseph brought him to Jacob’s right hand that he might receive the superior blessing v.13 but Jacob crossed his arms so that his right hand was on Ephraim’s head. When Joseph noticed this change he objected but Jacob insisted that the blessing go to the younger son. This is a recurring feature of the bestowal of God’s blessing - going, not to the elder son entitled to it by fleshly descent, but to the younger. This is to repudiate the flesh and to emphasise that the blessings of God are bestowed according to his will.

Ephraim means “fruitful”, being called this because when he was born Joseph acknowledged that God had made him fruitful in the land of Egypt (ch.41:52), and Ephraim would be blessed above his brother

v.20. The descendants of these two sons of Joseph would obtain a double portion in the promised land vs.21-22. And so it transpired: Joseph became, not just one tribe in Israel, but two, Ephraim and Manasseh, both of whom developed large populations and occupied extensive lands, thus fulfilling the word of God.

Week 10

Genesis 49

Friday

Before dying, Jacob blessed all his twelve sons and, by God's inspiration, revealed what would befall them "in the last days" v.1 in the purpose of God. We are able to trace the fulfilment of these prophecies in the later experiences of the twelve tribes but, because Jesus was an Israelite and God's purpose is in him, those prophecies which relate specifically to him are of most interest to us.

Judah is identified as the royal tribe to whom the others would bow and who would be victorious over his enemies v.8, therefore Jesus was born, through Mary, into this tribe. He is specifically referred to here by the title "Shiloh" v.10 being the one through whom God would speak his word, and he would also be the one, when he reigns in Israel, to raise up Judah. There is also a reference to his riding into Jerusalem upon an ass v.11 as he did when the common people proclaimed: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" Mat.21:9, acknowledging him as king of Israel.

Jesus was not only a son of a woman but also the Son of God, and this is foretold in the prophecy concerning Joseph. Joseph was made strong by the God of Jacob, and "from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel" v.24. The reason for information about Christ being given in Joseph's blessing is that he became the inheritor of the birthright (1Chron.5:2) and also because Joseph's life was an enacted parable of Jesus'. Christ was, like Joseph, separate from his brethren v.26, made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob v.24 being the son of man God made strong for himself (Psa.80:17), the one designated throughout the scriptures as the shepherd and stone of Israel v.24, and the one upon whom abundant blessings will be poured vs.25-26.

However, before the glory would come the suffering. In this suffering, members of certain tribes played a significant role, notably Judas Iscariot and the priests of the tribe of Levi. Therefore, in blessing Simeon and Levi vs.5-7, Jacob looked, not just at their past but also

at their behaviour in “the last days” of the Mosaic age v.1 when Christ suffered at their hands. As “instruments of cruelty... in their anger they slew a man”, before which they gathered together to plot Christ’s death: “O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour be not thou united. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel” vs.5-7. Therefore these tribes were divided and scattered in Israel v.7, with Simeon being given land only within Judah’s territory and Levi receiving no land at all, only cities among the other tribes.

Week 10

Genesis 50

Saturday

Jacob had charged his sons to bury him in the promised land, and they discharged this duty. Afterwards Joseph’s brothers were fearful that he would then do them harm, retaliating against them for the evil that they had done to him. But Joseph wept before them, reassuring them that he would continue to care for them, because all the evil they had done was ultimately for good in the purpose of God, even to save many peoples’ lives: “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” v.20. This has its counterpart in the near future at the return of Christ when the Jews, being brought before him, will be fearful of him whom their fathers crucified long ago, for “they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him” Zech.12:10. But Jesus will comfort them just as Joseph did: “Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them” v.21.



Week 11

Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles was written by Luke, under inspiration of God, as a continuation of his Gospel record which he calls his “former treatise” 1:1. This book records vital details of the activities of Jesus’ apostles as they obeyed his command: “Go ye into all the (Roman) world, and preach the gospel to every creature” Mar.16:15

The account is addressed to Theophilus, meaning “lover of God”, and all those who do love the LORD are keenly interested in this record because it tells us what the first Christians believed, their obedience to Christ’s commandments, and how the Church was established and

developed. This book, therefore, forms an indispensable guide for those who wish to receive the salvation of God offered through Christ.

Week 11

The Acts of the Apostles 1

Sunday

Luke begins this account with Jesus' resurrection of which he gave his disciples "infallible proofs" by showing himself alive v.3. After being raised from the grave, Jesus met with his disciples over a period of forty days, during which he conversed with them and ate with them, so there was no doubt that the same Jesus who had been crucified was alive again from the dead. It is instructive to observe that, after spending three and a half years with them preaching the gospel of the kingdom, he also devoted these last days with them "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" v.3. Jesus, making God's kingdom the topic of conversation in those last moments with his friends, emphasised the importance of this subject which is the substance of the gospel and which must be believed for salvation.

The disciples knew from Jesus' teaching, and from the scriptures, that God will re-establish his kingdom which existed long ago in the land of Israel. As the coming kingdom will be so marvellous they naturally wanted it to be set up immediately. Consequently "when they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" v.6. God has appointed a day, still future, when he will certainly re-establish his kingdom, but those disciples were not to know when, for "the Father hath put the times and seasons in his own power" v.7.

On the final day, as they were talking together, Jesus ascended to heaven in their sight until a cloud hid him from view v.9, whereupon two angels reassured them that "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" v.11. The return of Jesus to the earth could hardly be expressed in clearer or more emphatic terms; and it is this event for which faithful disciples of Christ long because it is only when he returns that the kingdom of God will be restored to Israel, all nations will be blessed, and the faithful will receive everlasting life.

This record in *Acts* emphasises the fact that both the events of those days, when Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead, and those to occur when the kingdom of God is re-established, are detailed beforehand in the Old Testament. For example, the treachery of Judas Iscariot: "This scripture must needs be fulfilled, which the Holy

Spirit by the mouth of David spake concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus” v.16. Peter was referring to such passages, written a thousand years earlier, as Psalm 55 vs.12-14, and the apostles were guided by the prophecy in Psalm 69 v.25 that Judas’ office should be taken by another v.20. Therefore they appointed Matthias from among those who had been with them from the beginning and could bear witness to the work and resurrection of Christ vs.21-22.

Week 11

The Acts of the Apostles 2

Monday

Jesus had commanded his apostles to remain in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49), and fifty days after Jesus’ crucifixion, on the day of Pentecost, this power descended upon them v.2 and they were filled with the Holy Spirit v.4. Jesus’ commission to them was to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God to all peoples and therefore they were given, by the power of God, the ability to speak languages they had never learned. They were immediately able to speak in foreign tongues to Jews attending the feast from many parts of the Roman Empire who heard the disciples speak in their own mother tongues v.8. Fifteen different languages are identified here in which the disciples spoke “the wonderful works of God” v.11. It is important to note that the apostles, inspired by God, spoke existing foreign languages and expressed intelligible ideas, because many people today claim to have the same gift but merely utter unintelligible gibberish.

The explanation of this phenomenon, given by Peter, was that they had received God’s power, fulfilling a prophecy through the prophet Joel that God would pour out his Spirit upon men and women to enable them to prophesy and do wonders vs.16-19 and that this would happen “in the last days” before the Jewish political heavens were destroyed v.19-20. Joel prophesied in the same place that “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” v.21. This therefore was the apostles’ work: to use the power of God to prove their message came from him and to encourage men and women to save their lives by responding positively to that message. It is interesting that, in the prophecy of Joel, God likens the pouring out of his Holy Spirit to the early and latter rains which fall in Israel. The early rain enables the seed to be sown while the latter rain enables the crops to be reaped, and this metaphor identifies the two distinct eras in which God’s power would be given to men: firstly, in the days

of the apostles when the seed of the word was scattered in the earth; and secondly, when the harvest of the earth takes place at the return of the Lord Jesus.

Peter told these Jews about Jesus: that he was a man approved of God among them by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of them v.22; that his crucifixion was “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” v.23; and that he was raised from the dead by God v.24 as prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures. As an example of these prophecies he cited Psalm 16 which expressed the mind of Christ a thousand years before the event: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (the grave), neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life (by resurrection)” vs.25-28. After his resurrection Jesus was exalted to God’s right hand in heaven, which again Peter proved from the Psalms: “The LORD said unto my Lord (Jesus), Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool” vs.34-35 and Psalm 110:1. Peter therefore forcefully declared that “the same Jesus whom they had crucified, God had made both Lord and Christ” v.36.

These Jews became greatly distressed at the realisation that they had rejected the Messiah and had been responsible for the crucifixion of the LORD’s anointed, and therefore they demanded of the apostles: “What shall we do?” v.37. It was Peter who answered this question because it was to him that Jesus had given the keys of the kingdom. Peter could unlock the way of salvation for them, and he did so in accordance with Jesus’ instruction that “whosoever believes the gospel and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). He therefore answered: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ” v.38.

About three thousand souls “that gladly received his word were baptized” v.41 and ever since then all true disciples of Jesus have gladly received the apostles’ teaching, been baptized, and thereafter “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” v.42.

Week 11

The Acts of the Apostles 3

Tuesday

The apostles, endowed with God’s power, were able to perform the most extraordinary miracles to demonstrate their message was from the Lord. They immediately healed man lame from birth who was a familiar sight, begging at the gate of the temple. He sought alms from

Peter and John but Peter told him: “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” v.6. Then, as Peter lifted him up with his right hand, his disability disappeared. Up to that moment he had never walked. No wonder he then leaped up and went “with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God”!

This spectacle excited the multitudes attending worship in the temple, enabling Peter to tell them that the healing was by God’s power in the name of Jesus v.16, the one whom they had pressured the Roman governor into crucifying v.13. Remarkably, they had killed the Prince of life v.15 and desired the release of a destroyer of life. But all this was in accordance with God’s purpose, as was also Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, for “those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled” v.18. This was a vital lesson for them to learn, and for us today, that God had declared beforehand in the Old Testament scriptures the life and work of his Son through whose suffering, death and resurrection mankind will be saved.

In the same way, future events are detailed in the Old Testament; events which we can anticipate being fulfilled exactly as God has spoken. Therefore Peter exhorted them to reform their lives so they will benefit when the Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven to restore the kingdom to Israel and to forgive the sins of his people, giving them eternal life: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” vs.19-21.

The good news is that in Abraham’s seed (Jesus Christ) “shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” v.25. God’s offer of inheriting the promises and being blessed in Abraham and Christ has been extended to all nationalities, but the offer was first made to God’s own people of Israel, Abraham’s natural descendants: “Unto you (Israel) first God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every of you from his iniquities” v.26. The opportunity, however, would not be confined to them but would soon be extended to the Gentiles, and it is now available to everyone so that any of us may repent and be converted that our sins may be blotted out and

that we may receive the promised blessings in the times of refreshing when Jesus returns from heaven.

Week 11

The Acts of the Apostles 4

Wednesday

The apostles, as a consequence of healing the beggar and teaching the people, soon experienced the persecution and imprisonment which Jesus had warned would attend the preaching of the gospel. The Jewish rulers, being members of the sect of the Sadducees v.1 who denied the resurrection, were particularly incensed at the apostles' proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. They, therefore, took them into custody, whereupon Peter declared the truth the Sadducees were reluctant to hear: "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole" v.10. They were supposedly the builders of God's house, composed of faithful men and women, but they had rejected the most important stone in the building, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God had made the head stone v.11 (quoting Psa.118).

The apostles had healed in the name of Jesus, demonstrating the efficacy of his name to save men and women, not only from sickness and disability but also from sin and death. Therefore Peter declared that the healing had been done in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and "neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" v.12.

These rulers perceived that Peter and John were "uneducated" men but they were soon to learn that by the Spirit of God the apostles were wiser than these religious leaders with all their formal education. They wanted to incarcerate Peter and John but, acknowledging "a notable miracle had been done" which was known by all the people, they simply ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus. One of the commandments of Jesus to his disciples is that they obey the authorities, but not when their orders contradict the law of God. Therefore "Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" vs.19-20.

The disciples rejoiced at their deliverance from the same authorities who had condemned Jesus to death, recalling that Christ's

experience was foretold in the Psalms. The second Psalm described his sufferings when “the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ” (v.26 and Psa.2:2), and also his glory when he returns to reign in Zion. The rulers of the earth opposed Christ when he was crucified, and they will do so again at his return but he, the king of Israel, will nevertheless become the supreme ruler of the whole world: “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen (Gentile nations) for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” Psa.2:6-8.

Week 11

The Acts of the Apostles 5

Thursday

The early disciples shared their possessions among each other, (chapter 4) doing this willingly. However two of them, Ananias and Sapphira, wished to appear equally benevolent while secretly retaining part for themselves. This brought swift retribution upon them, providing a salutary lesson that the great benefits of the gospel bring with them corresponding responsibilities, and warned others against adopting attitudes of mind opposing (“satanic” v.3) God’s Holy Spirit.

The teaching of the apostles, supported by the miracles they performed, resulted in many more joining the church v.14 but also attracted the ire of the Jewish rulers v.17. Again they arrested the apostles, but on this occasion an angel effected their release. When the apostles were brought back before the Jewish council they were again able to witness before these men who denied the resurrection that the one they had slain and hanged on a tree had been raised from the dead and exalted to God’s right hand as the Prince and saviour of Israel vs.30-31.

The rulers were incensed by these words and discussed how they might destroy the apostles but, following the counsel of Gamaliel v 34, a respected religious teacher, they reluctantly released them after further reprimand and warning. But the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus’ name, and “daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” vs.41-42.

Week 11

The Acts of the Apostles 6

Friday

The preaching of the gospel by the apostles and other disciples resulted in a great many people in Jerusalem accepting the Truth:

“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” v.7.

It was inevitable that tensions would develop among the disciples which would need to be resolved by the apostles. These Jewish disciples came from two distinct backgrounds: traditionalists of the land of Israel (the Hebrews); and those of the worldwide dispersed Jewry influenced by Greek thought (the Grecians). One party considered they were disadvantaged in the distribution to the needy, and complained. The problem was resolved by the appointment of supervisors to whom the apostles passed the Holy Spirit by laying hands on them, an ability possessed only by the apostles. One of these supervisors was Stephen, who being “full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people” v.8.

Stephen also disputed about God’s truth with certain Jews of various Greek schools of thought v.9 who were unable to withstand his reasoning from God’s word. They therefore resorted to false accusation vs.11-14 and “stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him before the council of the Jews” v.12. Stephen, falsely accused as Jesus was and in the same terms, confidently met these accusations and defended himself, exposing the defective knowledge and reasoning of these, the highest religious authorities in the land, as recorded in the next chapter.

Week 11

The Acts of the Apostles 7

Saturday

Stephen dealt with the false accusations against him by reminding the Jewish religious hierarchy what was written in the word of God. He began in the book of Genesis with the promise to Israel’s father, Abraham, that he would inherit the promised land for ever. This promise has not yet been fulfilled for: “he (God) gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him.” This seed is Christ (Gal.3:16), whom they had crucified, and this vital promise will be fulfilled when he returns.

But these religious rulers had rejected the rightful heir, just as their ancestors had rejected all the deliverers God had raised up in Israel. For example, Joseph was appointed a saviour by God but “the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt (and slavery)” v.9. In the same way the Jews had envied Jesus, rejected him, and

delivered him into the hands of Gentiles for destruction. But as God had delivered Jesus, so he had previously saved Joseph: “But God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions” v.10. Significantly, “at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren” v.13 and it will be at the second appearing of the Lord Jesus that his brethren (the Jews) will recognize who he really is.

In the same way, another generation of Israel initially rejected Moses as their saviour when “he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not” v.35. It was only at his second coming, 40 years later, that they accepted him: “This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer” v.25. Significantly, the Jews said to Jesus: “Who made thee a ruler and judge over us?” and rejected him as their Messiah; but at his second coming they will accept him and be distressed at their previous rejection of him: “they shall look upon me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for him” Zech.12:10.

Past events recorded in the scriptures illustrate the purpose of God in Christ, and Stephen, by citing these records, was able to show that the Jewish rulers, in rejecting and murdering Jesus, had behaved exactly as their fathers had done, and so he concluded: “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers’ persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers” vs.51-52.

The council could not bear to hear such truths: “they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth” v.54. When Stephen declared he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God in heaven they “cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him” vs.57-58. Stephen, however, had a glorious hope - the hope of eternal life by resurrection from the dead at the return of Christ. Therefore, before, falling asleep in death v.60 he called upon Jesus to receive his spirit (breath), because Jesus, at his return, will have power to bring dead bodies out of the grave and breathe into them the breath of life.

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