

The Nature of the Church (3) — The role of pastors and elders.

—William Kelly

In the last issues, Kelly explained the opposite errors of a state church and a dissenting church, membership being only by faith in Christ. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church made the gifts available to all, and they were used, not as appointed by men, but as directed by the Spirit. Here Kelly considers the role of pastors and elders in the local church.

According to the divine plan, if I am a member of the Church at all, I am a member of the Church everywhere. If I go to any quarter of the world where saints call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, I am a member, not by permission nor by courtesy, but by the universal recognition, on the part of believers, of the title which grace has given me. Baptized by the Spirit, I am a member of Christ's body wherever I may be. In apostolic days that membership, and none other, was known everywhere. There might be differences of perspective. There might be need of the word: "Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Phil. 3:16). Some might eat herbs, and some might eat meat; but the Spirit said, and says, "Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7). Now the glory of God is identified, not with some, but with *all* the members of the body of Christ. Therefore, if the weakest members were excluded, except for reasons of necessary Scriptural discipline, so far would that glory be forgotten or despised; and those guilty of such exclusion should be avoided, as causers of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we learned.

The basis of ministry is the same as that for membership. It is of God's Spirit. If not, it is nothing or worse, and should be so treated by all those who honour God rather than man. If a Christian be an evangelist, he is so everywhere, and not restricted to this or that district, congregation, or chapel. If he be a teacher or a pastor, or both, he of course exercises his gift where he usually resides. But then he is not *the* teacher, but *a* teacher:¹ and he is a teacher in *the* Church, and not in *a* church. "We — says the apostle, writing to far distant saints whom as yet he had not seen — We, being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). He is not speaking of what was to be in heaven, but of what actually was on earth, the unity of Christ's body here below. "Having then gifts differing..." (Rom. 12:6).

So (1 Cor. 3), in meeting their carnal — because it was exclusive — preference of one servant of Christ above another, the apostle presses the broad and blessed truth, "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas..." (1 Cor. 3:22). They displayed a sectarian spirit in respect to those who ministered and this is what Paul rebuked.

It is the same principle in 1 Corinthians 12:18-28: "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it pleased Him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of you. Nor, again, the head of the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness; for our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked. That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the Church; first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."

"God set some in the Church,"² not in *a* church. Viewed as churches, apostles could be in but few. There were none in the church at Corinth when Paul wrote. Teachers stand clearly on the same base; apostles in *the* Church, teachers in *the* Church.

¹ *In the church at Antioch there were at least five prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1).*

² *The Church =*

a. The Universal Church: all believers from Pentecost until the Lord's return.
b. The Global Church: all members of the Universal Church who still live on earth at any given time.
c. The Local church: all members of the Global Church living in a given locality. A local assembly or church is just the local expression of the global Church.

Again, in Ephesians 4:11-16, whether apostles, or prophets, whether evangelists, or pastors and teachers, they are given of Christ, not to be the solitary officials of a denomination, but "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come..." Verse 16 tells us that it is "the whole body fitly joined together," not broken into sects; the whole body "compact by that which every joint supplied", according to the effectual working in the measure of every part": a practical thing, and not a mere theory, a thing meant to be in the Church while on earth, and not at all referring to heaven. We shall not need such ministrations there. In this passage there is also, I would notice, a warrant of faith for expecting the continuance of the gifts of Christ till His body be completed. And of a truth He has never failed during all the long years of ruin in which His gifts were well-nigh smothered, as they were too really and painfully misused.

For I fully recognize that there have been even in the Catholic church, in her clergy and laity, those who had gifts of God's grace to build up His own people, and to spread Christ's name among sinners. But, at the same time, I as utterly deny that they were Christ's gifts in virtue of the commission which the Catholic hierarchy conferred, any more than that others were not His gifts for the lack of such a commission. The same remark, I need hardly add, extends still more widely to modern Protestantism. Would to God that the tender love of Christ, in thus cherishing the Church as His own flesh, might touch a chord in all His members, that together we might weep over our common sin, and that together we might rejoice, extolling the grace that has abounded but the more!

There is, however, a distinction to be observed, which cannot be forgotten without injury. When the body came together as such, the assembly was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It would have impinged upon the right of Christ for any individual, however gifted he might be, to absorb the regulation of it into his own hands. The Giver is there, and He is looked to, not the gifts merely. The order of such an assembly meeting is definitely laid down in Scripture (1 Cor. 14). "Ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted... If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandment of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:31,37-40).

It is quite a different principle which governs a servant of the Lord in the exercise of whatever talent has been intrusted to him.³ He owes an immediate and individual responsibility to Christ to trade with it. He may preach to the unconverted, or he may instruct more perfectly the children of God, or both, if he possess both gifts. He owes it to his Master to exercise all he has received for the good of souls, hindering and hindered by no one else. Every servant, be his gift great or small, has the same liberty and the same responsibility. Two or more may think it good to associate in the ministry; but let us remember that if Paul chose Silas, recommended to the grace of God, Barnabas took Mark; and we do not read that he was thus honoured of God in confirming the churches (Acts 15:36-41). Liberty is not licence. The servant is free of man, but bound to obey the Lord; and his brethren are no less bound to judge his disobedience.

These gifts, let us remember, must be kept distinct from local charges, such as the elders or presbyters of Scripture.⁴ All, even many whose practice was totally different, have always regarded these to be the same as the bishops, or overseers of whom we read in Scripture. These charges had to do with some particular church in a locality, and were appointed by an apostle, or by a delegate possessed of a direct and special commission from an apostle to that end. Such a delegate was Titus. But Scripture nowhere intimates that authority for appointing elders was meant to continue. We have seen that the gifts of Christ were to be "till we all come..." (Eph. 4:13). But Scripture never confounds them with local charges, although both clearly might co-exist in the same individual. We know this to have been so in Philip's case, who was one of "the seven," and an evangelist besides.

Pastorship, to come still closer, is a gift (Eph. 4:11), eldership is a charge; but the gift of feeding the flock of God; so far from being incompatible with the office of an elder or bishop, was evidently one of the most important qualifications sought in those who desired that good work. Thus Paul (Acts 20:28) exhorts the Ephesian elders to take heed to themselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers (bishops — ἐπίσκοπος), to feed the Church of God which He had purchased with His own blood. "Feed the flock of God," said another apostle, "which is

³ Kelly was not against organized lectures by gifted teachers. He gave many of them himself throughout his life. But these were not "assembly meetings" as such, where the Spirit guided collectively, but "teaching meetings," where an individual used his gift guided by the Spirit.

⁴ In Acts 11:30 they are mentioned for the first time in connection with the church at Jerusalem. They are prominent at the council in chapter 15; but not a hint is dropped in the Acts touching their appointment, if they really had any outward authorization. James (5:14) mentions the elders; and Peter (1 Pet. 5:1) and John (2nd and 3rd Epistles) call themselves elders, but do not speak of official establishment. This appears to be confirmed by the way in which the elders are in one place contrasted with the "younger" (1 Pet. 5:1,5). Experience is in question, and moral weight to guide.

among you, taking the oversight (ἐπισκοπέω) thereof not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage [their allotments],⁵ but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:2-3).

In the First Epistle of Timothy (ch. 3) we find aptness to teach and ability to take care of the Church of God among other requirements. Titus too (1:5-9) was told to ordain such as held fast the faithful Word, as he had been taught, that he might be able by sound doctrine to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. But it would be too much to conclude from this that all the elders necessarily laboured in the public ministration of the Word. They were appointed to exercise a godly fatherly care over the church; but labouring in the Word and doctrine was not an indispensable combination. Hence the apostle says, in 1 Timothy 5:17, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the Word and doctrine." In one way or another, all elders were assumed to feed the flock; but there might be elders who did not serve, at least publicly, in the Word: a principle recognized in the Presbyterian system.

(Scripture quotations from the KJV)

To be cont'd

One Hundred Years Of Revival — A Study of the Books of the Return

—W. D. Hayhoe

In 1520, Martin Luther published his book, "The Babylonian Captivity." His bold thesis stated that during the Middle Ages the Church had been held captive to the Papacy, just as the Jews had been held captive to Babylon in the Old Testament. In keeping with this analogy, the resulting Reformation that swept through Europe can be likened to the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. Other great revivals followed the Reformation, such as the Great Awakening in the 1700's under Wesley and Whitfield, and the Second Great Awakening in the 1800's. This latter one coincided with a recovery of prophetic and Church truth. Since the New Testament was completed in the first century after Christ, however, we have no divine commentary on these revivals to help us assess their causes, strengths, and weaknesses. The Old Testament, on the other hand, contains six books giving us God's perspective of the revival and restoration of the Jews after their captivity in Babylon: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. This study will focus on some important characteristics of these 100 years of revival, which may also apply to us today.

1. The Roots of the Return

How does recovery start? What are its roots? The first point we notice in Ezra 1:1, is that *God had made a promise* through the prophet Jeremiah that after 70 years of captivity He would cast down Babylon and return the Jews to their land (Jer. 25:12, 29:10). God keeps His promises. These two things did happen, exactly 70 years after the king of Babylon destroyed the temple and carried away the Jews into captivity (538 B.C.).

The second point we notice is that *God works through prayer*. One of the young men carried away into Babylon was the prophet Daniel. For 70 years he was faithful amid the temptations of the idolatrous Babylonian court. Daniel stood tall, loud, and clear. Prayer and the study of God's Word were his daily habit. In Daniel 9 we see him, an old man of perhaps 80 or 90, reading the prophet Jeremiah and reminding God that the time had come for Him to keep His promise. But Daniel well knew that the people of God did not deserve to return to their promised land. So he humbled himself for three weeks of prayer and fasting. At that instant God put in motion the divine machinery for the Jews to return. God tells Daniel that his "prayer was heard and the command was issued" (Dan. 9:23).

The third point to notice is *God's sovereignty* in raising up Cyrus, a Persian king who sympathized with the desire of the Jews to return (Ezra 1:2-4). Revivals are always dependent on God's sovereign acting. Think of the present freedom for the gospel in Russia, because of Premier Gorbachev's new policy of openness. The Sovereign God works in His time.

God's promises, Daniel's prayer, and Cyrus' favour, all set the stage for revival; but a fourth point was needed: *the people's response*. Revival only takes place when people allow themselves to be revived, when they respond to the call of God in their lives and hearts.

⁵ *Into this wrong, Christendom has long grievously fallen, nationalists or dissenters, and in so-called Catholic times. Their ministers and pastors do regard the parish and its congregation as their allotments. "Do you belong to the Rev. So-and-so's church? I am of Such-Anothers'." Thus is "the flock of God" overlooked and nullified.*

We believe that neither evangelical revival nor restoration to Biblical principles will occur today among God's people unless there are godly individuals like Daniel praying and fasting, and unless there are people willing to be revived. Even then, all depends on God's faithfulness and sovereignty.

2. Raising the Altar

Not all of the Jews returned. Who would want to give up the comfort found in Babylon as part of the entrepreneurial class, to embark on a life of "out-tripping" in the forsaken land of Palestine? Nevertheless, out of about 500,000 captives, some 42,000 returned (Ezra 2:64). That is a good number, considering the magnitude of the task and the tremendous dangers that faced them. Perhaps the leadership of the royal prince Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua played a significant role in this return.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, what was the first thing they built (536 B. C.)? The temple? The city walls? Their own houses? No, the altar of God (Ezra 3). Their logic was beautiful. They didn't reason: "Since there are so many enemies around let us get our army trained and our city walls up;" but, "Since we are terrified of the people around, let us get our altar up to show that we really trust in God, and not in ourselves" (cf. Ezra 3:3). Revival never occurs without a renewed faith in the real, living presence of God among His people for protection and blessing.

Other things are also signified by the altar. They built it in order to offer up burnt-offerings (Ezra 3:3). Do we delight to put God's interest first? Are we happy to start the week every Lord's day morning by being together to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God in worship, that is, the perfections of Christ (1 Pet. 2:5)? He is the perfect burnt-offering. Then, there is another offering to be made, our everyday lives (Rom. 12:1).

They not only kept the burnt-offerings, but they also celebrated the feast of tabernacles (Ezra 3:4). We don't read that they kept the customs and traditions of Babylon, but they were very careful to keep the Word of God. However, there were some things they simply couldn't do, for example, restore the monarchy. There was no attempt to make Zerubbabel King. His very name "descendent of Babylon" reminded them that it was still the "times of the Gentiles." But, as J. G. Bellett succinctly expressed it, "They do not refuse to do what they can, because they cannot do all that they would."

3. Rebuilding the Temple

The returned remnant of the Jews made a good start and then got side-tracked. They got the altar up and the burnt-offerings going. And that was the right place to start. But the reason for which they had returned, the mandate given them by Cyrus, was to build *the house of the Lord* (Ezra 1:4). Instead, they used the opposition of the people around Jerusalem as an excuse to stop building the temple and start working on their own houses. We can infer this from a careful reading of the dates in Ezra 4 and 5. (These two parenthetical chapters cover the following 80 years.) There was opposition, it is true. But they had already stopped building the temple when the order came from the Persian king commanding them to stop.

But God didn't leave them there. Two prophets are raised up, Haggai and Zechariah (518 B. C.). Haggai's message was short and to the point, "What are you doing living in your own paneled houses, when God's house still lies desolate!?" (Hag. 1:4). How many times do Christian leaders today feel like shouting the same message at the Lord's people! Zerubbabel and Joshua again led the people in this revived interest to put God's priorities first (Ezra 5:2, Hag. 1:12, Zech. 1:3).

Once the people got their priorities straightened out, the Lord put the other things in motion, and the permission to continue with the building of the temple was obtained from the king of Persia. In Ezra 6:15-16, they finished building the temple. What joy to again see something rise for God's glory! They then celebrated the passover, according to God's Word (Ezra 6:19-24). Are we not similarly encouraged by believers showing active interest in building the Lord's house today, i.e., evangelizing unbelievers, and instructing new believers in God's Word? Are we not similarly encouraged to see believers who want to "keep the passover" according to the Scriptures, i.e., the weekly breaking of bread (Acts 20:7)?

4. Rescuing the People

Chronologically, the next event, which occurs between Ezra 6 and 7, is often overlooked in a study of "The Return" — the story of Esther. What about those 500,000 Jews who stayed behind in Babylon and Persia? Had God forgotten about them? Well, He couldn't own them as His people. The title, Lo-Ammi ("not My people"), was still over them (Hos. 1:9), and

so we don't find the name of God mentioned even once in the book of Esther. But this just makes the book more intriguing, to see God's hand so clearly "behind the scenes moving the very scenes He is behind."

The king's favourite, Haman, tried to destroy the Jews in all 127 provinces of Persia (Est. 3). This would have included not only the Jews who stayed behind in Persia, but also the ones who had returned to Jerusalem. And then there would be no people of God for the Messiah to return to!! We see clearly how Satan was behind this attempt, just as he was behind that of Hitler in our century. But if Satan is always active to hinder when a revival is going on, God is also active to overrule. Moreover, God is sovereign, though in His grace He often chooses to work through His people. Esther was available — one single girl against the Persian empire! What courage, what conviction, what availability! Like Daniel before her, whose example she was probably well acquainted with, she expressed her trust in God by fasting before going in to the king (Est. 4:16). We know the rest: the king couldn't sleep, and so got his records out and found that Mordecai had saved his life. Then, at her banquet, Esther unveiled the wickedness of Haman to the king. The day was saved, and all the Jews were rescued. Esther's unselfishness and love for her people was integral in the story of the returned remnant, even though she herself didn't return.

Mordecai became Prime Minister in the kingdom of Persia in 474 B.C., and was also "great among the Jews" (Est. 10:3). At that very time two Jewish lads were growing up in Persia — Ezra and Nehemiah. Brought to maturity under Mordecai, they would play the next crucial role in the revival of the remnant. Ezra returned to Jerusalem in 458 B.C. and Nehemiah in 445 B.C.

5. Restoring Separation

The temple was finished in 516 B.C. Almost 60 years pass by. Then in 458 B.C. a man of God comes on the scene, who, next to Moses, had perhaps the greatest role in forming the Jewish faith, the scribe Ezra. First, he was a "*man of the Book*," absolutely committed to studying, applying, and teaching the Word of God (Ezra 7:10). Then, he was a *man of dependence* on God. Ashamed to ask the Persian king for an armed escort for that dangerous trip of 1500 kilometres, he called a fast instead (Ezra 8:21). He was also *a man of great humility*. Grieved at the sinful condition of the mixed marriages he found in Jerusalem, he bows in deep confession (Ezra 9:5-15). Lastly, he was *a man of action*, leading the people in being reconciled to God at great personal cost (Ezra 10:4-5).

There has never been a revival without a deeper sense of God's holiness, and a stronger call to separation for God's people. In Ezra 2, the leaders emphasized that everyone had to have a genealogy in order to worship. Similarly, the great revivalist George Whitfield preached the need for everyone to repent and be born again in order to be a true believer. In Ezra 4, the Samaritans of the half-religion, were not allowed to build with the Jews. Today, can we build with half-Christians, with liberals, modernists, or unbelieving professors?

God had told His people not to marry foreign wives, for God knew the end result of such relationships. How true it proved, even Solomon fell into idolatry through his foreign wives. Yet, the people fall again, and this causes Ezra to confess their condition before God (Ezra 9:5-15). This resulted in repentance among the people, who put away their foreign wives. But their repentance was not deep, for in Nehemiah 13 and Malachi 2 we read that this evil continued to plague them.

We too are told to separate from all that would draw our hearts away from the Lord. We should not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, either in marriage or in business (2 Cor. 6:14-18). We should flee from youthful lusts and withdraw from iniquity (2 Tim. 2:22,19). It is the worldly desires in our hearts that bring an end to a revival introduced by repentance.

6. Rallying the Workers

Thirteen years after Ezra's return (445 B. C.), the news comes to another man back in Persia that the people were in great distress and the walls of the city were broken down (Neh. 1:3). This meant that the city was in great danger of being once again destroyed. Something had to be done. Nehemiah was *a man of action*, but he was also *a man of prayer*, and the first thing he does is fast and pray (Neh. 1:4). Like Daniel, Esther, and Ezra before him, Nehemiah's contribution to the revival started with prayer and fasting. "He had a deep and constant sense of the ruined state of God's people" (J. N. Darby). But although Queen Esther had only waited four days, Nehemiah had to wait four months (from the month Chisleu to the month Nisan — Neh. 1:1 and 2:1). Then, the Lord gave him the opportunity and the king asked him for his request. After a quick prayer, Nehemiah presented the king with his request and it was granted (Neh. 2:4).

The next few chapters, Nehemiah 2-6, present the classic picture of a man gifted by God to rally the people of God to the necessary work. We see his secret evening inspection, his strategy of getting every family to work on the part of the wall nearest them, his firm resistance to the enemies' temptations and threats, his wise solution to the quarrels that soon divided the workers, and his own personal example. But not just that, he saw the clear hand of God in it: "They recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God" (Neh. 6:16).

What wall needs to be built today? One between us and unbelievers? But the Jews didn't have a commission to evangelize the Gentiles as we do, which requires contact with them (1 Cor. 9:16-23). The wall around the city meant security and community for the Jews. And this is just what is needed today. Satan's relentless attacks are so strong, that every local congregation should have walls of prayer, of concern one for another, of security and community, and walls of separation from worldliness and evil. Without these, any work of revival will soon come to nothing; individual believers will get discouraged, and false doctrines and bad morals will enter in.

7. Recommitting the People

Now we arrive at the great Bible conference of Watergate (442 B.C.). In Nehemiah 8, the Law of Moses is read carefully and distinctly by Ezra so that the people can all understand what it really means. What an effect it has on the people! How they grieve! But Ezra and Nehemiah tell them to rejoice instead of weeping, for the day was holy unto the Lord (Neh. 8:9). God turns our mourning about our miserable failures into rejoicing at His restoring grace!

Nehemiah 9 and 10 then give us their confession and praise to God, and the renewed covenant signed by the leaders and the people. Notice the order in Nehemiah 10. *First*, they commit themselves to obeying God's Word (vv. 29-31). *Second*, they will give regularly for the sustainment of their worship (w. 32-37). *Third*, they will give tithes for the support of the Levites who served (vv. 37-38). *Finally*, they "will not neglect the house of... God" (v. 39). What wonderful New Year's resolutions!

Were Nehemiah and Ezra right in getting the people to put themselves back under the law (i.e., under a covenant) after such failure? Would we be right today in getting the Lord's people to sign a covenant of commitment to the Lord's work, involving time and finances? The New Testament doesn't instruct us about this. However, when leaders today go through the frustration of seeing God's people listless, weak, and worldly-minded, they are sometimes tempted to put them under the same kind of covenant. If only they could get God's people to completely commit themselves to putting God's things first! However, chapter 13 shows that it doesn't work. No sooner does Nehemiah return to Persia for 12 years, then the people again fall into inter-marriage with unbelievers and selfish living. Covenants don't work. If they did, the apostle Paul would have used them with his erring Corinthians, Colossians, and Galatians. Only grace will work. That is why Paul wrote, "Timothy, my son, be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). This is the secret of continuing with the Lord's people in weakness and declension: being strong in grace. "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:17 — KJV).

8. Robbing God

Malachi follows Nehemiah 13, and closes the canon of the Old Testament. The 100 years of revival are past and the people are again in a bad state. The very point which marked their bright beginning — the construction of the altar — was their point of failure in the end. They were offering defiled food on the Lord's altar, blind and lame animals (Mal. 1:7). Do we sometimes get weary of our one hour together each Lord's Day morning to worship Him for His great sacrifice? Are we too busy to spend time during the week to prepare true sacrifices of praise?

Two other problems that had beset the people throughout the 100 years now completely conquered them. The priests were divorcing their wives for younger, foreign women (Mal. 2:14), and the people were renegeing on the tithes, in effect, robbing God (Mal. 3:8). How much similarity there is between this and the last days of the church, as prophesied in the letter to Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22)! Nevertheless, there were a few who "feared the *Lord*, and spoke often one to another" (Mal. 3:16). They were appreciated by the Lord. And these faithful few continued for 400 years right to the Lord's birth, where they were found in the persons of Joseph, Mary, Zechariah, Elizabeth, and others in Luke 1 and 2.

9. The Results of the Return

The revival had come to an end in Malachi's days. Yet there were several important results which we should review. *First*, the Jews were completely cured of idolatry. They never returned to the sin that had plagued them so much before the

captivity. *Second*, there was now a people in the land of Israel for the Messiah to come to, although when He came He was rejected by them (Jn. 1:11). *Third*, it gives us an example for our day of how God's people can return to a Scriptural foundation for worship and service in a world hostile to God.

Appendix

The books of the Return compared with the Book of Acts

There is a danger in applying these Old Testament books to us today. Unlike the Jews, whose commission was to preserve the purity of their heritage by keeping separate from the Gentiles, our commission is to win as many Gentiles as possible to Christ (Mt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 9:16-24). If we only apply the lessons of these remnant books and neglect our great evangelical commission of the New Testament, we can easily fall into the trap of "remnant theology." Misusing the verse, "Who has despised the day of small things?" (Zech. 4:10), we may begin to justify our declining numbers by appealing to our faithfulness. There is some truth in this, for we do find by Malachi's time only a few who really honoured the Lord. But this line of thinking overlooks entirely the ever-present possibility for revival and true growth that come about when individuals are praying, people are willing, and God is acting. Let us be faithful in times of declension, but let us also work hard in evangelism and teaching, and count on God for revival.

There is an opposite danger: that of a success-oriented "church growth theology" which argues that faithfulness always means church growth, since that is God's divine plan. There is some truth in this also, but again, it is not the whole truth. During many periods of the history of God's people, faithful and godly saints continued for the Lord even though He didn't send revival. The basic flaw of church growth philosophy is the fact that we are not living in the days of the book of Acts. Although all the spiritual dynamism of Acts is available to us today, as I have shown in previous issues of *Come And See* (Vol. 14:6, 15:1,2), great failure has come into the Christian profession that will continue to the end. The witness of Christ and of the apostles uniformly warn us that at the end times "the love of many will grow cold." God can send revival, as many Old Testament and more recent examples testify, but the first state of the church cannot be recovered (2 Tim. 2, 2 Pet. 2, Jude). Nevertheless, spiritual revival and blessing are always available for those who truly seek His face.

(Scripture quotations from the NASB)

The End

Outline for Bible Study (46)

95. Daniel's Friends In The Fiery Furnace. Nebuchadnezzar's Fall and Confession. — Daniel 3-4

Outline

1. The King's Decrees Dan. 3:1-18
2. The Deliverance of Daniel's Friends Dan. 3:19-30
3. Nebuchadnezzar Humbled and Restored Dan. 4

Explanation

1. Although Nebuchadnezzar had recognized and worshipped Jehovah, he nevertheless set up his own God, in an effort to establish a state-religion which would enable him to rule over his subjects according to his own will. A remnant of Israel (three men) remained faithful to Jehovah. Their faith was uncompromising (vv. 17-18), and they served God rather than men (Acts 15:29).

2. Nebuchadnezzar defied God by casting the men into the furnace (v. 15). Jehovah mocked him (Ps. 2:4) and glorified Himself by delivering and honoring these faithful men (Isa. 54:10; 43:1-3). The heathen acknowledged God (Dt. 28:10). Nebuchadnezzar then honored the God of Daniel and his three friends (Dan.2:47; 3:28), but his proud heart was not yet perfect before God.

3. Nebuchadnezzar had another dream. Daniel again interpreted it for him. The dream revealed that Nebuchadnezzar would become like a beast for seven years until he gave God the glory due to Him. And so it happened.

Lesson

The three men in the fiery furnace are an illustration of the faithful Jewish remnant during the tribulation; they too will be saved and delivered (Rev.12:17). They are also an example for us when we pass through tribulation today.

96. Belshazzar's Feast and The Conquest of Babylon — Daniel 5

Outline

1. Belshazzar's Feast Dan. 5:1-12
2. Belshazzar's Judgment Dan. 5:13-30

Explanation

1. Nebuchadnezzar had sinned against Jehovah through the introduction of idolatry. Belshazzar, however, made an open mockery of God, and judgement came (Job 15:24-25).

2. Daniel's speech to the proud king was a frank accusation. Belshazzar had ignored the time of grace; there was no place for repentance for him (Heb. 4:7; Ps. 73:18-19,27).

Once again Daniel received discernment, this time to interpret the writing. This was the blessed result of fellowship with the Lord (Prov. 2:6-8; Ps. 25:15). That night the Medes took the kingdom.

Lesson

The sin of Belshazzar was greater than that of Nebuchadnezzar, because the former had seen the power and severity of God in God's dealing with his grandfather (Lk. 12:47).

Everyone will be weighed in the balances and found wanting before God (Rom. 3:19, 23). Only grace can save men.

To be cont'd

Questions And Answers (4)

Q10. What will be the fate on the last day of most of our forefathers who were not privileged to hear the gospel of Christ before they died, seeing they only gave themselves to idol worship throughout their lives (Heb. 9:27)?

A10. A Germanic king who was about to be baptized by a missionary asked this question. When told that they would not be in heaven, he refused to be baptized; it was too hard for him to accept that those he loved were eternally lost. Obviously, he was not ready for baptism.

But, it makes no difference whether one's forefathers served idols or whether they lived "a decent life" in a Christian country. Both the so-called Christian (because he did not accept Christ as his personal Saviour — Jn. 3:36) and the idol-worshipper (because he did not honour the God of creation — Rom. 1:18-20) will be in hell forever. The former ignored the message that was presented to him and will therefore suffer more than the latter who never heard of Christ. So you share your sadness with all brothers and sisters in so-called Christian countries who had unbelieving forefathers.

However, there is another point to consider in Romans 2:14. It speaks of some who have come to know the Creator-God from nature (Rom. 1:19-20) and have turned from idols to honour God, though knowing little about Him and His plan of salvation. They contrast with those described in 2 Peter 3:5.

There is an account of a Chinese grandmother who had cared many years for her little one. When the girl became older, she told her: "Go and seek the true God. Somewhere you will find Him. I cannot tell you more, I just know He is there." The young girl left, and after many wanderings found Christians who told her about the true God and His Son, the Saviour. Faith like this grandmother's is rare, yet God's Spirit may have worked in some heart here or there that, though knowing little about God, came to honour Him as Creator.

Whether some of your forbears had such faith, who can tell? Whether or not, let not the fate of your forefathers hinder you from turning to God, as it did the Germanic king. Let us proclaim Christ and pray that those who are still alive may repent and accept Christ as Saviour (Rom. 10:14-16).

Q11. From Adam onward many have died as a punishment for their sins. Others have died a natural death. Would these persons benefit from the salvation wrought on the cross? Could you answer this with reference to Hebrews 9:27 and 1 Peter 4:6?

A11. Let me begin by paying attention to some who have died as a punishment for their sins, but who are recorded as having believed. First of all, Moses died in the wilderness because of his smiting the rock a second time. Samson died because he had visited a harlot; God had given him up to the Philistines. Yet both are found in the list of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. Jonathan was a man of faith, yet he remained with his father Saul rather than casting his lot in with David, and he died on the mountains of Gilboa. The man of God out of Judah (1 Ki. 13) disobeyed God by visiting the prophet in Bethel. This transgression resulted in his immediate death. Josiah was told not to go out against the king of Egypt, yet he went and fell in the battle. All these were men of God, who died as a consequence of not doing God's will, and "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

This verse helps us to understand that, although their sins were recorded and of a public nature, these persons were no greater sinners than any of us today. Which of us does everything constantly only out of faith? We know that "we all often offend" (Jas 3:2). But we also know that we are saved through faith in the name of the Lord Jesus, through the work He has done on the cross. "We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses" (Eph. 1:7).

In Romans 3:25 we read about Christ Jesus, "whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, though faith in His blood, for the showing forth of his righteousness, in respect of the passing by the sins that had taken place before, through the forbearance of God." There is the answer to your question. God was able to pass by these past sins, because He saw ahead and knew that the Lord Jesus would pay for all the sins of those who in past ages had faith in God. Their faith was counted to them as righteousness (Rom. 4:3).

Now you can also see the truth of 1 Peter 4:6: "For to this end were the glad tidings preached to the dead also, that they might be judged, as regards men, after the flesh, but live, as regards God, after the Spirit." This tells us that, though God may have judged one here on earth for the sins he had done (as Moses was), yet he lives eternally in God's presence because of his faith (Moses was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration). Let us not forget that those who have faith in God, both in the Old and in the New Testament, are born again and will never die (Jn. 11:26).

Yet "we must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each may receive the things done in the body" (2 Cor. 5:10). This answers to Hebrews 9:27, "It is the portion of men once to die, and after this judgment." Both believers and unbelievers will come before the judgment-seat, though not at the same time. Believers will be there so that their deeds may be manifested. Then all we have done will be seen by us in its true value to God. For what we have done well, we will receive a reward. Because all our sins have been judged on the cross, we will not come into judgment. The unbelievers will appear before the Great White Throne and will find that none of their deeds have pleased God. None of their sins have been borne by the Lord Jesus and they themselves will receive the righteous punishment of eternal damnation. How terrible to fall into the hands of the living God! How blessed to know our sins forgiven!

To be cont'd

Quotes from Woollen and Linen

—J. G. Bellett

Position — Condition

Zeal, if it be for Christ, though misdirected, is better than a chill at the heart or indifference as to what is right or wrong in His sight. But still, the only perfect path is that which is taken in the sight of the Lord in the understanding of the mysteries of God, and the call of God, and the directions of the energy of the Spirit, and not merely after the fashion or dictates of the morals and thoughts of men. And the call of God now demands that the tare field be left unpurged (Mt. 13:29), that the indignity of the Samaritans be left unrevenge (Lk. 9:54-56), that the resources and strength of the world be refused rather than used (Mt. 26:52).

Position may be quite according to God, but the practical, godly grace with which it is filled and occupied may be scanty and poor. And how should this warn us not to count on the virtue of a merely pure and separated position!

The End