

The Remnant

*“Even so then at this
present time also there
is a remnant according to
the election of grace.”
Romans 11.5*

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THE GOSPEL

*Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David
was raised from the dead according to my gospel (II
Timothy 2.8).*

The gospel! Good news! Glad tidings! These are a few of the expressions we find in the Bible describing God’s message of deliverance for His blessed and chosen family. For those with ears (spiritual ears) to hear, there is no sweeter message nor engaging theme than the gospel of deliverance.

How sweetly satisfying and joyful is the gospel message! It speaks in bright terms to a troubled soul of pardon, hope and promise of life everlasting for redeemed sinners. By redeemed sinners we mean those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. Only the heirs of grace, those that have been made alive by the quickening of the Spirit, will benefit from these good tidings. There is no comfort or joy therein for any others. The gospel has no word of solace for the children of the wicked one, but it overflows in great measure for needy sheep.

The gospel *is* good news, glad tidings, timely words of comfort to the living children of God, and much more, too. Time and eternity are not sufficient in duration to fully reflect upon all blessed benefits contained in the gospel proclamation. “As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country (Proverbs 25.25).”

Thou dear Redeemer, dying Lamb,
We love to hear of thee;
No music’s like thy charming name,
Nor half so sweet can be.

—Cennick

(Hymn 291, Beebe Collection)

The gospel *is not* an offer. It *is not* an invitation to “whosoever will.” Search the Word. Go from one cover of the Bible to the other. It shall not be found where the gospel is tendered, offered or prospectively broadcast for any soul that ever lived. The gospel is a restricted message, certainly not for everyone. Be sure of this: The gospel comes (in power and effectually) only to those elect souls for whom it was everlastingly ordained. The gospel comes with authority. It comes as a message so abundant, so rich with heavenly tidings, that it is wholly impossible to turn from it or refuse to hear its message. The hearer, for whom the gospel was intended, cannot fail to be enraptured, captivated, and receptive. The blessed gospel of God surely comes to His chosen as welcome news. To all others it is but a message, ranging in interest from none to a delusional acceptance.

Good news can only be agreeable and important if it directly pertains to the recipient. What may be extremely good news to one person may actually be bad news to another. Suppose there are two employees, A and B, of a certain company. Both of these employees bid on a promotion. At the appointed time

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chosen one. This illustration is not perfect. None are. However, the comparison shown appears so simple it seems beyond dispute.

The Resurrection of Jesus

Among the first Scriptures to be considered whenever contemplating what the Bible says about the gospel should be the text at the heading of this article. The writer, Paul, had called Timothy to remembrance. Thus, there was a truth to be kept in mind. To paraphrase the text, Paul says, "Timothy, remember that, according to my gospel, Jesus Christ, the seed of David, was raised from the dead." That Jesus was the seed of David was significant, but the essential element of the good news was, and is, *that Jesus was raised from the dead*.

Though the house of David was greatly diminished at that time, there were, in fact, others of David's seed remaining at the time of Christ's birth. But the splendor of those good tidings was, Jesus, the heir-appointed seed, had been *raised from the dead!* This, the coming forth of Jesus from the dead, is what becomes such glad tidings to those blessed to hear it. Surely, on the testimony of His resurrection from the dead hangs all the ornaments that garnish the gospel with everlasting splendor. The silver trumpet has sounded.

This is the vital matter Paul would remind Timothy to call to remembrance. Whenever one of the elect hears the sweet gospel, with the inward ear as well as the outward ear, it cannot but be received as good news, perfectly suited to his or her needs.

In order to hear the gospel with that inward ear one must first hear the voice of the Son of God speaking life (creating life) into them. On hearing the gospel initially, by the voice of Jesus directly, the elect live. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live (John 5.24f)."

Living, they see Him Who speaks life unto and into them. There is no other source of spiritual life! Be sure of this: None can inwardly hear a word of gospel news apart from this initial preparation. A recounting of the good news may fall upon the natural

the results are posted. Employee A was chosen for the promotion; employee B was not. The posting is certainly a source of exhilaration for employee A, the one chosen for the promotion. This employee will, without doubt, share this good news with fellow employees, friends, and family. Employee B, however, is cast down. Upon learning of his rejection, he is dejected. Thus, he is saddened by the very same news which caused joy in employee A. Employee B may show courtesy, and even extend well wishes to the victor, but by no means can the news of the promotion be pleasing to him. This good news for employee A is just the opposite for the loser. The announcement or posting of the decision could not be glad tidings to the rejected individual; only to the

ear, but like stony ground, the message cannot penetrate except first there be this divine, initial preparation.

A brief explanation relative to the above paragraph. It is not the purpose of this article to engage in dispute with those who may believe the gospel, as preached by sinful man, is the *means* of bringing life to depraved, dead sinner. That scheme, known as *gospel regeneration* (falsely so-called), is a delusion, and, in our opinion, a pestilent heresy. It has ever been rejected by the church of the Living God. The household of faith certainly does believe that all the family of election, the sheep, will hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. This is the gospel in its initial communication to us. Such power accompanies this declaration of good news from Jesus to His children that death loses its grip on them as eternal life is implanted. It is a point long denied by the Old Order of Baptists that the gospel, as preached by man, brings life to dead sinners. Rather, they are persuaded that the gospel brings life and immortality to light (2 Timothy 1.10).

The gospel of the resurrected Jesus, as declared by God's called servants, is the subject now at hand.

Romans 1.1-4

There is one text, more than many others, that seems well suited to represent our aim. As much as any that could be cited from the Scriptures, this one brings the meaning and purpose of the gospel in focus, particularly for this brief study. It is this: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures.) Concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection for the dead (Romans 1. 1-4)."

How forceful, yet how comforting and encouraging. In penning this weighty doctrinal epistle to the saints at Rome, Paul left no room for successful dispute. Paul opened the book with revelations regarding the blessed truth of a resurrected Jesus. (The gospel derives its basis for being glad tidings to sinners from the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.) The Romans, and also all that through the centuries

would read this book, would see at once that Paul was a gospel servant; called as an apostle *separated* to the gospel. This gospel, he affirms, was promised afore (centuries before) in the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, along with other prophets during the earlier years in Israel's sojourn.

This gospel of which the prophets wrote, God's glad tidings to His family, concerns His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. That is plain enough! Furthermore, and importantly, Paul reckoned how Jesus was the Son of God. That Jesus was the Son of God is the sum and substance of this gospel, proven so by the powerful declaration of the Spirit of holiness when Jesus *came forth from the dead*. Again, the gospel is vitally linked with, and associated to, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If that is *not* good news, glad tidings, and the gospel of the grace of God, whatever could be? If it *is* the gospel, the glad tidings, the good news, then what else could compare to it in wonder and power to dying sinners?

Acts 13

No message, however well-intended, can be the gospel of God's grace, nor glad tidings from heaven, unless it is anchored in the resurrection of Jesus, the seed of David, from the dead. *It is the raising Jesus from the dead that empowers the message with sweet tidings to needy sinners*. "And we declare unto you *glad tidings*, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee (Acts 13.32, 33)."

Notice well: *glad tidings!* It was the *good news*, the gospel, that God had kept His promise to the Fathers by fulfilling those same promises unto their children. How, it may be asked? By raising Jesus from the dead as the firstfruits of the resurrection. For all who are His by covenant love and everlasting election, the good news is this: Jesus came forth from the tomb, and even so shall all His family. That is exactly what Paul declared as being the meaning of Psalm 2.

Paul continued in Acts 13: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from

which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13.38, 39).” So then, Paul affirmed first a resurrected Jesus. Then he preached Him (Jesus) unto his hearers as the sum and source of the forgiving of sins. And what evidence did Paul produce in this affirmation? Just this: All who believed this gospel were justified (not going to get justified) from all things. By simple deduction it may be fairly said, if one was a believer, then those glad tidings he believed *pronounced* him justified. Note well! The gospel did not justify him; the believing did not justify him. The gospel was the glad tidings of this justification and the believing was God’s ordained way of comforting the believer. It is a much blessed sinner who has been enabled to believe in a resurrected Saviour; a Saviour that has completely secured and justified his brethren. See Acts 13.48.

The Living Lamb

If it cannot be seen by now what our aim is, to set forth the resurrection of Jesus as the heart of the gospel, then we are at a loss to do so. And, why the emphasis on the resurrection? It was, after all, the cornerstone of the Apostle’s message from the very beginning. “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee (Mark 1.1-3ff).” With but a little comparison it can be seen that in the beginning of the gospel Jesus was identified by John as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. And, was it not as the *Lamb slain* this was accomplished? “And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain...(Revelation 5.6).” Again: “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation (Revelation 5.9).”

This was not a *dead* lamb these congregated voices adored. The Lamb these admirers worshipped had come forth triumphant from the tomb. Death had been vanquished! It could have been nothing more, or nothing less, than *evil tidings* had they learned that Jesus had deceived them; that His death resulted in nothing other than His burial and ultimate corruption.

But no; He lived! The Lamb which John the Baptist had pointed to in the beginning of the gospel had been gloriously elevated. After His ascension, His resurrection became the core and heart of the gospel. This then was glad tidings, sufficiently empowered to lift the lowest sinner from his depths and to revive the flagging spirits of the vilest rebels who ever lived.

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15.1ff).” Here, as Paul again affirms the importance of the resurrection, he tells the reader he is at that time *declaring the gospel*. He had previously preached this same gospel, the Corinthians had received this same gospel, and were presently standing therein. The question, then, what had Paul first preached unto these brethren? Certainly nothing new, for he tells them it was also what he had received. It was this: Christ died for our sins. This was in complete agreement with the Scriptures. Christ was buried. Christ rose again on the third day! This too was in harmony with the Scriptural record. *The gospel now flies on the wings of the resurrection message*.

We are all dying sinners. The entire human race lives, and then, in their order, they die. Those sinners who groan under the felt weight of their sins, fearing the consequences of past and continued trespasses against their holy God, are seekers. They are seeking a word from some authoritative source to relieve their burden; to cheer their soul as they see yonder the awaiting grave. Reader, there is but one word to relieve these seekers. It is the word of the gospel! In the simplest terms it is this: God will not at all acquit the guilty. We are guilty. However, we have an Elder Brother, Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who has come to earth, born of Mary, without sin. He has undertaken all, everything necessary, to satisfy the Father in our behalf. Whatever the law demanded; whatever the holiness of the Father demanded, Jesus met and obliged. All, all that could possibly be required of us, Jesus has fulfilled. This includes His substitutionary life; the

righteousness thereof to be imputed to us. Accomplished as well was the sacrifice of Himself upon the altar of God's justice to pay our debts. So, Jesus died. He was buried. He arose the third day. He was received up unto the Father after His resurrection. All this for His own.

Is this good news? Is there any glad tidings in this dispatch? Perhaps not as much as at times might be desired, but does this not somehow bring a little light of hope to your dark path of gloom and dread, especially as you face the reality of death and the world of the unknown? Yes, there is good news contained herein. When blessed to have some little understanding of the Word of God it can be seen that the everlasting love of God to His elect provided a way of salvation. The gospel brings this heavenly intelligence to our souls. We find a measure of elation. Perhaps, when I die, when my life is over and done, my soul will be gathered to the Father in the harvest of His family. When the world as we know it is concluded, perhaps too my body shall also be raised in the glorious fashion as was the body of Jesus my Brother.

These brief thoughts have not been submitted as a full explanation of what the gospel is, or what its purpose may be. If something here has been useful to encourage any that feel a need for good news then the effort was worth the time involved.

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HEARING AND BELIEVING

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life (John 5.24).

The words of Christ are perfectly, eternally, and unchangeably true. Since He is one with the Father, it is impossible for Him to lie. He is truth incarnate, as witnessed by His words in the 14th chapter of John, "I am the way, *the truth*, and the life...(John 14.6)." When He speaks we can have

absolute confidence in His words. Here He preceded a statement with further reinforcement, "Verily, verily, I say unto you...." This could be translated, "In truth, in truth, I say unto you...." Evidently our Lord intended to super-impress on our hearts the certainty and reliability of what was to follow, that all who hear His words, in all ages of time, might be able to rest on this truth in the face of any temptation they may face.

One of the most important things to notice in this verse is that the actions described are not conditions to be fulfilled in order to secure eternal life or to escape condemnation—rather, they are evidences of those characters who *have* everlasting life, and "shall not come into condemnation." Of course, this is 180 degrees off the typical view of worldly, man-centered religion.

Hearing the word of Christ and believing on the Father who sent Him are spiritual actions, which must be performed in the spirit by spiritually quickened individuals. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4.24)." "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2.1)." We all come into this world alienated from the life of God, at enmity to God and godliness, enemies in our minds, and without the fear of God—which is the beginning of wisdom. We can't do a whole lot about that situation, either. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one (Job 14.4)." "...a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit (Matthew 7.17, 18)." The natural or "old" man is corrupt, and it has not the capacity to bring forth good fruit. Therefore our Lord told Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3.3)."

It takes a spiritual birth to bring forth the "new" man—the spiritual being who can perform spiritual actions, like hearing the word of Christ and believing on the Father. It follows without controversy that, since the spiritual birth must and does precede any spiritual activity, then no spiritual action can be a condition unto spiritual life.

...*He that heareth my word...* What is the meaning of this? What is the "my word" that is to be

heard? The “word” of Christ is the “logos” of Christ. What does it mean to “hear” His word?

It means (1) the words or teachings of Christ: “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing...from such withdraw thyself (1 Timothy 6.3-5).” The Lord told those “believers” who called Him a bastard and wanted to stone Him, “He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God (John 8.47).” If Jesus Christ is our Master and Lord, then His words are precious and true to us, though they may cut us to the quick and lay us in the dust before Him.

The word of Christ means (2) the doctrine concerning Him, or the gospel of Christ. To hear His word, one must recognize Him. The gospel of Christ declares Him to be the Son of God who took on human flesh to be our “near kinsman” that He might redeem us. It declares the fact that “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15.3, 4).” Anyone who claims to hear His word, yet does not recognize Him as the God-man, the sin-bearing “Lamb of God,” is a liar.

The word of Christ means (3) the life-giving Voice of the Son of God. In order to truly, spiritually, and profitably hear His word, we must hear it directly from Him. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live (John 5.25).” Jesus Christ calls His people from death unto life with His awesome, life-imparting Voice. He speaks in their innermost being with the Voice that brought the natural world into existence in the beginning.

Back then He said, “Let there be light.” The result was, “there was light.” “Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou (Ecclesiastes 8.4)?” Just as Christ brought forth the dead by crying, “Lazarus, come forth,” He calls “His own sheep by name”—personally addressing them with His irresistible Voice—and “leadeth them out” of the realm of death into the kingdom of God.

What does it mean to hear His word? It does not mean to merely hear the message of the gospel or the teachings of Christ with the natural ear or to receive these things intellectually. The ear is a sense organ of the body by which vibrations from without are transferred as neural signals to the brain, where they are received and interpreted as either intelligible or unintelligible sounds. The intellect is part of the natural soul of man, whereby one may assimilate information, contemplate ideas, form opinions, make judgments, and many other natural functions which are generally common to mankind. The fact that the words of Christ may occupy a place in this natural part of a man says nothing about the spiritual condition or the future destination of that man.

To “hear” Christ’s word, the “voice” of Christ must speak in one’s spirit. This has nothing to do with some spectacular experience of seeing visions or hearing audible voices or other sensory manifestations. It has everything to do with being taught of the Lord, according to the terms of the new covenant. “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be unto them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest (Hebrews 8.10, 11).” “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me (John 6.45).” The word of God must be planted in our hearts by God Himself.

The parable of the sower tells us that the only place where the seed (the word) brought forth fruit was the “good ground”—the heart which had been prepared by grace to receive the truth. When the good seed of the word is sown in the prepared heart of an individual by the heavenly sower, it remains there and brings forth fruit in due season. The word of God in the heart bears witness to the word of God which we hear with the ear. “...The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach...(Romans 10.8).”

When one hears Christ’s word, it comes with power—convincing, converting, humbling, life-

changing power. “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance...And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost (1 Thessalonians 1.5, 6).” “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 Thessalonians 2.13).”

Hearing the word of Christ implies heeding His word. The heaven-born child of God hears and receives the word of God. He is one who “trembleth” at His word and attempts to walk according to it. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee (Psalm 119.11).” “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psalm 119.105).” The Lord Jesus differentiated between “hearers” in His teaching: “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock...And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand (Matthew 7.24-26).” We know how these respective houses fared under the storms that came. “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves (James 1.22).” The spiritual hearer pays attention to the word of his Lord. When I was young, my father would sometimes give me some serious instructions or scoldings. Then he would say, “Do you hear me?” My father wasn’t curious as to whether the sound of his voice reached my ears—believe me, it did. He was asking if I was paying full attention to what he was saying with a serious intention to act thereon. When we hear the word of our Lord, we are moved by it to follow Him.

...and believeth on him that sent me.... The children of God hear the word of God and believe on God. The eternal God is the object of their faith. The word of truth planted in their hearts teaches them effectually that, “it is He which hath made us, and not we ourselves (Psalm 100.3).”

The apostle Paul sets down the marks of those who have been circumcised in their hearts: “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit,

and rejoice in Jesus Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3.3).” Believing on God and hearing the word of Christ are inseparable. One cannot “hear” the word of Christ and “not believe” on Him that sent Him. Neither can one believe without hearing the word of Christ. To “believe on” the Father and to “believe on” the Son are one and the same. We can’t have a Father without a Son and vice versa. Christ said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father (John 14.9);” and again, “I and my Father are one (John 10.30).” God teaches us our insufficiency, and He also teaches us His eternal, abundant, unimaginable sufficiency. Those who are taught by God are distinguished by their faith in and dependence on their Everlasting Father.

He that heareth...and believeth.... Each of these actions are expressed in the present tense. This implies continuation. The hearing and the believing of a child of God is not a temporary, passing experience. It is not a wildfire experience that flared up once upon a time at a revival meeting and has not been seen or heard of since. The scripture plainly tells us, “The just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul (Hebrews 10.38, 39).” The “faith of God’s elect” is an enduring faith. It is planted in the heart by the Almighty hand of God. It is given to them as a blessing of the everlasting covenant. It is purchased for them by the blood of Jesus Christ. It is part of the “good work” begun in the life of an heir of heaven that God Himself “will perform” in them “until the day of Jesus Christ.” This enduring faith causes the child of God to endure. This faith causes them to “overcome the world.” No temptation or trial can sink this faith, because, “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world (1 John 4.4).” “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

Hear the persuasion of the apostle Paul on this matter, you troubled and tempest-tossed saints: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things

present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8.38, 39).” Rage on, heathen! Seek whom you may devour, Satan! The weakest, smallest, most ignorant, most confused, most sin-plagued sheep in the flock of Christ shall overcome every onslaught of the adversary and stand victorious over all at the last day! Shall anything utterly overcome one whose faith rests in Almighty God? “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us (Romans 8.37).”

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A BETTER VINEYARD PART 2

In a previous article, we tried to address Ahab’s offer of a better vineyard to Naboth: “And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money (1 Kings 21.2).” In that article we said that there is no vineyard in all this world that is better than the vineyard God has given to His children. We now wish to pursue this fact a bit further.

In the Old Testament era, the house of Israel was the vineyard of God: “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry (Isaiah 5.7).”

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus said that the Lord’s vineyard was to be taken from national Israel and given to new husbandmen: “What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy

the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others (Mark 12.9).” “So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they [the Pharisees] heard it, they said, God forbid (Luke 20.15f).”

Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 9.7 that the apostles were, in the Lord’s providence, planters or husbandmen in this vineyard, the church: “Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?”

The church, then, is presently the spiritual vineyard of the Lord. All the Ahabs of this world cannot produce a better vineyard, although they will offer to do so, trying to tempt the saints to sell or trade their spiritual heritage in Christ Jesus. As Naboth did when the moment of truth came, the saints in this age also had rather die than relinquish the God-given heritage of their fathers.

The key word before us now is not “vineyard,” but *better*; what is better in what the vineyard signifies to New Testament saints. Better, whether their heritage is typified by a vineyard, a sheepfold, a house, a field, a covenant, or anything else; all these figures represent the eternal heritage God has given to His people, telling them, “Occupy till I come (Luke 19.13).” To see how much better God’s gift really is, look at the book of Hebrews, where you will find that *better* is one of the key recurring words.

The Background of the Book of Hebrews

Who were the Hebrews to whom Paul wrote? The word *Hebrew* has a double meaning to us, both a literal and a figurative one. Literally, it goes back through the tribes of Israel, back through Jacob, back through Isaac, back through Abram/Abraham, to the man named Eber (Genesis 11.14), Abraham’s ancestor. The name *Eber* means something like “to pass over from the other side (of a river).” Figuratively, the name-word *Hebrew*, when it was applied to Abram (Genesis 14.13), probably referred to his origin far east of the Jordan River and his having come from Ur, a city of the Chaldean nation near the Euphrates River. Working forward from these early

beginnings, the Israelites were called Hebrews because of this ancestral line.

In the days of the New Testament era, the early church in Jerusalem was made up almost entirely of Hebrew believers in Christ Jesus. The epistle to the Hebrews was written to them shortly before Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 70 A. D.

(It may seem odd to the reader that the word "Hebrew" occurs fourteen times in the New Testament but is not found once in the book of Hebrews.)

At the time of Paul's writing this letter, the Pharisees were still in control of the temple, representing themselves as the heirs of the true religion of Jehovah as He had delivered it to Moses. Simply stated, they dismissed Jesus of Nazareth as a false prophet and His followers as apostate Jews and heretics.

Jerusalem was torn with unrest, which made the local Roman rulers nervous. Rome tightened her iron grip on Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside of Judaea. Fanatics among the Jews fomented trouble which they often conveniently blamed on the followers of Jesus. Roman troops persecuted the early church on the one hand, while the Pharisees continued to persecute them on the other. There is nothing quite like religion and politics.

From the time of the stoning of Stephen until the time Paul wrote this epistle, the Hebrew Christians were being killed or exiled. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles... Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word (Acts 8.1, 4)."

The lives of those who could not flee from Jerusalem were seemingly in great peril. With ever-increasing pressure from both political Rome and the organized religion of Judaism, there was an element within the church that was leaning toward apostasy—renouncing Jesus Christ and going back to their heritage of the Jew's religion. Such a move seemed expedient to many who feared death at the hand of either the Pharisees or the Romans.

Now no man, certainly Paul included, could look on the outward appearance and judge any individual as to whether he was a true child of grace or only a

nominal follower of Christ who had infiltrated His church, like those whom Christ rebuked in the days of His humanity: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled (John 6.26)."

When church members began to quit the church and return to the Jews' religion, they did so to escape the persecution coming upon them in order to save their lives and their families.

In the face of this, Paul's letter to the Hebrews counsels the members of the church in Jerusalem, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Hebrews 10.23ff)." The day they saw approaching was the day Jerusalem would surely be destroyed. Some gave heed to Paul's advice in this letter, and some did not. Those who did manifested the grace and salvation of the Lord in their lives. Those who did not proved themselves to be apostates who, for one reason or another, had wormed their way into the church when it was yet popular and in favor. Now, to save their own skins, the latter ones deserted the church before the Roman axe fell.

Have you ever wondered what and how Paul preached in the Jewish synagogues during his travels? The Book says, "And Paul, **as his manner was**, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ (Acts 17.2f)." Paul had a manner of reasoning with the Jews from the Scriptures. In the New Testament there are two main examples of his manner of reasoning from the Old Testament Scriptures: One, a specific case, is in Acts 13. The other, a more general and complete view, is the book of Hebrews.

It is Hebrews which draws our attention now, **with its emphasis on things better than a return to Judaism.** *The book of Hebrews was written to the Hebrews to tell the Hebrews to stop being Hebrews, as someone has well put it. The Lord Jesus Christ and*

His church are infinitely better than anything the Mosaic covenant and the Pharisees had. The word "better" occurs thirteen times in Hebrews. It is these **better things** that we would examine now.

Jesus Is Better Than the Angels

Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Hebrews 1.4).

First and foremost, Paul begins with the fact that Jesus Christ, God's Son, is better than the angels, those glorious, powerful, invisible spirit-beings that populate the unseen world around us, above us, and in the visible presence of the invisible God Himself. The superiority of Jesus and His institutions over all that oppose Him is maintained throughout this book. The Lord Jesus Christ has the preeminence in all things (Colossians 1.18), including His preeminent place in Heaven and in Hebrews.

The constant interchanging of God the Son and the God-man Christ Jesus as presented in verses 1-4 is marvelous. His deity as the second person of the Godhead and His humanity as the Mediator alternate again and again, like the flashing of lightning. In one instant Jesus is the Son of God; immediately He is God's Servant-man, and just as quickly He is God again:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son....

This is the exact opposite of what is now preached and believed by the religious world. Most professing "Christians" think that God in the Old Testament spoke directly to people, but now He speaks to them by His prophets (or preachers). No. Under the Old Covenant He spoke to His people by the prophets (although He often spoke directly to the prophets). Under the New Covenant Christ speaks directly to His people, calling them and instructing them by His Spirit. "My sheep hear my voice (John 10.27)."

...whom he hath appointed heir of all things.... His Son, Jesus Christ, is the subject here. The *whom* refers back to His Son by whom He speaks to us. This Son He has appointed heir of all things. But God the Son, as deity, is not *appointed* to anything; He does the appointing. "For He performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with

Him. Therefore am I troubled at His presence: when I consider, I am afraid of Him (Job 23.14f)." "No man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto (1 Thessalonians 3.3)." "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5.9)."

Jesus Christ could only be *appointed* heir of all things, not in His essential deity, but only as a man, the Mediator, the man Christ Jesus.

...by whom also he made the worlds.... Paul immediately switches back to the fact that the Son is Elohim, the Creator God of Genesis 1 and John 1.1-5. The *worlds* (Greek, *aeons*) does not refer to the earth, planets, and stars, but to the ages or eons of time. He is the eternal God, encompassing the unnumbered eons or ages.

...Who being the brightness of his glory.... God dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto (1 Timothy 6.16)." The Son is the Light of the world (John 8.12, 9.5)," not merely the source of that Light.

...and the express image of his person.... Expressed is *pressed out*. The Son took on the image or likeness of sinful flesh, being made like unto His brethren, in a body made of the same dust of which Adam was formed, and of the seed of Abraham. The idea of pressing an image into clay is used here to bring to mind the custom of a king's pressing his signet ("sign it") ring into a clay tablet which contained his official word, decree, or document. The clay tablet was then fired into a permanent, brick-hard record, impossible to be altered. Jesus was the image of God's official signet, pressed into the Adamic clay He received as a body in Mary's womb. He was fired in God's purity and holiness; Christ Jesus is the fire-tested and permanent Word of God, an unchangeable record.

...and upholding all things by the word of his power.... We are immediately brought back to His deity. He is not only the Creator of all things; He is also their sustainer. "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist (Colossians

1.16f).” The universe and all things in it would disintegrate into chaos or pre-creation non-existence, were it not for His holding the very atoms of all creation in their appointed places.

...when he had by himself purged our sins.... Again, His humanity is presented. The Son of God purged the sins of His people (whoever the *our* is) without the help of any man.

...sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.... Again, we are brought back to His deity and Godhead. Sitting down indicated a finished work. In the tabernacle and the temple there was no place for the Levitical priesthood to sit. The *mercy seat* was not a chair; least of all was it a place for the priests to sit. It was a seat in the sense of *a seat of government*, as we refer to the “County seat.” The mercy seat was God’s seat of government from whence He dispenses His sovereign mercy.

...Being made so much better than the angels.... This again must refer to **the man** Jesus Christ, because the thought presented here is that He was *made*. As God He is *unmade*, the Maker of all things. As the Mediator-man, He was better than the angels, because no angel could mediate between God and men.

There are various orders of angels in the hierarchy of that spirit world above us. From the Scriptures we know of at least four orders: angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim. There are only three angels we know by name: the angel Gabriel, the archangel Michael, and the cherub Lucifer. The angels and archangels are further ranked and arrayed in what the Scriptures call “principalities, powers, might, dominions, and thrones.” As there are earthly principalities, powers, might, thrones and dominions, so there are also their spiritual counterparts to these offices. There is no reason for us to assume that such levels of governments and powers stop at the earthly level, especially when God’s word plainly declares otherwise. Paul says they exist **in the heavenlies** or **above the sky** (the literal meaning of “in heavenly places,” Ephesians 1.3, 2.6, and 3.10, and “in high places,” Ephesians 6.12). Of these glorious creatures, Paul asks, quoting from the second Psalm, “For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?” The answer is, He said this to none of the angels; but He

did say this to Jesus who is the object of angels’ worship: “And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him (Hebrews 1.6).” He tells us these angels are spirits, ministers, and flames of fire. This does not refer to earthly, human ministers, but to the angels who populate the heavens: “And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire (verse 7).” Paul here quotes Psalm 104.4. Elisha and his servant saw them (2 Kings 6.16ff), and the angelic army they saw blinded the Syrian army. Ezekiel, Daniel, John, and others all saw the angels of God by divine revelation.

These angels are “all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation (verse 14),” even as they ministered to Jesus after the temptation (“Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him,” Matthew 4.11), and in the garden as He prayed, the night before His crucifixion (“And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him, Luke 22.43).” These angels who ministered to Jesus were hardly earthly ministers from among mankind, as at the time of Christ’s temptation the human ministers (apostles) had not yet been called, and during His agony in the garden they were sleeping, not ministering to Him.

Paul assures his readers, “Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak (Hebrews 2.5).” The subjection of that future world is to Jesus Christ, whom the holy angels serve and worship. Paul’s point in 1.4 is that Jesus was made better, so much better, that the highest of those spiritual beings who surround God’s throne and hang on His every word.

...as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. His inheritance from His Father is deity and the name of it: Jesus is nothing less than God, “God manifest in flesh (1 Timothy 3.16).” When every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, it will not only be to His glory, but unto the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2.11). How can this be? It is because God the Father is His Father, and Jesus said, “I and my Father are one (John 10.30).” Make no mistake about this: What glorifies Jesus glorifies His Father, and what insults and detracts from Jesus insults and detracts

from His Father. Before it is over, all followers of false religions will be made to know that no one can worship God without worshiping Jesus Christ.

Better Things of You

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak (Hebrews 6.9). This is a most interesting and valuable text, because what precedes it (say from Hebrews 5.11 to 6.8) has been much abused by those who espouse a free will or works doctrine. The very wording of verse 9 makes us ask, “Better than *what* things? Though we *thus* speak *how*?” To find out what Paul meant, we must look at what was said before this verse:

Of whom [i.e., of Melchisedec] we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing (5.11). Paul was addressing not the dead or the deaf, but hearers who had been confused and whose hearing had been dulled by error, and fear of persecution, and the resulting heretical distractions that were already creeping into the Jewish element of the church at that time (see Acts 15.1-5).

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (5.12ff).”

The analogy here is, milk is to babies as meat is to adults. The Hebrew church had those within it who were behaving as babes, not as workmen “that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2.15).” They ought to be teachers in the sense that the Hebrews, historically and nationally, had had the oracles (utterances) of God committed unto them: “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed *the oracles of God* (Romans 3.1f).” If external advantages and privileges mean anything, the Hebrew saints ought to have been able to teach their Gentile brethren of the futility of the old covenant and the blessedness of the new.

Further, God put the obligation of being a kingdom of priests upon national Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel (Exodus 19.6).”

The unbelieving Jews who had infiltrated the church during the early days of its popularity (Acts 5.13-16, 6.7) certainly could not be teachers of—or about—Christ, so this ancient and divinely-ordered charge must devolve, in this case, upon the believing Jews, the church in Jerusalem. But it did so, not under the terms of the old *if-then* covenant (“which **my** covenant **they** brake...saith the Lord”—Jeremiah 31.32), but under the *new* covenant.

To digress, needfully, for a moment: In all this, remember, Paul could not “look on the outward appearance” of Brother Wavering and Sister Fearful and judge their hearts, their souls, or their spiritual condition. He could not tell if someone about to quit the church in order to save his skin was an apostate unbeliever, or if he was a terrified, bewildered, but genuine saint.

By the Spirit of our God, Paul was here rallying the true saints to their God-given heritage of being witnesses unto Christ. Do not let the Arminians have this term, *witness*, by default. Remember that our Lord said, “...ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1.8).” You might find it profitable to review how this word, *witness*, is used throughout the remainder of the New Testament (Acts through Revelation).

To return to the subject at hand, *the oracles of God* as He placed them among His people: Peter, who also wrote and ministered to Jewish or Hebrew believers in Christ (See Galatians 2.7-9), said: “If any man speak, let him speak as *the oracles of God*; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4.11).” It was Peter, then, who in perfect harmony with Paul, amplified the spiritual, new covenant ap-

plication of Exodus 19.6 as being fulfilled in the New Testament saints: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Peter 2.9f)." Peter wrote his first epistle, as Paul did his letter to the Hebrews, shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus Peter continues immediately after 1 Peter 4.11, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you (verse 12)."

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment (6:1f).

When Paul says "leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ," he is not telling us to abandon and forget about doctrine! The doctrine of Jesus Christ is presented as the foundation upon which the individual saint builds (1 Corinthians 3.11). The leaving is not a walking away from Christ the foundation, or the doctrine of Christ (See also 2 John 9), it is *going up* with the building, a continuing the construction, the saint's life experience as being built up (Ephesians 2.20ff; Colossians 2.7), resting on Christ that one true and solid foundation.

This leaving is a **going on**, on the foundation, to completeness, not a **going off** the foundation into some doctrinal vacuum. The *perfection* of which he speaks is not sinless holiness, as the word is often misunderstood; it is a completeness. "Ye are complete in Him (Colossians 2.10)." Finish or complete in your experience (though it be in suffering, persecution, and death) the structure that is built on Christ, and indeed, built by Christ (Hebrews 3.1-6).

And this will we do, if God permit (6.3). This little sentence should by itself silence forever anyone who thinks an anxious God always waits, "wanting" us to do anything and everything that is good, all the time and any time. If such were so, why would Paul say that we can only go on to this completion or perfection *if God permit?*

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (6.4ff).

Here, work-mongers, who deny that the Lord keeps His own, introduce the idea that the saints of God may yet somehow apostatize. They do so entirely out of context and therefore without warrant, as the text says no such thing. Plainly, Paul speaks hypothetically: **If** such were to fall away, **then** it is impossible to renew them to repentance. This is one of the biggest **ifs** in the Bible, because the Lord's people cannot apostatize. Kept by the power of God, (1 Peter 1.5), the elect simply cannot fall away.

For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. Just exactly when, how, and why does the good earth that brings forth good fruit receive blessing from God? Does God not first bless the earth that He has made good for Himself so it will bring forth good fruit? Or is it that the rejected and nigh-cursed earth first brings forth good fruit in order to earn God's blessing? How one answers these questions reveals whether he believes salvation is of the Lord or of human effort. If sorry soil could make itself good, farmers could save tons of fertilizer. In Matthew 13 that the seed that fell into the good ground produced good fruit. We leave it as an exercise for will-worshipers to say who made the ground good, whether or not the seed prepared the soil, and if not, who did?.

In verse 9, the verse which has called upon us to take this lengthy look at what precedes it, Paul's words prove he did not fear that any of God's children would apostatize. *But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you.* He writes to beloved. "But, beloved, we are persuaded **better things** of you" or about you. We are persuaded you are not merely poor, thorny ground by the wayside, or stony ground, or rejected ground, or ground nigh unto being cursed. As they are not these things, God's people are good

ground, elect vessels of mercy, whom Christ has redeemed from the curse of the law, “being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: (Galatians 3.13).”

... *and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.* “Though we *thus speak*” again demonstrates that Paul is speaking hypothetically. What are the “things that accompany salvation”? Look in Ezekiel 36.25ff, for one place they are enumerated: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.” What are the things that accompany salvation? Spiritual cleansing; a new, God-given heart in place of the old, natural, stony heart; the indwelling Holy Spirit; God’s working in His people *causing* them to walk in His statutes and judgments; dwelling in the land God has given our fathers (their vineyard!); the Lord’s unfulfilling promises of the New Covenant, “**ye shall** be my people, and **I will** be your God.” These are some of the things which *accompany* salvation.

Someone may say, “I thought these things *are* salvation.” No, they only accompany it, as God, by Ezekiel’s pen, immediately continues, “**I will ALSO save you** from all your uncleannesses...(Ezekiel 36.29).”

We must close this lengthy article for the time being, hoping that, if He so wills, the Lord might enable us to look at some more of the better things in His vineyard.

So, where does this leave us for now? First and foremost, the Lord Jesus Christ is preeminently better than the angels and all else He has created. He has an elect people and is the Captain of their salvation. What He has done for them has put them in His so great salvation **far better** than anyone can imagine, “which things the angels desire to look into.”

(To be continued if the Lord wills)

—Elder C. C. Morris

Another New Book: The Pagan Festivals of Christmas and Easter

By Shaun Willcock

The Remnant Publications has acquired a number of copies of *The Pagan Festivals of Christmas and Easter*, and they are available to our readership while the supply lasts. Published abroad by its author, this is a rather unusual and providential occurrence, as most if not all publications previously offered in *The Remnant* have been printed by *Welsh Tract Publications*.

This book is an interesting study of the origin of the pagan practices of Christmas and Easter, a specific discussion for those who are particularly interested in the background of “religious holidays.” It is excellent for its intended purpose, that of heightening our awareness of the heathenism underlying these observances.

Brother Willcock does not wander from his subject matter but is straightforward and well organized in his presentation. The book is in two parallel parts (Part One, Christmas, and Part Two, Easter). Each part deals with the pagan origin, the customs, the author’s understanding of the biblical accounts of what really happened during the times in question (the birth of Jesus Christ in Part One and His death and resurrection in Part Two), and a concluding chapter under each heading. The book concludes with a final overall summary chapter.

Some readers may consider the author’s conclusions speculative in places. Many who are taken up with Christmas trees, dyed eggs, and Easter bunnies will oppose—I think unsuccessfully—this booklet’s contents. On the other hand, if you have heard these things controverted, and you have wondered what all the fuss was about, this little treatise will certainly get you started on finding the answer. Readers who are already aware of Babylonian-Roman paganism, as it has been passed down to this present evil age, will find this work is a handy reference.

Because of the nature of its subject, *Pagan Festivals...* is footnoted for checking the author’s historical documentation. There are seventy-nine footnotes in all; over half of them are citations to *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop (Loizeaux Broth-

ers, 1959). From that standpoint, Brother Willcock's book might well be considered an introduction to, or a pocket summary of, Hislop's 330-page work. For those demanding a wider validation, at least nine of his footnotes refer the reader to various editions of *Encyclopedia Britannica* for verification. In addition to these works and some other secular publications, there are Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Baptist authorities who are also cited.

Willcock's book reveals the origin of the Christmas tree and where it is described in the Bible, what mistletoe and holly really represent, the origin of the Santa Claus myth, the sources of Lent, dyed eggs, and Easter bunnies, among many other facts; it even addresses the one time *Easter* is mentioned in the Bible and clarifies what the word used there really means.

By offering it to those interested in the subjects, the publishers of *The Remnant* are of course not endorsing its every word and conclusion. However, for those who want to know more about the pagan background of the two major "holidays" observed in church-ianity today, this little book is a good place to begin.

See page 19 for ordering instructions. *The Pagan Festivals of Christmas and Easter* is 64 pages, paperback. \$5.00 postage paid.

ECCLESIASTES 1.4

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever. (Ecclesiastes 1.4)

Solomon's somber discourse on the emptiness and painfulness of life, apart from the grace of God, has an ominous yet subtle theme which addresses every aspect of his thoughts. Not only is mankind hedged about by time, confined to the parameters of creation and subservient to the mandates of the Almighty's will, he is predestinated to conclude this level of existence by the means of death.

This event may be of so-called natural means. It may be agonizing and difficult due to age or infirmity. It may be sudden and unexpected by accident or calamity. It may be veiled in a disguise of disease

or congenital defect. It may greet its guests singularly or in mass quantity, but whatever the means and course of this undaunted predator, it is effectually controlled according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the council of His own will (Eph.1.11).

God has set *the time of enactment*, "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; (Ecclesiastes 3.1f)"; *the ignorance of the recipients*, "For man knoweth not his time (9.12)"; and *the reality of the event in the minds of all*, "...For the living know that they shall die...(9.5)." His decree has also established *the condition of man at the appointed hour*, "as he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand (5.15)"; also, *the all-inclusive nature*, "...and I myself perceived that one event happeneth to them all (2.14)"; *the destination of the body*, "...all go unto one place; all are of dust, and all turn to dust again (3.20)"; *the mystery of the spirit*, "who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? (3.21)"; *the futility of man*, "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit, neither hath he power in the day of death (8.8a)"; and *the power and authority over this event*, "Naked came I out of my mothers womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1.21)."

Every aspect of this final event in nature is ordained, empowered and governed by God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge. Even though it is oftentimes difficult for those who remain to go through "a time to weep" and "a time to lose," Solomon admonishes the wise man thus: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after himself. (Ecclesiastes 7.14)."

Solomon compares death to the natural cycles of life. He speaks of the rising and the setting of the sun in its redundant journey, the circuits and courses of the wind which appear random and ever changing, and the flow of the river to the sea which, being continual, never fills it. These examples of endless, undepleted, uninterrupted courses of nature which

daily venture forth to complete their assigned tasks without any help from man, are the setting in which Solomon speaks of death. He profoundly concludes that since death is a part of life, and all of life is a labor to be performed, so death is outside of the realm or influence of man. "All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing (1.8)."

Death has its beginning, course, and means in the creation over which God is absolutely sovereign. It functions by the decree of God and performs its duty by His power. Death has no power or agenda independent of itself. It sets all men on an equal footing before their maker. It has no regard for the status or wealth in this life (Ecclesiastes 9.2f), and surely has no power to grant or deny any preference at its conclusion. It has no redeeming qualities nor absolving virtues; "...it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgement (Hebrews 9.27)."

Death stands as the common denominator of all things created. Solomon, who was blessed to commune with his own heart, stated that even though "...I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom that all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience in wisdom and knowledge (1.16)," he concluded about death, "As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise?...And how dieth the wise man? As the fool (2.15f)." No achievement in this life can prevent all from going to the same place. Not the rich (5.15), the man of power (6.2-6), the wicked (8.10), or the man of morality and faith (9.2). Even King David proclaimed after the death of Bathsheba's first child, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return unto me (2 Samuel 12.23)." Thus shall the king lie down with the child in the labor called death.

This passive denominator is not only common to all mankind but to all of creation. "For that which befalleth the sons of man befalleth the beast; even one thing befalleth them: As one dieth, so dieth the other; yea they all have one breath; so that man has no preeminence above the beast (3.19)." The grass of the field, the trees of the woods, the bird in the sky and the beast of the earth, nothing can escape; "...then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (12.7)."

"For who maketh thee to differ and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hast not received it (1 Corinthians 4.7)?"

Where then is boasting? In man's works? All that is shall die, and there shall be no remembrance of the former by the latter. This is why Solomon states that all is vanity or empty and painful to his spirit. There is nothing for man to look forward to or to work for: "...this is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that labored for the wind (5.16)?" Man, as a vessel of God made for His purpose, has nothing in which he may say, "See, here are the works of my hand and the profit I have gained, be it in natural or in spiritual matters." "There is nothing better for a man, than he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This I saw, that it was from the hand of God (2.14)." This is the portion or station for mortal man with no hope of any escape from this predator. Death is the factor of zero by which all accomplishments of this life are multiplied and the sum is vanity and vexation of the spirit.

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept (1 Corinthians 15.20)." The only act which could negate the power of death was a direct confrontation of it in the flesh, and the only one qualified to overcome it and be victorious in this confrontation was the one by whom and for whom were all things created (Colossians 1.16). "He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2.8)," and by the power of the eternal Godhead, slew death and led the captive out of captivity. He, as Joshua of old, led His people dryshod across the river. As with Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, by this same power, "...the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor had the smell of the fire passed on them (Daniel 3.27)," so death has no power over the children of the King. The course that the Elder Brother of the household of faith took for the glorification of His family and to the praise of the Father was through death for the destruction of sinful flesh. Then, by the regeneration and the resurrection of His body, the victory was secured. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that

at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue should confess that JESUS CHRIST is LORD, to the glory of GOD the Father (Philippians 2.9f).”

The Apostle Paul understood the dire consequences of the death of God’s anointed in the flesh without the resurrection. “But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is also in vain. Yea, and we are found to be false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ: whom He raised not, if it so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable (1 Corinthians 15.13ff).” This echoes the words of Solomon which he recorded three times: “Then I commended mirth, because man hath no better thing under the sun, that to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: For that shall abide with him of his labor all the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun (Ecclesiastes 8.15; 2.24, and 3.22).” How mournfully sad it is to have nothing better than this flesh in this world.

The resurrection was the quintessential path prescribed by the Father which gave His Son the victory over death and the right, the portion, and the memorial for His children to be glorified with Him. It was the final act by which the Father placed all things under His feet and gave Him all power and authority over all principalities and powers which are in heaven and in earth. By what He accomplished Christ glorified both the Father and the Holy Spirit in Himself. Now, because of the Captain of their salvation, His children stand being justified in Him. By His faithfulness they have peace with God. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor

height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8.35ff).”

Each member of the household of faith must now follow the footsteps of their Elder Brother through death so that this corruptible may put on incorruption, yet without fear. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Psalms 23.4).” This hope is not based on anything which they could ever do for themselves but solely on the work of the only one worthy to stand as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. His faithfulness carried His family over the threshold, for “...He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2.13).”

The conclusion, then, of the whole matter which Solomon gives for all to hear is this: “Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil (Ecclesiastes 12.13f).” On behalf of the household of spiritual Israel, Jesus Christ has been faithful in all the work that was required of Him and it is accounted to Him and imputed to His family for righteousness. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. (Romans 8.1).”

May truth be gleaned from the chaff.

—C. A. Dirkes
337 Sunnybrook Road
Barrington NJ 08007

FROM THE MOUNTAIN-TOP

The following excerpt is from our mail: “...just returned from a 4-day 3-night hike of Mt. Witney (14,495 ft) and *The Remnant* was the one magazine we took with us to read in the evenings. Godspeed.”

—D. B.
California

“ON REFORMATION AND BAPTISM”

Elder R. H. Hale of Huntsville, Alabama, has available in print an excellent article on the above subject, taken from the text, Hebrews 9.10: “...meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them *until the time of reformation.*”

This is a printed version of a sermon that he delivered to the Flint River Association in September, 1998.

Elder Hale has a limited supply of this article in print and on hand, and he will send a copy to interested brethren, free for the asking, while his supply lasts. You may write to him at this address:

Elder R. H. Hale
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The following is an outline of principles the readers of *The Remnant* may expect to see maintained in this publication. Under no circumstances do the publishers or writers for *The Remnant* seek to delineate herein a standard of doctrine or views to be imposed upon the readers. Rather, we set these principles before the readers that they may know what general principles guide our efforts. All attempts at declaring articles of faith will be marred by prejudices and frailty, and ours are by no means any exception.

We believe these principles are, in the main, harmonious with the articles of faith published by predestinarian associations and churches of the old order of Baptists known as Primitive, Particular, or Old School Baptists the world over.

1—The eternal existence, sovereignty, immutability, omnipotence, and perfections of Jehovah God; He has revealed Himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these sacred Three are One; Jesus Christ was and is God manifest in the flesh, and in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

2—The Old and New Testaments in their original languages are the verbally inspired word of God, and they are the complete and only valid guide of faith and practice; the King James Version is the preferred English translation;

3—The will of the eternal God is the first cause of all causes;

4—The absolute predestination of all things;

5—The eternal personal election of the redeemed in Christ, before the world began, and their eternal, vital union with Him; their number is fixed, certain, and sure, and can neither be increased nor diminished; their fall in their federal head Adam into spiritual death, total depravity, and just condemna-

tion; their utter inability to recover themselves from this fallen state;

6—The blood atonement and redemption by Jesus Christ are for the elect only, and are both efficacious and effectual in accomplishing the will and purpose of God to reconcile His people unto Himself;

7—The sovereign, irresistible, effectual work of the Holy Spirit in quickening the elect of God; the new birth is by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit without the use of any means;

8—The final preservation, perseverance, and eternal happiness of all the sons of God, by grace alone;

9—No works are good works other than those which God Himself has so designated; none of the works called good are left up to men to perform or not, at the creature's discretion; nor do the works of the creature, either before or after regeneration, result in merit accruing to his account in God's sight;

10—The peaceable fruits of righteousness are the certain result of God's working in His people both to will and to do of His good pleasure, and His people will be found walking in paths of righteousness for His name's sake;

11—The separation of church and state;

12—The principles outlined in the Black Rock Address of 1832;

13—The bodily resurrection, first of Christ, and also that of all the dead;

14—The final and eternal judgment; and,

15—The bliss of the redeemed and the torment of the wicked are both eternal and everlasting.