

Articles by Andrew Borland

Andrew Borland

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Anna

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Andrew Borland

Andrew Borland of Scotland, Editor of The Believer's Magazine, is well-known to our reader family. This is the last of three articles dealing with three noble women of the New Testament. 'The articles have been selected from "Wholesome Words," a bi-monthly paper received from New Zealand.

(From Luke 2)

Anna is referred to as a widow of great age, perhaps one of the oldest persons in Jerusalem at that time. Her life can be divided into three sections. Reference is made to her virginity, but no indication is given as to its duration. Then she had lived with her husband for seven years after she had been married. The longest period of her life was her widowhood. The account says, "She was a widow of about fourscore and four years" (2:37). If "fourscore and four years" was the length of her widowhood she could have been well over a hundred. Notice these features about such a remarkable woman.

1. Her interest in spiritual things had not declined in spite of her experiences and the passage of years. The loss of her husband after only a few years of married life had not destroyed her noble concern. Perhaps her grief intensified her desires. Advancing years, even to extreme old age, had not diminished her zeal.

2. She was "the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher" (2:36). Her family connections were well known.

Asher was one of “the ten lost tribes” taken off to captivity and scattered; but evidently some of them who had returned to Jerusalem were the forebears of Anna’s father, Phanuel. When the girl was born the parents chose to name her after one of the noblest women in Hebrew history, Hannah, and, doubtless, the maiden was oftentimes reminded that her name meant “grace”, and that she had a worthy character to emulate. Names in those days were not simply social or family tags, they had significance for those who bore them.

3. Anna is described as a “prophetess”. She was the last of that line in pre-Christian times. Two other women are so designated, Deborah, in Judges 4:4, and Huldah, in 2 Kings 22:14. That was an honour indeed! She was one to whom were given messages from God, in all probability because there were no men to whom messages could be entrusted. Luke must have discovered the fact from those who knew that such an honoured woman existed.

4. Certain statements are made which reveal her character. An intimate picture is built up for us in a few words.

(a) She departed not from the temple. Her entire life was devoted to God. It may be she occupied some building in the Temple precincts, and while she was no longer known on the streets of the city she was well known by the pious folk who attended the services regularly. What she saw in the Temple court must have grieved her, as she witnessed the sacred surroundings converted into a den of thieves making merchandise their business in the name of religion. Do the assemblies of God’s people not need women like that today?

(b) She “served God”. Her life was devoted to worshipping. There were priestly functions which, as a woman, she could not perform; but divinely imposed prohibitions could not interfere with a devout spirit expressing itself in adoration and praise. About her demeanor there would be an atmosphere of sanctity, of devotion, which did not need to manifest itself in words.

(c) She “fasted”. She practised self-denial. She did not allow her indulgence to destroy the regularity of her religious exercises. Perhaps that had been a life-long practice, so that in old age it was a habitual attitude of life. Her mode of living was free from the excesses which mark an undisciplined life.

(d) She “prayed night and day”. Fasting and praying continued together. Such exercises were not spasmodic. They were part of a regular routine from which she did not depart, and by so doing she overcame natural tendencies which might interfere with her service for God. What an asset such a woman was to those who frequented the Temple at the stated times of prayer!

(e) On one occasion she attended the Temple at the time when aged Simeon was holding the Infant Messiah in his arms, and when she heard him speak she “gave thanks unto the Lord” (2:38). Her words are not recorded, but it may be certain that her whole being was thrilled as she realized that the long-promised Messiah had at length arrived. How do we react at the remembrance that He has been here as the Saviour of the world, and is now alive forevermore?

(f) She “spoke of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (2:38). She was well known to the godly remnant in the city whom she knew as those

who longed for the coming of the Redeemer. She immediately shared with them the good news that their expectations had been realized. She was not ashamed to identify herself with the Lord, and with those who loved His first appearing. What noble service even aged women can do! What an occupation for an aged woman to “speak of Him”!

Here is a lesson for us all to learn. “A resigned and religious old age will often move us more than the heroic ardour of young hearts.”

Elizabeth

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Andrew Borland

Andrew Borland of Scotland, Editor of The Believer's Magazine, is well-known to our reader family. This is the second article dealing with three noble women of the New Testament. The articles have been selected from "Wholesome Words," a bi-monthly paper received from New Zealand.

The second woman of the trio under present consideration is Elisabeth, of whom only Luke makes any mention. The beloved doctor, according to the introduction to his gospel narrative, had consulted current accounts and enquired of eye-witnesses, so that readers would be assured of the reliability and accuracy of his record. Much of the information he presents is complementary to that given by Mark and Matthew, and includes much that otherwise later generations would not have had.

Elisabeth, as has been noted, was beyond middle age, for she was well-stricken in years, married to a man who was "a priest, of the course of Abia," whose duty in the service of God took him from the hill country to serve in the temple in Jerusalem. Very little is written about Elisabeth, but Luke's characterization is masterly. What he writes about her is sufficient to make a deep impression on the mind of a careful reader.

1. Elisabeth was an elderly married woman with a deep disappointment in life. It was the expectation of every Jewish woman that she would be the mother of a man-

child who might be in the Messianic line, might even be the Messiah. To Elisabeth marriage had not fulfilled that expectation, and she felt her barrenness as “my reproach among men” (1:25). The worthy couple, anxious as they were, had no child whose laughter had cheered their home, and whom they could have nurtured in the fear of God. However, disappointment had mellowed her character. Evidently she had come to accept the situation, and was beyond the period of expectation. Her disappointment had not soured her disposition, as disappointment often does. The cure for such a reaction is submission to and confidence in the will of God. Perhaps the quiet life in the hill country, and the fact that her husband Zecharias was of the priestly order, may have contributed to the serenity of her attitude to life.

2. Elisabeth, during a considerable number of years, had shared with her husband the business of building a God-fearing home. Luke may have learned something of the character of that home from conversation with neighbours who had vivid recollections of the worthy couple. Elisabeth had gladly cooperated with her husband in creating an impression which never left the neighbourhood. Home-building was for both a serious business, husband and wife contributing to the success of the effort. Is it not true that many a partnership in home-building has been wrecked by the vanity and ambition of a worldly-minded woman? The partnership, begun happily when aspirations were nobly fostered, can so easily assume a different aspect when material prosperity provokes a sense of self-gratulation and induces an attitude of independence. Spiritual assets come to be at a discount, and the simple dependence

upon God disappears in the constant round of social engagements. Husband and wife disagree, but, although the disagreement does not voice itself, an appreciative tension builds up and destroys the deeper harmony which existed in earlier years.

What was the nature of the home of the pious pair? Husband and wife were equally yoked together. Both belonged to priestly families. The husband is described as “a certain priest named Zecharias, of the course of Abia,” while his partner was one “of the daughters of Aaron” (1:5). Naturally they had common interests and looked forward to the time when the husband would be called upon to discharge his duties as an attendant in the temple. Whatever were the religious duties Zecharias might have had to perform in his village community we are not informed, but it is easy to infer that Elisabeth concurred and assisted where and when it was necessary. Happy is that home where the woman makes it easy for her husband to serve his heavenly Master.

3. An insight is given into that home in Judea. Simple, but revealing statements are made. God was honoured by the obedience of each. They were both righteous before God. That, in all probability, was the estimate of those who knew them intimately. Their lives were conspicuously upright. They both walked in all the commandments. They knew the demands of the Word of God, and were exemplary in respecting what that Word taught. They both kept the ordinances. In public as well as in private they demonstrated their obedience, setting an example to the entire community. They both reached the same high level of moral attainment, they were blameless, that is, their lives were above reproach. Thus

they had preserved the sanctity of their home through many years; and Elisabeth shares the honour with her husband. What an asset to any community is a home like that! And how highly respected should be every Christian woman who in any measure resembles the godly Elisabeth!

4. Their home had been sanctified by prayer. That fact is learned from the divine comment to Zecharias when he was ministering in the temple. The prayer-life contributed to the stability of that home. And it always does. Family prayer is a splendid bulwark to a home, especially if the woman of the home encourages the atmosphere in which it is easy for the husband to pray.

5. Elisabeth was a woman who was willing to endure loneliness to allow her husband to discharge divinely appointed duties in Jerusalem. How long he was absent is not disclosed, but during his absence Elisabeth had no immediate solace in the home. How she would long for the termination of the service, when she would welcome him back! And it is not easily forgotten that the wives of itinerant preachers have many a lonely wait while their husbands are away in their Master's service. There's many a modern Elisabeth.

What a responsibility elderly couples have to set a godly example before others! Wives have a considerable part to play in the preservation of such an example.

Mary Mother of Our Lord

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Andrew Borland of Scotland, Editor of The Believer's Magazine, is well-known to our reader family. This is the first of three articles dealing with three noble women of the New Testament. The articles have been selected from "Wholesome Words," a bi-monthly paper received from New Zealand.

Readers of the New Testament know how indebted we are to Luke for information about the people associated with the birth of our Lord. Chapters one and two of his Gospel are masterpieces of literature, written with a sympathetic understanding of the events surrounding the birth of the Saviour of the world. Among the numerous interesting features of those chapters is the introduction of three most remarkable women, each one of whom had her own special part to play in that unique period in history.

Mary was a young woman, whose age is undisclosed; she evidently was in the blush of maidenhood. She was a virgin, espoused to Joseph, the village carpenter whom she expected soon to marry. Elisabeth, who was to become the mother of John the Baptist, was a married woman, well-stricken in years. The great disappointment in her life was the absence of a family, although both she and her husband were a worthy couple and had prayed that they might have a son to dedicate to the service of God. Anna of whom Luke gives us only a momentary

glimple, was a widow of great age, whose memory stretched well nigh a full century back.

One general lesson from the story of those women is this that women had a noble and beautiful part to play in the fulfilment of the purpose of God. Age, in the development of the divine plan, was no disqualification. Mary was young; Elisabeth was beyond middle-age; Anna was an old woman. Social status is no hindrance to usefulness. Mary was a virgin; Elisabeth was a married woman; Anna was a widow. What an encouragement to all classes of women! None need claim exemption from service according to the will of God.

Consider, Mary, the virgin. As we are concerned with her character rather than with the unique nature of "that Holy Thing" of which she would be the mother, there is no need to defend the truth of the Virgin Birth of our Lord. Notice that she lived in social surroundings which were not conducive to the promotion of godliness of character. Nazareth, presumably her native town, was notorious. The question was asked by Nathaniel, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" The inhabitants, generally, had a reputation for being proud, haughty, and easily offended. Yet the impression we get of Mary is that she was meek, submissive, pure. The obvious lesson is that the grace of God can enable a person to triumph over circumstances which are detrimental to godly living. That should be an encouragement to young Christian women surrounded by a permissive society.

Evidently Mary had been able to maintain her beautiful character throughout girlhood into young maidenhood. Although nothing is recorded about her home life, it is deducible that from her earliest years she had been

taught that she had her soul to keep free from the pernicious environment in which she lived. How did she do that? Would she not be helped by the recollection of her worthy family connection? The probability is that, like her prospective husband, she was of the house and lineage of David. Consequently, she may have been impressed that she had a fine tradition to maintain. What a help it would be to her to have near and distant godly forbears! Young women should not forget the duty of the respect they owe to parents whose godly lives and careful instruction build a protective moral and spiritual wall around their exposed lives.

Further, the grace of God was upon her. Tradition, good as it might be, was not sufficient. More was needed. The divine purpose had destined her for a wonderful part in the program of salvation. To preserve her, and she being unwitting thereof, the grace of God was in constant operation on her behalf. Little do any of us realise what a debt we owe to God for the grace which surrounds us, protects us, and will not let us go.

Mary was a lover of the Word of God. What access she had to the Old Testament Scriptures we do not know. Perhaps she was indebted to the recitation by her mother of favourite passages read in the synagogue. The maiden's retentive memory cherished the words she had heard, and when the occasion demanded it she was able to give vent to her pious feelings in language reminiscent of Hannah's song preserved in their ancient writings. Happy the young woman whose speech is recollective of words she has memorized from her perusal of the Book of books.

Is there any wonder that Mary attracted the attention of the most godly man in the village? Joseph is described as a righteous man, that is, pious, noble, and known for character derived from fellowship with God. While the physical beauty and comeliness of behavior may have attracted him to Mary, such a man would be aware that his betrothal to Mary was of the Lord. That is a most important factor in the establishment of a new home.

We may well ask. What should be the overruling factors in the betrothal of two young Christian persons?

1. Mutual attraction prompted by the Lord. So important is the right decision that mere natural impulses should be regulated by prayer and evidence of divine guidance.

2. Character should take precedence over every other qualification. It is better than possession of material wealth. It is better than mere academic attainment. It is better than the attractiveness of personal adornments.

3. Faithfulness to one's pledge in the partnership. Joseph had a most tempting experience, but by the grace of God he overcame despite seemingly insuperable difficulties. The breaking of engagements, simply for personal advantages, is to be deplored, and should be neither countenanced nor encouraged.

4. Years of waiting are a splendid preparation for the duties of motherhood. What a home Mary's must have been! Submission to the divine will cannot but result in a home which will radiate the atmosphere of heaven.

Men Who Slept --Part 10

Men Who Slept

Part 10

Andrew Borland

The Man Christ Jesus

It is most fitting and I trust most profitable to conclude this series on Men Who Slept by considering the incident in which it is recorded that our Lord fell asleep in the hinder part of a boat. It is not without significance that the title refers to The Man Christ Jesus, because one of the most pertinent evidences that the Saviour of men was a true man and not a phantom being as the Docetists taught, is the fact that after a long spell of exacting service for men He was so tired that He fell asleep. Perhaps it is one of the most touching and fascinating pictures we have of our Lord, asleep soundly, exhausted and resting undisturbed while those around Him were panicking from fear of perishing in the storm.

So assiduously and unremittingly did He go about His Father's business that He denied Himself sleep that He might have fellowship with His Father and find encouragement in His service amongst men. What an example He has left those of us who are inclined to indulge the encircling amplitude of warm blankets! We read of Him that after a busy day and presumably after a short refreshing sleep "in the morning rising up a great while before day, He went out into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). On another occasion, when "every man went to his own house, Jesus went unto the

Mount of Olives" (John 7:53-8:1) where He oft resorted to pray.

Some of His most worthy servants have followed His example and denied themselves sleep that they might spend time at the throne of grace, pleading for others. John Welsh of Ayr is such a one. At the time of the Reformation in Scotland he was appointed minister to the seaport town of Ayr, notorious for its godlessness which broke out in malicious brawls on the streets. There seemed to be no deterrent for the evil on-goings, until John Welsh's preaching began to take effect in the lives of godless seamen. The secret of his power was the intensity of his prayers. When he retired for the night he kept by his bedside his woollen plaid in which to wrap himself. Often he would rouse himself from sleep, rise to his bedside, wrap himself in his plaid and kneel in prolonged prayer. When his wife would remonstrate with him lest he should catch a fatal cold, he would reply that he had the souls of the people of Ayr to account for in the day of reckoning. He was following His Master's example. To our shame, it may be said that there are few who do.

Perhaps one of the reasons why our Lord loved to frequent the home at Bethany was that there He found quiet retirement and refreshing sleep in congenial surroundings which reinvigorated Him after days of service. There, too, He would find opportunity for preparation in the fullest sense of the word for further labours. On one occasion, when many were coming and going, He said to His disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart, and rest awhile," and doubtless that resting included nights of quiet sleep. How aptly Shakespeare has summed up the benefits of refreshing sleep:

Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

We have every right to assume that our Lord as a true man succumbed, like others, to tiredness, for we read in the story of His encounter with the woman at Sychar's well that "being wearied with the journey He sat by the well," longing for the drink which would refresh and revive. It is not surprising, then, that we read the following from Mark's Gospel:

"And the same day, when the evening was come, He saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took Him even as He was in the boat, and there were also with Him other little boats. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was now full. And He was in the stern of the boat, asleep on a pillow; and they awake Him, and say unto Him, Master, carest Thou not that we perish? And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And He said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (4:35-41). That is a most revealing passage and is worthy of closer investigation.

How blessed was that sleep
The sinless Saviour knew!
In vain the storm-winds blew,

Till He awoke to others' woes

And hushed the billows to repose.

The incident should be considered in the context of other events. Jesus had had a busy time visiting villages and cities, teaching, preaching, healing the sick and driving out demons. Such activities involved the expenditure of physical and mental energy. With little time for sleep there was not the opportunity for recuperation of vitality. Multitudes thronged Him, and such was their anxiety for His health that His mother and brothers sought Him to remonstrate with Him. When crowds gathered to Him by the sea, He sat in a boat and taught them the parables of the Kingdom. Such occupation must have been physically exhausting, and when evening was come He said to His disciples, "Let us cross to the other side." The disciples took Him as He was on board the boat and pushed off into the sea. It was on board that boat that one of the most arresting of His miracles was performed. He fell asleep and when He was wakened He stilled a storm.

Mark calls the storm a great one. As Peter's interpreter, he was repeating what he had heard from that fisherman disciple who had a vivid recollection of the unusual fury of that tempest. Winds blowing down from the hills come with such suddenness and ferocity that the placid waters are whipped into a menacing turmoil which lasts for a short time and then subsides. Four of the disciples on the tempest-tossed vessel were experienced fishermen who doubtless had weathered many a storm in the pursuit of their calling, although not one of such intensity. Other disciples, like Matthew and Nathaniel, were landsmen and those, one suspects, were

the men who panicked, and in their fear awoke the Lord. Experience teaches many a lesson which others have not learnt. Some expositors have concluded from the ferocity of the storm which was filling the boat that the storm was the work of demons as the emissaries of Satan who was making one more attempt to destroy the Son of God. As from other incidents in which His Person was endangered our Lord emerged in triumph. The disciples seem to have been so concerned about Him after His strenuous day that they took Him as He was into the boat, and they allowed Him to pillow His head on the steerman's bench. They must have looked upon Him as He lay with some measure of sympathy; but through it all they recognized in Him One who could help them in the moment of peril. That is why they woke Him. It was the winds He rebuked first, and not His terrified disciples. How gracious He was! He was calm and self-possessed, unruffled, although He had been rudely aroused from well-deserved slumber. When He spoke He addressed the wind and the waves as if they were rational beings, saying to the sea, "Peace, be still," after He had rebuked the wind. The command, "be still," has been translated, "be muzzled," as if He were addressing a wild dog whose fury was a menace to others. The wind sank to rest, and there was a great calm. He was complete Master of the situation. When He entered the boat, trod its timbers, mingled with the others, lay down upon the steerman's bench for a pillow and fell asleep, He was a true Man. When He rose, and stilled the storm with a voice of command, He was displaying that He was Lord of Creation, God manifest in flesh. His unhurried, dignified composure marks Him off from His terrified disciples.

How like ourselves those disciples were! They looked at the storm rather than at the Man they had seen drive out demons and overcome disease. Why should they have been afraid? They had no faith in His word. He had said, "Let us cross to the other side," and they should have known that with Him the other side they would reach. If they had believed His word they would not have wakened Him; but when they did waken Him, such was His concern for them that He did not rebuke them until He had allayed their fears. Perish they would not, for No water can swallow the ship where lies The Master of ocean and earth and skies.

The reaction of the disciples was one of undisguised surprise: "What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" They knew that He could perform astonishing miracles, but to them it seemed beyond the realm of possibility that anyone could control a furious storm at sea. Is there any wonder that they "feared exceedingly"? They had taken a further step in the understanding of the mystery of His Personality. The question they asked, "can easily be explained, not as expressing any ignorance or doubt as to the person of their master, but unfeigned astonishment at the new proof of his control, not only over demons and disease, but also over winds and waves, which they had seen, like human slaves, obey him at a word" (Alexander). As the disciples in wonderment exclaimed after they had seen Peter walking on the sea, and their Lord had stilled another tempest, "Of a truth, Thou art the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33), so we, too, bow in adoring worship and acknowledge Him with the same spirit of reverence.

We can close this meditation in no better way than by quoting some of Dean Alford's appropriate verses:

My barque is wafted to the strand

By breath divine;

And on the helm there rests a hand

Other than mine.

One who in storms is known to sail

I have on board;

Above the raging of the gale

I hear my Lord.

Safe to the shore, safe to the land,

The end is this;

And then with Him go hand in hand,

Far into bliss.

Men Who Slept --Part 2

Men Who Slept

Part 2

Andrew Borland, M.A.

This is the second article in an unusual series by Andrew Borland, Editor of The Believers' Magazine which is published in Scotland. These articles give good instruction and timely warning.

2. Noah

Noah, despite all the noble records concerning him, is one of most pathetically tragic figures in the Bible story. To some that may be a startling assertion to make, especially when they recall the honourable mention made in one of the most vivid verses in Hebrews II. He is there in the catalogue of the heroes of faith. Yet, as in the case of other persons mentioned in that chapter, not even the slightest allusion is made to the lapse which blackened the end of his days. The "fly in the ointment" of Noah's life is the unsavory event which happened after he had settled down when he had come out of the ark.

It is one of the evidences of the impartiality of the Biblical record that it includes such incidents as the deceptions practised by Abraham, the gross sin of David, and the drunkenness of Noah. By his act Noah disgraced himself in the eyes of two of his sons, and seems to have been a laughing stock of the third one. That sleep, induced by indulgence, spreads a blot upon a life which

otherwise is one of the most remarkable in the story of the Bible.

Here is the record of the sad event.

“Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent.

And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backwards and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, “Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.”

He also said,

“Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.

God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave” (Gen. 9:20-27 R.S.V.).

That is one of the watersheds of Biblical history, in which the characteristics and destiny of the three branches of the human family are hinted at. The prophetic utterance is closely connected with the sleep of Noah, for it was when he recovered consciousness and sanity that he made the threefold pronouncement. The fact that Noah became the mouthpiece for a divine utterance does not in any way mitigate the gravity of his unseemly behaviour.

Look at the man about whom the incident is recorded. There is no necessity to investigate the details of the story in Genesis 6-9, nor to discuss the problems connected with the question of the historicity of the Flood.

(1) Consider the general social background of the days in which Noah lived. If ever there was a permissive society it was that in Noah's day. Whatever may be our interpretation of the fact that the 'sons of God' took to themselves wives from the attractive daughters of men, the inference is that there was a break down of the social structure as God had intended it, and the result of such unions was the development of a most undesirable situation. The wickedness of man on the earth became great. His mind became degenerate, and he thought only of evil. Violence characterized his behaviour. Corruption of morals was universal. The spirit of undisciplined conduct spread like a miasma until all around Noah were affected. Only one family remained uncontaminated, That family was the family of Noah; but what an atmosphere to live in! The Bible record is meant to impress upon us the outstanding character of Noah's conduct in the midst of the prevalence of such corrupt behaviour.

(2) Consider Noah as he is depicted as an individual. Certain outstanding features marked that distinguished man. Plain, unadorned statements disclose a man of unusual experience.

He was a righteous man. That is, he was in right relationship with God, and he became a preacher of righteousness to a community that was characterized by unrighteousness. Such a course was neither easy nor

popular. That Noah persisted gives evidence of the robustness of his righteousness.

Noah found grace or favour in the sight of the Lord. That is a compliment to the separateness of his life amidst all the corruption that prevailed. He was different from others, and those noted that there was a peculiar charm about his behaviour. While they did not appreciate the source of that charm, they could not but conclude that it was a characteristic which sprang from non-conformity to their mode of behaviour. There is something distinctive about a person of whom it is written that he has found grace in the sight of the Lord.

Moreover, it is written that 'Noah was perfect in his generations.' Marginal reading for 'perfect' is 'upright', that is, he was of a different strain. He was pure in his descent. He was not of a class with those degenerate persons who had corrupted the earth. He was in a family apart by himself, a very fine compliment to a man who had found favour with the Lord.

Last of all, and, perhaps most important is the fact that 'Noah walked with God'. That is another way of stating that he habitually cultivated the spiritual side of his life. Evidently he was conscious of fellowship with his Maker. He had no Scriptures to guide him, but he had access to the presence of God, guided' doubtless, by the Spirit of God. No higher commendation can be given to any man than this, 'he walked with God.'

Now take the four statements which sum up the life of Noah.

- He found grace in the eyes of the Lord.
- He was a just or righteous man.

- He was perfect in his generations.
- He walked with God.

Those are remarkable characteristics. Yet it was of such a man that it is recorded that at the end of his days he was guilty of an act of drunkenness which has disgraced him in the eyes of others.

Think, too, of the influence Noah had on his family. His was no easy task in the permissive society in which he lived and in which he had to rear three sons who could not but be aware of the wickedness which prevailed. Yet Noah managed to marry a wife of like persuasion as himself, and managed to acquire for his sons wives who had not been contaminated by the corrupt behaviour which they witnessed everywhere. Those features which have been noted in Noah's life must have exercised a potent influence upon the lives of his family. Noah's offspring, after the flood, were to repeople the earth with a new race of people from whom was to spring Abraham, the father of the faithful.

It was such a man, a man who had walked with God, who had been a preacher of righteousness, who had built the ark, and had been shut therein with God, who had built an altar and offered sacrifices of gratitude to God that it is written that he fell into a drunken stupor and disgraced himself in the eyes of his family. What a calamity!

What was the cause of such a disaster? The answer is plain. He allowed himself to be tempted to indulgence in a legitimate manner of life. He became a husbandman. He grew vines, and evidently he partook of the fruit thereof. That surely was not the only means of sustenance, but from the fruit of the vine he made wine,

and on the occasion of which we have been reading he over-indulged himself, lost his self-control, and exposed himself unnecessarily within his tent. What a picture of a man of whom such an action was never expected.

There is no limit to the excess to which a man may go when he allows himself to be taken off his guard.

There are lessons to be learnt from this man who slept.

1. A life that pleases God can be lived in the most vicious of circumstances. Noah pleased God by his conduct in the midst of a corrupt generation. That fact should be an encouragement to those who find themselves exposed to conditions which are far from being encouraging to a life which is bent on pleasing God.

2. A man's life has its repercussions in his family. Parents should exercise an influence for good upon their offspring. The abiding nature of Noah's influence is evidenced in the conduct of two of his sons when their father needed their help. Isn't there truth in the Proverb, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it?'

3. Experience does not create immunity from temptation. Noah is the last man of whom it would be expected that he would succumb to the temptation of over-indulgence. He had resisted the temptations abundant in the longest portion of his life, yet in a very simple fashion he was brought under a power which disgraced him. That is a pertinent lesson to us all.

4. Age does not give us freedom from temptation. Noah entered the ark when he was six hundred years old, and he lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. It was during that second part of his life when Noah fell a

victim to the temptation which came upon him in the ordinary course of living.

Men Who Slept --Part 3

Men Who Slept

Part 3

Andrew Borland, M.A.

We are very pleased to have another of Andrew Borland's series on "Men Who Slept." These articles are unusual and appealing. They are to be enjoyed and their truths are to be practised.

3 Jacob

Few Bible stories are better known than that of Jacob, the supplanter and cheat whose name was changed to Israel because his nature was transformed through the night-long encounter with the anonymous wrestler by the brook Jabbok. Perhaps the best known incident in his life-story is the sleep and dream outside the gates of the city of Luz. The experience was entirely unexpected, and was so unusual that it altered Jacob's attitude to God and to life. He learnt in a night a lesson which he had not learnt in all his previous experience at home with his parents, Isaac and Rebekah. Brought up as a nomad, tending his father's flocks, the probability is that as a faithful shepherd he had spent many a night with the open sky for his canopy. He was accustomed to the silence of the open spaces, and was not afraid to be alone.

Never before, however, had he spent a night like the one he passed outside the gates of the city of Luz. On previous occasions he was on territory near enough to the tent dwellings of his family and their servants, but

on this occasion he was far from home without the presence of his sheep, and unprotected in any way. He had been accustomed to life in the open, wandering about with his father and mother as they moved from well to well seeking watering places where they might dwell with their flocks. Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents, an unsophisticated person who knew only the simple life of a countryman.

One of the family establishment, he was a source of comfort to his mother who showed favour to him more than she did to Esau his twin brother. Esau was a rover, a hunter who loved the open country, where he could meet with others. In the course of his excursions he had visited the encampments of the Hittites, and, caring nothing for the feelings of his parents, he took two wives who were a grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob on the contrary had remained unmarried up until the time of his flight from home.

The story of his sleep is briefly told with that economy of words for which the Bible is well-known. "Jacob went out from Beersheba and went towards Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place and tarried there all night because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place and put them for his pillows and lay down to sleep, and he dreamed" (Gen. 28:10-12).

Beersheba had been the camping place of Isaac where he had found water for his flocks, and there Jacob had had his home. There he had witnessed his father build an altar for the worship of the God whom Abraham had honoured by building altars to His name. Jacob was much impressed by the conduct of his father, for on future occasions he referred to God as The Fear of Isaac.

Far from home, now, at Luz, he evidently had lost the sense of God's presence, until he had that experience which came while he slept at the place he later knew as Bethel, the House of God.

Look now at the man who was sleeping.

He was probably forty years of age. He was both a cheat and a liar. He had cheated his brother Esau twice, and had deprived him of his birthright and his father's blessing. He had deceived his father and blantly lied to him, abetted in his act by his scheming mother. Now a fugitive from the vengeance of his brother, tired and disappointed, he had arrived at Luz when the sun was set, and had found to his dismay that the gates were shut. Entrance was impossible. He must spend the night in the open.

That was an unforgettable experience. R. L. Stevenson has a most interesting description of a night when he slept in the open as he was travelling in the Cevennes in Central France with his donkey, but his surprises were not comparable with those which Jacob had on that night alone outside the gates of Luz. While Jacob slept he saw sights invisible to the natural eye, and heard sounds which he could not have heard otherwise. God revealed Himself. God spoke to him. While he slept he dreamed, the content of the dream being under the control of divine revelation. That revelation was meant to assure him that the God whom he had learnt about with his father and mother now left far behind was omnipresent. He was as near to him at Luz as He had been to him at Beersheba.

That God can be everywhere it is difficult to learn and hard to appreciate, but it is an important lesson to learn

if we are to have confidence in the presence of God wherever we may be. Brother Lawrence, the lay member of a monastic community, near Paris, learnt to practise the presence of God amidst the clatter of dishes in the kitchen. It is good to remind ourselves frequently that 'God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable'. The Psalmist gives expression to his experience: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me" (189:7-10). Jonah had a similar experience so may we too, when occasion arises.

Jacob also became apprized of that fact that God was interested in him as an individual; as much interested in him, as He was in Isaac and Rebekah, away back in Beersheba. When Sir Humphrey Gilbert was drifting down the Gulf Stream where he knew his vessel would sink, he assured his crew that heaven was as near by sea as by land. That is always true.

A second lesson he gained was this. Heaven was not like brass. It was open to the spiritual traffic of earth-dwellers who wished to make use of the access there. He saw the heavens open. He saw a stairway which reached from earth to heaven. He saw angels ascending and descending. He saw the Lord stand at the upper end of the stairway. There were no obstructions. Angels kept the line of communications open, and that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6).

How did Jacob react to the vision and the voice? He showed complete acquiescence in the plan and purpose of God. He was willing to go on, trusting that God would be with him and he would care for and provide for him. Such an attitude displayed both faith and courage. We are apt to forget that the exercise of faith does not dispense with the display of physical courage. Jacob represents the missionary setting out on a new enterprise, with the conviction that he is being called of God, and has the promise that God will be with him. Yet that knowledge does not entirely take from him the fear of dangers in an unknown pathway. Even the undertaking of a new bit they carried messages up to heaven, and brought down the answers. Obviously Jacob was meant to understand that God could be reached from anywhere on earth. Wherever Jacob went he was assured by the promise of God, "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest (28:15), That assurance is given to all who seek to know the presence of God. Quoting from Joshua one and Psalm 118, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews affirms that God has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee; so of service may tax our courage, such as setting out to visit a new and difficult district with tracts. Yet in any service any one may have the same promise as Jacob had, "I will be with thee."

But Jacob had another reaction. He made a promise. "If God will be with me, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear ... of all that thou givest me I will give the tenth to thee" (Gen. 28:20-22). Jacob is generally suspected of having a "bread and butter" religion, but he should not be wholly condemned, for many a Christian, professing to have had a higher revelation

than Jacob, has not yet reached the generosity of the tithe. Why did Jacob make that promise? Had he any precedent? The probability that his father taught him by example, and Isaac in turn had learnt it from his father Abraham who gave to Melchizedek a tenth of all the spoils of his victory in battle (Gen. 14:20). Melchizedek was the divine representative, and Jacob was following the example of his grandfather when he made the promise of a tenth to God. Although Christians might do better than Jacob, they could do worse than follow his example. The same spirit which motivated Jacob is contained in the closing stanza of the popular paraphrase, "Such blessings from Thy gracious hands Our willing hearts implore, And thou shalt be our chosen God And portion evermore."

Two stories might illustrate the experience Jacob had at Bethel when he made the discovery that God, is not confined to any chosen locality.

When Sir Ernest Shackleton was on one of his Antarctic expeditions, with two companions he had to make a hazardous voyage across boisterous seas to reach the Island of S. Georgia where he expected to find help. The three men had to battle across the tempest-riven terrain, and as they were in sight of safety the explorer turned to his companions and said something like this, "I don't know how you have felt, but it has seemed to me that there was a fourth Person accompanying us."

A famous mountaineer had been on a solitary expedition and was descending when he sat down on a ledge to rest. He took from his pack a piece of chocolate. Almost unconscious of what he was doing, he broke the chocolate in two, and turned to share it with a

Companion who really was not there. So keenly had he sensed the presence of Another.

Any of us may have experiences similar to these.

Men Who Slept --Part 4

Men Who Slept

Part 4

Andrew Borland, M.A.

Andrew Borland of Scotland draws lessons] from the circumstances of Peter's sleeping. Oh, to be alert to the presence, counsel and will of God in Christ.

4. Peter (1)

It is recorded three times that Peter slept. He fell asleep along with James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. Again, in the company of the same two disciples he slept in the Garden of Gethsemane when his Lord was in an agony in anticipation of death on Golgotha. A third time, after Pentecost, during the days when the early Church was being persecuted Peter suffered imprisonment more than once, and on one occasion he slept like a child, guarded by soldiers against the day of execution by Herod (Acts 12). Further, when the deputation came from the Gentile Cornelius, Peter had gone up to the roof-top to pray and he fell into a trance in which he learnt that with God there was no respect of persons, and 'what God had cleansed' should not be called common (Acts 10:2-15).

The incident on the Mount of Transfiguration is so well known that it scarcely needs detailed description. Jesus in the presence of two celestial visitants, Moses and Elijah, was transfigured before His three disciples, Peter, James and John. The dazzling splendour of the metamorphosed person of their Master bewildered

them. During the conversation which took place about the exodus which He should accomplish at Jerusalem they were overcome with sleep, but not before they had had confirmed to them the declaration lately heard at Caesarea Philippi that their Lord's intention was to go to death on a cross. It was when they awakened that they behold His glory, and Peter proposed building three booths, as evidence that he wished the situation could be permanent and there would be no necessity for the shameful death on a cross.

Several factors may have contributed to the condition which induced sleep. It is to be inferred that the inducement to sleep was so strong that it actually overcame the desire to watch their Master in the strange transformation and to hear through the conversation on that Holy Mount. They had had rather exhausting experiences of late, and now they must have been tired after the toilsome climb up to the top of the mount. The physical frame of men even like those sturdy fishermen can reach the limit of endurance, and must succumb. Further, the rarified atmosphere would tend to make them heavy. The word heavy is sometime translated 'weighted down', as if pressure were made to bear upon them. Whatever the cause, their sleep robbed them of part of that wonderful scene.

From the suggestion of Peter that they should stay on the Mount, it is evident that he and the other two wanted to avoid the cross. They could not understand, far less appreciate, how the Person whom they had but recently acknowledged as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" should announce that the way to victory and the establishment of the Church which their Master had mentioned would be the way of the Cross. Perhaps it

was to disillusion them that the Lord had taken the three disciples to the Mount of Transfiguration where they had a preview of His glory and His coming Kingdom, and at the same time, as Luke informs us, where they heard the two heavenly visitors converse about His exodus.

Besides, they were assured that Heaven itself confirmed their conviction expressed at Philippi that Jesus was the Son of God. Moreover, they were confronted with their own unwillingness to believe the word they had heard about the Cross, for the voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, My Chosen; listen to Him" (Luke 9:3a R.S.V.). Those last words were an implied rebuke.

The disciples were to accept the teaching about the Cross as being fundamental to the future establishment of the Church and the Kingdom. We have no way of discovering what were the actual contents of the conversation on the Mount, but there can be no doubt that our Lord would explain to Moses and Elijah His fixed intention to set His face to go to Jerusalem, there to fulfil the purpose for which He had come. The voice was meant to be the ratification of the content of the conversation.

Peter and those who were with him missed that most interesting and informative conversation because they were "heavy with sleep." That incident on the Mount is a revelation both of the humanity of our Lord and of the frailty of the disciples. In His humanity Jesus was robust enough to make the arduous ascent of a fairly high mountain, while the disciples in the prime of their manhood, were evidently overcome by their effort and fell asleep, exhausted.

Their sleep was prolonged during most of the conversation, and that sleep deprived Peter and his fellow-disciples of the most personal explanation of the Cross ever given by our Lord. He had already made reference to that event, but while reference was explicit enough none of them was detailed; but on the Holy Mount He conversed with two who would understand that the Cross was the road to triumph, and the establishment of the kingdom.

It was “when they were awake” that “they saw His glory and the two men that stood with Him” (Lk. 9:32). Peter never forgot what he saw when he was awake, but it is interesting to observe that when he made mention of it years later, he does not refer to the conversation about the exodus to be accomplished at Jerusalem. His words describing what he saw are these, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

It’s a legitimate inference that it was while they slept that most of the conversation with Moses and Elijah took place. Peter was most deeply impressed by the fact that they were eyewitnesses of His majesty. They had a preview in miniature of the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a lot the Christian misses when he is mentally asleep! He may have a distorted vision of the whole meaning of the sojourn and work here of the Son of God, whose Cross was the stepping stone to “the power and coming.” It takes both to give a complete understanding of the intention of our Lord when He took Peter, James and John with Him up into the Holy Mount.

Physical exhaustion may contribute to spiritual sleepiness. The mental processes are retarded by bodily

lethargy. Concentrated thought is almost impossible. Over work during the preceding days may be the cause of much of the spiritual laziness which often characterizes the Lord's people when they come together for prayer or when they meet for the breaking of the bread. Excessive overtime, Sunday labour, may be contributory causes to the lack of vision which afflicts so many Christians in this age of competition within the social circles of men and women. It is still true that they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare (1 Tim. 6:9). Let us be warned, and ponder on our ways. We may be guilty of sleepiness.

It is only when the Christian is spiritually awake that he can see the glory of the Lord. Many factors may combine to put one's mind to sleep. Indifference to the claims of Christ may do it. Prejudice against certain lines of teaching may do it. Neglect of private devotions may be a cause, as also may be the forsaking of the assembling together for public worship. Christians afflicted with any spiritual malady easily fall into that state of sleepiness which robs them of that keenness of vision which penetrates the realm of unseen realities where they catch glimpses of "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Self-investigation is always a profitable exercise. Try it now!

May the experience of Peter and his two fellow disciples be a warning to all of us, lest any of us, like them, fall asleep even in the presence of the Lord of glory.

Men Who Slept --Part 5

Men Who Slept

Part 5

Andrew Borland

The unusual series by Andrew Borland, Scotland, grips the heart and challenges the life of the sincere believer. A yielding to the admonitions must surely result in a walk more honourable before the Lord.

4. Peter (2)

Perhaps the most pathetic incident in the experience of Peter is that in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he was heavy with sleep because of excessive sorrow, a condition in which he could not watch with his Master, perhaps for a space of two hours. The account given in Matthew's Gospel is worth quoting in full, although there are instructive additions in the account by Luke. Read the following passage slowly and thoughtfully.

"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face and prayed, O, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt. And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray that ye enter

not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, praying and saying, O, My Father, if this cup may not pass from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done. And He came and found them asleep again; for their eyes were heavy. And He left them and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh He to His disciples and saith unto them, Sleep on now and take your rest; behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me" (Matt. 26:36-46).

I have asked you to read that passage before I make any comments, for comments are bound to reduce its poignancy, and to take from it the significance of its tragic appeal. There is no other passage in all literature which can touch it for the sheer depth of sorrow which it sounds and for the triumph which acceptance of the divine will ensures. Perhaps you should read the passage again, and when you have finished, ask yourself the question, Who was responsible for the original account? You cannot but conclude that it has the genuine ring of truth, and that is an authentic account from, one of the three disciples who occupied a place of privilege in the Garden. The detailed simplicity adds weight to its credibility, and the unadorned repetition points in the direction of an eyewitness. As the earliest extant narrative of the awesome event is in Mark's Gospel, and as Mark has been called the interpreter of Peter, the obvious answer to our question is, In all probability the apostle Peter was responsible or the graphic account given by his younger fellow-disciple, Mark.

Notice the sequence of events in this most tragic series of incidents. The deepest reverence becomes us as we tread the holy ground in the Garden of Gethsemane.

1. The scene in the Garden was the climax of the many occurrences of a day charged with emotion and surprises. The incidents and revelations in the Upper Room must have created a strange atmosphere among the disciples. They must have been concerned about the departure of Judas, and about the announcement that one of their number was a traitor. The experiences on the journey from the Upper Room, through the streets with the strange shadows cast by the Paschal moon, over the brook Kidron and up the slopes of Olivet to the Garden, must have added to their bewilderment and their confusing anxiety. Peter especially must have been perturbed, and his confidence must have been undermined when he thought of his Master's disclosure of his imminent denial.

There are three groups in the Garden of the Olive Press, a special enclosure to which the Lord had frequent access, and where He knew there would be afforded Him some seclusion when, alone, He could face the tremendous issues immediately confronting Him. Eight disciples, among them Thomas who was prepared to die with Him, were left at the entrance. They were not permitted to be near to render solace to their Master in the hour of His conflict and agony. Three disciples, Peter, James and John, the inner circle, those already privileged to be with their Master and to see His glory on the Holy Mount, were taken farther into the Garden to watch, and to be near enough to witness His agony and to hear the most painful words ever uttered by human lips. The Son of God in the reality of His

humanity went “a little farther,” “about a stone’s throw” into the shadows, and there in the unparalleled solitude, alone, He fought out to victory the direst conflict the details of which have ever been recorded. In most vehement language Peter had but recently protested his loyalty; and in the Garden that loyalty was put to the test; for before the act of denial, at the moment when his sympathetic watchfulness was needed, he was overcome by sleep.

2. The various acts in the drama are easily followed (a) The silence of the Garden was broken by the words of the Lord. Peter and the others observed an arresting change in the countenance of their Master, for “He began to be sorrowful and very heavy.” Those words convey the idea that a wave of emotion which betokened that deep sorrow was taking possession of Jesus and had passed over Him. The unperturbed calm which had characterized Him during the hours preceeding had gone, and an expression of perplexing sorrow had taken its place. However unusual as the words were, Peter would not be surprised when he heard his Master exclaim, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” Endurance had almost reached its limit, and the momentary relief was to be found in the outpouring of His grief in the ears of His disciples. As He left the three for His dire conflict in prayer He entreated of them, “Tarry ye here, and watch with Me.” These words, “watch with Me,” imply that they were to keep awake, and they were a challenge to them lest they should fail in the hour of crisis. Their sleep was all the more blameworthy after such a request.

(b) After Jesus withdrew the three disciples were awake when they saw the excessive agony expressing itself in

the drops of blood-like sweat falling to the ground: They were awake when they heard the words of the prayer, "O, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." For the space of almost one hour the Saviour agonized in prayer, and during most of that hour the disciples had been asleep. How gentle was the rebuke which roused the sleeping Peter! "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?" How considerate were the words which almost excused them for their blameworthiness, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak!" He knew that the tension upon the disciples had been excessive, "Gentle surprise and the pain of disappointed love are audible in the question, addressed to Peter especially, as he had promised so much ... This was all that Jesus got in answer to His yearning for sympathy ... Those who loved Him most lay curled in dead slumber within earshot of His prayers" (Maclaren). As He left them a second time the Saviour advised them, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

(c) A second time their Master retired to pray, and a second time the disciples heard Him pray in almost the same words. Again as they waited they fell asleep. A second time Jesus came, and He found the disciples, unable to keep awake, asleep again. The reason given is that their eyes were heavy. What disappointment!

(d) A third time Jesus retired and prayed the same words, and the disciples heard Him; but when He returned to them He found them asleep again. His words are no longer words of remonstrance, but words of calm, self-possession which gave evidence that the hour of crisis and opportunity was over. His conflict was past, as was also their opportunity to show their

sympathy. "Sleep on now and take your rest:" the need for watchfulness was over. The words, properly understood, would burn in the conscience of each of the three guilty of unconcern when their Master most needed the comfort of their presence. Sleep, like that of the disciples in Gethsemane, is worthy only of severest condemnation; yet how few of us escape temptation to a similar kind of conduct! Asleep at one's post in the army is a criminal offence of the direst kind. May we learn our lesson from the words which come ringing down the intervening centuries, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation"!

What are the causes of sleepiness? In the case of the disciples three causes are pin-pointed. Luke says that their sleepiness was due to sorrow, while Matthew remarks that it was because the flesh was weak, and their eyes were heavy. Perhaps exercised and spiritually-minded readers will discover an individual application, discovering those weaknesses which induce sluggishness which tends to drowsiness.

The Lord gave the disciples the safeguard against falling into temptation — "watch and pray". That is a word to us all.

"Watchfulness and prayer are inseparable. The one discerns dangers, the other arms against them. Watchfulness keeps us prayerful, and prayerfulness keeps us watchful. To watch without praying is presumption to pray without watching is hypocrisy," May we never be guilty of presumption or hypocrisy. Only the grace of God can render us triumphant over temptation.

Men Who Slept --Part 6

Men Who Slept

Part 6

Andrew Borland, M.A.

4. Peter (3)

The Bible is a most impartial Book, It does not make paragons of its characters. There are no heroes whose lives are faultless. Abraham is not perfect; on occasions he deceived. Jacob has faults, deceiver, cheat and supplanter. David sins grievously, John Baptist has his hours of depression and doubt. Peter is guilty of misunderstanding and denial, and he is found sleeping when he should have been awake. Yet how gloriously those same characters shine on the Sacred Page. Abraham is called 'The Friend of God'. David is 'a man after God's own heart'. Jacob becomes 'Israel', the Prince who prevailed with God. John Baptist had this said about him, 'Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater' (Matt. 11:11). Peter who slept in the Garden of Gethsemane retrieved his character by sleeping peacefully in prison during the night before his purposed execution.

The story in Acts 12 is one of the most touching in the New Testament. It places Peter in the company of that illustrious group of people who bore witness to their faith in God by having that peace which possesses the mind of him whose confidence is in the God of deliverances. Read the account of his unusual experience.

“When Herod had apprehended him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four quarters of soldiers to keep him intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing by the church unto God for him. And behold, an angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shone in the prison, and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said to him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me” (Acts 12:6-8).

The imprisonment recorded was the result of a determined effort by Herod the king to suppress the New Society which was making unwelcome progress among the people despite the growing opposition from those in authority in Jerusalem. Peter and the apostles had had previous clashes with the religious hierarchy, but they had been delivered by the intervention of the Lord.

After the miracle of the healing of the cripple at the Gate Beautiful, the Sanhedrin was so perturbed by the favourable reaction of the people that they attempted to suppress the witness of the Apostles, and put Peter and John in prison until they could be examined on the following day. So popular had the Apostles become, and so boldly did Peter and John contend for the truth before the Sanhedrin that, after being threatened, they were let go (Acts 3:5-21).

A second time the Apostles were apprehended and put in the common prison, and placed under strict guard. “But an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, and

brought them forth.” The report which was given by the officers sent to escort them to the Temple for trial is most interesting. “The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing outside before the doors, but when we had opened we found no man within” (See Acts 5:17-25). Perhaps it was the recollection of such an experience which set the church praying in Mary’s house, and gave Peter composure of mind as he considered that the omnipotent God could repeat the miracle.

Peter’s deliverance from the death intended by Herod must be considered against the background of that monarch’s life. He was Herod Agrippa I, a title conferred upon him by the Roman Emperor, and he is, by Luke, accurately styled King of the Jews, the first to be so named for many years. His life was one of intrigue, treachery and blood shedding, one evidence of that last being the order to slay the soldiers who had been on guard on the night in which Peter escaped. He had all the obnoxious characteristics of the Herodian family. Like his predecessors he could not suffer any one who stood in the way of his selfish ambitions, or who disturbed his conscience, and like those predecessors he was a callous murderer. Herod Antipas had murdered John Baptist because he unnerved him when he said, “It is not lawful.” Herod the Great, when he was afraid of One who was born to be King of the Jews, slaughtered the Innocents in Bethlehem and its environs. It is not surprising then, that we read, “Now about that time Herod the King stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.”

Herod's action was evidently governed by the desire to be popular with the Jews, for "because he saw that it pleased the Jews he proceeded further to take Peter ... and when he had apprehended him he put him in prison." His intention was to allow the festive season to pass, then as an additional piece of excitement, after Easter to bring Peter forth to the people. But man proposes and God disposes. The monarch who had intended to slay Peter as a spectacle for the people was himself cut down without warning, "When, arrayed in royal apparel he 'sat upon his throne and made an oration'." God is not mocked. As a man sows he shall reap.

How unsearchable are God's judgements and His ways past finding out! James suffered martyrdom, and there is no evidence that the church had time to pray for him. We are astonished that there was no divine intercession on his behalf, yet James must have been a most valuable leader in the church in Jerusalem. He was a marked man. What a contrast there is between the account of the stoning of Stephen, and the martyrdom of James! The brief record reminds us that many a martyr passes to his reward in heaven, unsung, unhonoured on earth.

On the other hand Peter was miraculously saved, and escaped for further service in the spread of the gospel and the conservation of his fellow Christians. The astonishing feature in this narrative is preserved in these words, "When Herod would have brought him forth the same night Peter was sleeping", evidently so soundly that when the angel came he had to smite Peter on the side. Observe these aspects of the incident.

1. The Security Precautions. Herod made sure that his prisoner would not escape. Peter was delivered to four quartenions of soldiers, sixteen in all, so that there were always four on duty, two in the prison cell, and one at each of the two doors, so that escape seemed impossible. Moreover, there was an iron gate opening on to the street. For further precaution against escape the prisoner was chained to two soldiers, one on either side while he slept. How quickly Herod was disillusioned if he thought that his soldiers, and bolts, and bars, and chains could baffle the power of Omnipotence! Human devices are no match for God. Peter slept, while Herod wondered if his plan would succeed. God accomplished the defeat of His enemy by the simple strategy of an angel. Sennacherib discovered that he was no match for God, "when the Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold." Nebuchadnezzar had to admit that God was stronger than he when he was recovered from his madness. Belshazzar paid with inglorious death for his blasphemous behaviour when the hand on the wall warned him of his approaching end. Many another has made the same discovery, even in this century.

2. The Remarkable Composure. Peter was sleeping soundly on the night preceeding his intended execution. He did not have any sedative to induce sleep. Conscious of the presence of God and knowing that death had no terrors for those who knew the risen and living Saviour, he slept although he had no downy pillow, had chains round his arms and lay between two soldiers. The changing of the guard at intervals would waken him, yet when the angel came he was fast asleep, perhaps just before break of day. In the circumstances his composure was remarkable. One wonders if, being acquainted with

the Old Testament Psalms, Peter recalled the experience of David at the time of the Great Rebellion when Absalom hunted him like a partridge." I cried unto the Lord... and he heard me ... I laid me down and slept; I awakened; for the Lord sustained me" (Psa. 3:4-5).

3. The Leisurely Preparation. There was no haste with the angel after he had roused Peter, the angel raised him up, and the chains were loosed from his arms. The girdle round the inner garment was fixed. Then the sandals were put on. The outer cloak was then cast over all before the angel said, "Follow me". The narrative gives the impression that the angel was in no hurry.

4. The Miraculous Escape. The soldiers did not wake up. The guards at the two doors did not hinder their passage. The huge iron gate which opened on to the street let them through without human effort. It opened of its own accord. Evidently there were no people on the street, as the angel led the way through one street and then immediately departed.

5. The Divine Intervention. The deliverance of Peter was an act of Providence designed to synchronize with the all night prayer meeting of the church in the house of Mary. Providence literally means "fore-vision, and hence, foreaction —preparation for what is foreseen, expressing a divine, invisible rule of the world, including care, control, guidance, as exercised over both the animate and inanimate creation. In its largest scope it involves foreknowledge and foreordination, preservation and administration, exercised in all places and at all time" (A. T. Pierson). How well those features are seen in the escape of Peter! Yet it should be remembered that the providential interference is closely associated with

the prayers of the church. Note the interesting “But” in verse 5, “Peter was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing by the church unto God for him.” Two features are linked together, the prayers and the composure of Peter, and his commonsense attitude when he was left alone in the street. He made for Mary’s house, and after he had made himself known, he wisely departed to an undisclosed destination.

Others have had similar experience to that of Peter, sleeping calmly before the day of execution. Take the example of Nicholas Ridley who with Bishop Latimer was martyred in 1555. His brother offered to spend the last night with him in his prison cell. He refused, saying that he meant to go to bed and sleep quietly, quoting the words, “I will lay me down in peace and take my rest, For it is Thou, Lord, only, that makest me dwell in safety.” On the morrow, he was chained to a stake near to Balliol College, Oxford. As the flames licked his person, in a loud voice he exclaimed, “Lord, Lord, receive my spirit”.

The death bed of many a saint has been robbed of its fearssomeness, because the cross of Christ, “takes its terror from the grave, And gilds the bed of death with light”.

Men Who Slept --Part 7

Men Who Slept

Part 7

Andrew Borland, M.A.

“Men who Slept:” These articles by the Editor of The Believers’ Magazine are instructive and interesting. They also are full of weighty words of counsel.

5. Abraham

It should be noted that “the father of the faithful,” in the incident before us is still called Abram, for it was not until after the covenant described in chapter 15 of Genesis that the divine announcement was made, “As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram; but thy name shall be Abraham ... and I will establish my covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant” (Gen. 17:4-7). That covenant has not been abrogated, and its terms will stand, that the land of Canaan (Israel) will be for an everlasting possession, and Jehovah has pledged Himself in these words, “I will be their God” (17:8). The making of that covenant was the climax of Abraham’s experiences, “When the sun was going down, and a deep sleep fell upon him” (Gen. 15:21).

His ordinary business life as a farmer had been gloriously interrupted by the divine command to leave his idolatrous associations in Ur of the Chaldees, and, with his family, travel towards an undisclosed

destination. That departure is honoured in the Epistle to the Hebrews as an act of faith, and so it was, for it was confidence in God put into operation. By providential guidance he had ultimately reached "The Promised Land" of Canaan, and had been given the assurance, couched in the barest of language. "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12:7). Because of a famine which menaced both his family and his flocks, he had gone south into Egypt, "to sojourn there," only to sojourn, for his intention was to return to Canaan where more inviting conditions prevailed. During his sojourn in Egypt Abraham increased in wealth, for he was "very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold," having "sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants and maidservants, and she asses and camels" (13:2; 12:16).

On his return from Egypt he had separated from Lot, his nephew and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, while Lot had chosen the more attractive pastures near the wicked city of Sodom. It was while he dwelt in Mamre that Abraham had to sally forth to rescue Lot from the hands of his captors, and it was then that he had refused the tempting offer from the king of Sodom, and had been succoured and strengthened by Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the most High God (Gen. 14:17-20).

It is against that historical background that chapter 15 opens with these words, as introductory to the covenant making scene which follows, "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abraham in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abraham I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward" (v. 1). That promise of protection and provision was made "in a vision" a condition which is to be distinguished from the "deep sleep" which is described later in the narrative. The chapter deals with

the covenant which Jehovah made while Abraham slept in complete detachment from the material world around him. Notice,

1. Abraham's concern, as disclosed in the conversation between the patriarch and the Lord God. Abraham had cherished the promise previously given, and his puzzlement about its fulfilment is expressed in his query, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" He could have no heir if he had no offspring. The answer to his dilemma was a practical one, for Jehovah "brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."

The confirmation of the covenant in the rite which followed was the divine answer to Abraham's faith, just as the opening words of the chapter were the answer to his refusal to be enriched by the king of Sodom. It is written that Abraham "believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness (v. 6). God accepted the patriarch in His favour and confidence because the patriarch had believed the promise of an innumerable seed when as yet there did not seem to be any human possibility of offspring. That was faith which was confirmed in the covenant rite during the enactment of which Abraham was in a deep sleep.

IL The Co-operation between God and Abraham in the ritual of the making of the covenant before Abraham fell into the deep sleep when the details of the covenant were made known. God gave the instructions in reply to Abraham's question which was not occasioned by doubt but by anxiety to have assurance that the promise would be fulfilled, "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit

it?" The rite was one with which Abraham would be familiar, and the solemn significance of which he would understand. He knew what was meant by cutting a covenant, when covenant victims were divided and the parts placed opposite each other. Some interpret the act as representing the two parties to the covenant, while others see it as setting forth "the penalty of perjury," for it was "usually accompanied by the imprecation upon the covenant-breaker of a destruction as complete as that which had befallen the slaughtered animals." As this covenant was a unilateral one, involving only the promise of Jehovah, there was not the faintest possibility of its being broken. Abraham's part was to prepare the covenant animals, the heifer, the she goat and the ram, each three years old, indicating maturity and value. Besides, he took a turtle dove and a young pigeon. In the strictest sense of the words those were not sacrificial animals, as they would have been in the Levitical economy.

That ceremony took place on the day following the night on which he had seen the stars as a sign of the number of his descendants.. Until the sun was going down Abraham had the task of driving off the birds of prey whose feasting upon the animals would have reduced the ceremony to a meaningless performance. Abraham's co-operation ended there, and God began to act when a deep sleep fell upon Abraham at the going down of the sun.

III. The Divine Communication in detail. In "the horror of great darkness" which accompanied the sleep, Abraham became aware of the awesomeness and grandeur of the divine presence. While the patriarch slept Jehovah communicated to him details about the

future history of the nation of which he was to be progenitor. The items in the communication are easily followed. Abraham's seed would be stranger in a foreign land. They would be slaves there. The duration of their exile and slavery would be 400 years (actually 430). God would visit the enslaving nation in judgment and would deliver Abraham's seed who would leave the land enriched with great substance. It does not take any stretch of imagination to observe that those predictions were fulfilled in Israel's sojourn in Egypt.

The final act in the ratification of the covenant took place while Abraham was in his deep sleep. As the sun went down and darkness came on immediately Abraham saw a strange sight, a smoking furnace and a lamp of fire or flaming torch, passed between the pieces of animals. One explanation of "the smoking furnace" is: "The word really means the circulated firepot which Orientals use in their houses to sit round for purposes of warmth. This one was wreathed in smoke, out of which shot "a burning lamp" (Heb. a torch of flame). For not two symbols, but only one, passed between the divided carcasses. The double symbol of darkness and light would convey to Abraham two aspects of the divine nature, and as the smoking furnace passed between the pieces he would joyfully conclude that God was ratifying the covenant, and was pledging that it would be fulfilled both for Abraham himself and for his seed after him. Here was Jehovah as the covenant-keeping God. As he wakened from his sleep, Abraham's faith would be greatly strengthened.

There are lessons for us to learn from the narrative.

(1) God will be no man's debtor. Just as He became to Abraham his "exceeding great reward," so now we are assured that even a cup of cold water given to a servant of the kingdom will not go unrecognized. Those who sow material good to those who bring spiritual blessing in due season will reap if they faint not.

(2) God has made His covenant to be the God of Abraham's descendants, and He has pledged Himself to keep that covenant. Despite the defections and disobedience of the nation He has not discarded the people of His choice, and their continued existence with the contemporary national revival is evidence that the covenant is being honoured. Such a God is our God who has revealed Himself in the Person of His Son, and is covenant-keeping unto salvation because of the transaction on Calvary. Let us trust Him, for "they who trust Him wholly, Find Him wholly true."

Men Who Slept --Part 7

Men Who Slept

Part 7

Andrew Borland

This fresh article in Andrew Borland's (Irvine, Scotland) series on 'Men Who Slept' is not only unusual, it really encourages the heart and confirms confidence in the Lord.

Sampson

The story of Samson is one of the most pathetic in the Bible. A life which began with such promise, with the prediction that he was to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines who occupied the adjacent strip of seaboard, ended in the disgrace of captivity and the dishonour of a man blinded by his enemies and made a spectacle for the entertainment of his captors.

At his birth, he was a child in honourable company. That he was to be a person of outstanding importance is evident from the fact that his birth and the nature of his vocation were communicated to Manoah and his wife by a specially commissioned divine messenger, 'a man of God,' 'an angel of the Lord.' In that respect Samson is classed in Scripture with Isaac, with Samuel and with John the Baptist, whose mothers were barren women until a heavenly messenger announced the birth of a male child. That fact in itself gives significance to the history of Samson. Judged by human standards, so far as being the heroic deliverer of his people from oppression by the Philistines, his life was a failure. Yet the inspired

writer of chapter eleven of the Epistle to the Hebrews includes him in the same category of men of faith like Gideon and Barak, Jephthah, David and Samuel. In the reckoning of God his life was not a failure.

The Importance of Character

It should not be forgotten that character is often formed in the context of one's upbringing. Early influences play a great part in the moral and spiritual future of young folks. Hence the need for careful behaviour by the parents. Samson had the advantage of being born into a Danite family in the south of Judah on the border of the land occupied by the Philistines whose presence was a constant menace to the peace of family life. Zorah, the pastoral village where Manoah and his wife lived, was close to the border of the country where the Philistines had settled, and only a few miles from Timnah which was to figure much in the life of Samson. His parents were a God-fearing couple, probably farmers, who understood the implications of the Nazarite vow which imposed definite restrictions upon the person who was under obligation to it.

The visit from 'the man of God' 'the angel of the Lord' whose name was Wonderful, made a deep impression on Manoah and his wife. They knew that their son was to be an unusual child, and that he was to be brought up under strict discipline. His mother, too, was to prepare herself by accepting similar restrictions on her way of life. Several times instructions were given by 'the angel of the Lord,' 'drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing' (Judges 13:4). Of the child it was said, 'No razor shall come on his head: for the child shall

be a Nazarite unto God from the womb...to the day of his death' (Judges 13:5-7).

That Manoah and his wife paid heed to the instructions given is evident from the summary of Samson's life until he reached manhood and appeared in the camp of Dan between Sorah and Eshtaol: 'And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times' (13: 24-25). It is to be concluded that the woman strictly observed the restrictions placed upon her and that she brought up the boy after the manner prescribed. Samson was an extraordinary child, specially blessed of the Lord, growing up into vigorous manhood, and outstanding for his physical strength. He gave evidence of his powers in the camp of Dan when 'the Spirit of the Lord began to move him.' He must have astonished those about him by his first exhibitions of unusual strength.

The Influence of Four Women

Samson's story as recorded in the Bible revolves around four women: his mother, the wife in Timnah, the harlots in Gaza, and Delilah. That Manoah and his wife were deeply concerned about the rearing of the child is evident on two occasions. Manoah, probably prompted by his wife, prayed, 'O my Lord, let the man of God... come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child' (Judges 13:8). When 'the angel of the Lord' came again, Manoah asked the question, 'How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?' However, it was to the woman that instructions were given, and it was to the early training and example of his

mother that Samson owed much. A mother's influence extends even to the very end of a child's life.

The story of the woman of Timnah occupies two long chapters in the Samson narrative. Against the wishes of his parents he arranged for the wedding with the Philistine woman whose charm evidently attracted Samson. On the way over he slew a lion, and later he found honey in the lion's carcass. At the wedding feast Samson put forth the riddle which baffled the guests. Under pressure from the guests his wife wormed the answers from her husband and in consequence he had to supply thirty changes of raiment. Those he acquired by slaying thirty Philistines, and this naturally created enemies.

Samson made several mistakes during this episode. He refused to take the advice of his parents. In marrying a Philistine he failed in loyalty to his family and his nation, for intermingling with the Philistines was considered an irreligious act. He failed in loyalty to himself. He knew better, otherwise he would not have forced his will upon his parents. He failed in loyalty to God who had forbidden alliance with an idolatrous people. When Samson seemed to be in default his wife was given to his 'best man,' and to avenge himself of the insult he tied three hundred foxes in pairs, put a burning brand between each pair, and sent them to make havoc among the standing crops. When his wife and her father were burnt by the Philistines Samson slew them 'hip and thigh.' Samson then took safety in the rock Etam where three thousand men of Judah threatened to hand him over to his enemies. They bound him with ropes which he broke, and, being free, he found the jawbone of an

ass with which he slew a thousand of his would-be captors.

It is at that point in the story that we are informed that Samson judged Israel twenty years. It is evident that the inspired narrator was guided to include only a few illustrative incidents to show how even a strong man may be seduced by evil and led to his downfall.

The third woman in Samson's life lived in Gaza, the chief city of the Philistines, and a considerable distance from the scenes of Samson's national activities as judge in Israel. It was in Gaza that he encountered the harlot in whose house he stayed and where he was nearly trapped. The question may justly be asked, What was the leader of the Israelites doing in the stronghold of the Philistines? Was he tired of the commonplace, unexciting life as an itinerant judge? He had no just cause for which to be in Gaza. He must have known he was risking detection and his life. He may have been attracted by reports of the pleasures to be found in the new city, a place where he could find plenty of excitement to satisfy his energetic nature. There he might be free from the moral restraints which his responsibilities imposed upon him. Did he travel in disguise? That would be difficult, for doubtless he would be easily recognized. There he made contact with a woman whose company he should have avoided. Did he allow himself to be identified by the woman? She in turn informed the rulers of the city, and the trap was laid for him at the gate. It failed, for during the night Samson escaped by carrying off gate, posts and bars, to the discomfiture of his would-be captors. Again Samson had made a wrong move. He should not have been in Gaza; nor should he have courted the company of a woman of loose morals. He

exposed himself unnecessarily to moral danger in the harlot's house and to physical danger in the city of the Philistines.

Delilah was the fourth woman under whose influence Samson came. The story is so well-known that it does not need repetition. Three times Samson deceived Delilah about the source of his strength and three times he escaped from the Philistines who were lying in wait. The woman's persistence paid off, and when Samson disclosed that he was a Nazarite and that his strength was in his unshaved head, the end had come. His seven locks were shaven off, and he was easily overpowered by his enemies. Blinded, and in fetters of bronze, he was led from the Valley of Sorek to Gaza, where in prison he was made to grind at the mill, a task usually assigned to slaves. How long he was in prison we do not know, but the day came when the Philistines made festival to celebrate their triumph over their foe. He was led out to provide sport for the thousands who had gathered to watch. By this time his hair had begun to grow again, evidence that the strength he had lost while he slept on Delilah's knee was returning. With a mighty effort he pulled down the pillars upon which the roof of the building where hundreds of people who were watching had gathered, rested, and in the collapse those people and others were killed. Samson had his revenge at the cost of his own life. Poor Samson!

The Instruction from His Life

There are lessons to learn:

1. It is often easy to satisfy one's personal longings at the expense of defiling one's separation to a life of

godliness. Small beginnings may have disastrous ends.
Let us beware.

2. Like Samson it is possible for a Christian to be robbed of spiritual vitality and to know not that the Lord has departed.

3. Just as Samson performed feats of strength when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, so the Christian attributes every achievement to the help of the Spirit of God.

4. As Samson made his recovery when his hair began to grow again, so too, those who have fallen may be restored to usefulness when they return to the path of separation and honour the Lord by an act of rededication.

Men Who Slept --Part 8

Men Who Slept

Part 8

Andrew Borland, M.A.

6. David

In this paper it is assumed that David was the author of the Psalms for which the appropriate quotations are made. The psalms are the finest lyrics ever written. They have a universal appeal because they conserve in fitting language feelings which have surged through the being of the writers. Judged by the highest standards of criticism, David's poems are the noblest and best of their kind, and among them are included Psalm 3 and Psalm 4, both of which were spontaneously composed on successive days at the time of the Great Rebellion when Absalom drove his father ingloriously from Jerusalem and the king was forced into exile in the wilderness. Psalm 3 was written on the morning after an unexpected undisturbed sleep, "I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me" (v. 5). Psalm 4, composed at the close of the next day which had been spent on the march, shows how David had gained confidence in God from his experience on the previous night: "I will both lay me down and sleep; for Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (v. 8).

One interesting feature of the psalms is the frequent reference to night experiences. Take a few of them. The very first is in the opening psalm. The blessed man is one whose "delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (v. 2). "Thou has

proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night" is a quotation from psalm 17:3. One of the most appealing of such references is found in Psalm 63: "Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches (vv. 3-6). Those who have had prolonged illness and have suffered the distress of sleeplessness can testify to the truth of the psalmist's word, "The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness" (41:3).

Psalms 3 and 4 were composed in a time of adversity, and they bear witness to the fact that David had found in the wilderness a new conception of the goodness of God. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown; but now that his throne seemed to be toppling in the revolt of his pampered son, he was learning that adversity may be a blessing in disguise. He would have corroborated the dictum of the great Dr. Johnson that "Adversity leads us to think properly of our state", or that of Shirley that "the glories of our blood and state are shadows, not substantial things." He would have concurred with the Shakespearean pronouncement that "sweet are the uses of adversity," for his trying circumstances had taught him as trying circumstances should teach those who profess to know God, reliance upon divine help and intervention.

Psalm 3 is a record of David's feelings in what were most unpropitious circumstances, as the heading indicates. It was written when David fled from Absalom

his son, As he and his little band of loyalists had left the city the curses of Shimei; broke upon his ears, convincing him that there was no safety within the walls of Jerusalem. Now in flight, the king and his fear haunted army had reached their first camping place. As night drew on, hasty preparations had to be made for the bivouac. Protection for the women and children had to be secured. Kindly monarch as he was, and experienced soldier, he saw to the placing of the guards, superintended the sleeping conditions of his followers and then perhaps last of all, tired and apprehensive, David laid himself down with his shield for protection.

When he woke in the morning, maybe before the camp was astir, his first thoughts were of the goodness of God. The revolt was a serious matter. Many, he wrote, were in the uprising against him. Perhaps he was thinking of Shimei when he complained that many were sneeringly saying of him, "There is no help for him in God" (v. 2). The remainder of the psalm is David's attestation of the fact that God had been his helper and keeper while he had slept. Perhaps, as he had tried to sleep, and the past of his life, like a panorama, swept before him, he was disturbed in mind. His former misdemeanours, like a nightmare, might have risen before him, torturing his conscience and making him wonder if God's forgiveness was genuine and was still true. Then sleep came, and it was daybreak when he woke, what a different world it was! He could have sided with Robert Browning when he wrote. "God's in His heaven: All's right with the world." He knew that God was in command, and in the end good would triumph. That is the message from verse 3. As he lifted his shield which had lain beside him in the darkness he declared, "Thou, O Lord, art a shield for

me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head." He knew now why he had slept the night through. God had given His beloved sleep.

As he turned his gaze towards Jerusalem, and thought that there Jehovah had placed His name on the mountain of holiness, he recalled his prayer of the night before and exclaimed, "I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill" (v. 4). Anxiety which can be a grand disturber, vanished. Fears were allayed. Confidence in God had been restored. Peace came; so that he could write with joy of heart, "I laid me down and slept; I awakened; for the Lord sustained me" (v. 5). The outlook changed, and whereas on the previous day haste in flight had been his portion, now with confidence derived from the knowledge that God had heard him, he could face the new day, saying, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about" (v. 6), what a difference a good night's sleep makes especially if it is recognized as a definite gift from God in circumstances that otherwise would have been disturbing!

Psalm 4 was written at the close of the next day. David had felt while he was on the march through the winding defiles down towards the Jordan valley that if Absalom had overtaken him he would have been hemmed in. At the close of the day he was still safe, and confessed that the Lord had set apart him that is godly for himself (v. 3). Perhaps in verse 4 he was addressing the sons of men who love vanity, and rehearsing his experience of the previous evening before he had gone to sleep, "Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still; Offer sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord" (vv. 4-5).

He seemed to be remembering the experiences of the previous day before he was wrapt in the slumber which refreshed and invigorated him. Now he contrasts the joy which he had in the recognized protection of his God with the natural joy which men have when their harvests of grain and wine are bumper ones (v. 7). His gladness did not rest in the abundance of material goods, but in the spiritual joy of fellowship with the God who could lift upon His unfortunate servant the light of His countenance and give him peace.

Another day in the flight from Jerusalem was over. The sun was beginning to cast its slanting rays across his camp settling down for the night. Absalom's forces had not caught up with them, and David, skilled general as he was, had chosen a place of safety for his camp. Having placed his sentinels, and assured that all was well, the king, who had slept so well the previous evening, mused upon that fact and, recalling the goodness of God, murmured to himself in quiet confidence, "I will both lie down in peace and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety". And David slept on the pillow of contentment made of infinite wisdom, infinite love and infinite power.

One outstanding lesson those two psalms teach. The recollection of a previous goodness of God should induce in us confidence that He will not fail in the future.

Men Who Slept --Part 8

Men Who Slept

Part 8

Andrew Borland

Zechariah

While Zechariah slept he was given visions which conveyed to him truths relevant to the times in which he lived; and when he was awakened out of his sleep, he was given further unfoldings of the divine mind. He was contemporary with Haggai; and both prophesied at the time of the rebuilding of the Temple by the exiles who had returned from their captivity in Babylon. Jerusalem was the centre of his activities, and in that city he was associated with Joshua the High Priest as the religious leader and with Zerubbabel as the political leader.

The prophecy consists of two parts, the second part consisting of chapters nine to fourteen predicting events concerning the establishing of the Messianic Kingdom and Israel's part therein. The first part contains eight visions communicated to Zechariah in the second year of King Darius, that is, in the year 520 B.C. Chapter four opens with these words: "And the angel who talked with me came again, and waked me as a man that is wakened out of his sleep." The eight visions are thus divided into two: (a) those given while the prophet was in a reverie or asleep, and (b) those given after he had been wakened. This present paper is concerned chiefly with three visions when he was awake. It may be wise, however, to refer also to the fourth vision.

The prophet saw the ceremony of the cleansing and establishment of Joshua, the son of Josedech, as High Priest. His filthy garments and other types of defilement were removed and he was clothed in vestments of righteousness, a ceremony which symbolically was meant to convey the message that before the nation could be assured of acceptance into divine favour it must be characterized by holiness through cleansing from the defiling practices brought back from Babylon. That is a message which is always up-to-date, even today. Chapters four and five contain three visions. Zechariah had revealed to him conditions which were necessary for national prosperity and individual spiritual health, conditions which always have a relevance. The three visions were: (1) of a lampstand and two olive trees; (2) of a flying scroll; (3) of an ephah with a heavy lid.

The Lampstand had a central stem and seven lamps. Those lamps were supplied with oil from a large bowl which was constantly replenished from two olive trees, so that there was an abundant supply to the lamp stand. There was no human intermediary between the trees and the bowl. That arrangement had a significant message to Zerubbabel who was superintending the building of the Temple. The message was most arresting and highly pertinent: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Zerubbabel was to learn that however assiduous he might be in his personal efforts (power), and however determined his builder-assistants might be in their concerted endeavour (might), they could not accomplish successfully the task to which they had dedicated themselves. The message which may have been a hard one for Zerubbabel to learn

was this: The work will be brought to a satisfactory issue only as the Holy Spirit motivates those engaged in the task. The oil from the two trees was the symbol of that fact. Trees do not result from human labour but divine provision.

The lampstand had its own symbolic significance. Both in the Tabernacle erected by Moses, and in the Temple built by Solomon, the lamp-stand was a reminder to Israel that the nation had been placed by God in the world to be a witness to His truth, righteousness and holiness. Zerubbabel was being informed that the lampstand which was to be placed in the rebuilt Temple was representative of the nation as the bearer of light amidst heathen darkness. That witness would be possible only as the Holy Spirit was permitted to govern their lives.

That lesson has been carried over to the New Testament. The Perfect Lampstand is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the solitary Light of the world, whose entire life on earth was dominated by the Holy Spirit whom He did not receive by measure. Just as He is the Light of the world so His disciples are said to be lights in the world, holding forth the word of life. The exhortation is never outmoded, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may behold your good works and glorify your Father."

In the second part of the message Zerubbabel was given assurance that he would be able to complete the work in spite of seemingly unsurmountable opposition. "Who art thou, O great mountain. Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain, and he shall bring forth the headstone of it with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it." Perhaps there is a hidden reference to the current belief

about the stone of stumbling to which our Lord made reference in Matthew 21:42-44: "Did you never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." The scripture to which our Lord was referring is Psalm 118:22-23. Peter in his first epistle makes an extended reference to the same stone: "It is contained in scripture (Isaiah 28:16); Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious; ... unto you, therefore, who believe He is precious, but unto them who are disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence" (1 Peter 2:6-8). The incident to which the Psalmist, our Lord, and Peter, refer seems to be more than a tradition. It was believed that when Solomon's Temple was building, stones were shapen in the quarries, conveyed to the site and left in the sun to dry. One stone, it is said, was a seeming misfit and was thrown aside. Work-men going home often stumbled over it, and it became "an offence." When the Temple was almost complete, it was discovered that the cornerstone was missing. Search was made, and it was found that the discarded stone was the one needed to fill the honourable place. Perhaps it was that incident to which Zerubbabel's attention was drawn as a promise that he would see the headstone of the New Temple in its place when his work was finished, crying, "Grace, grace unto it."

Some might despise the Second Temple as built in a day of small things. It was nothing in comparison with the magnificence of Solomon's building, but Jehovah valued it as the work of a man who was faithful in his

generation. Zerubbabel, the man with the plummet in his hand, would be satisfied, when he realized that the seven “eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth” rested with pleasure on the final result. The next vision granted the prophet was that of the Flying Scroll. It was of unusual size, roughly ten yards by five yards, and there was writing on either side. The words of the law could be read, and the scroll is described as conveying a curse to those who infringed the law. Two defaulters are specifically mentioned, the thief and the perjurer. The scroll, bearing the curse, would “enter into the house of the thief and into the house of him who swears falsely by my name, and it shall abide in the midst of his house.” That is a symbolical way of indicating that the individual would be responsible to answer for his sin. Conscience would be at work, and there would be no escape.

God’s standard of holiness could not be lowered for those who had returned from exile. Infringement of His laws calls for His displeasure. Even under grace we must not minimize the claims which God makes upon those who have been delivered from the thralldom of sin “The disregard of business morality, the laxity in general conduct and morals, the association with the questionable things of the world, the frequent impurity of thought and word are completely irreconcilable with the unblemished purity of Christ.” (Dr. Tatford)

The third vision was of the Ephah with the heavy lid. In the ephah, something like a barrel, was a woman called Wickedness. When she popped up the heavy leaded lid was thrust down upon her and she was shut up in the container. Then came two women with wings like a

stork. They were able to fly swiftly, and they carried the ephah with the woman away to the land of Shinar.

If the vision of the flying scroll unmasks the sins of the individual, this vision discloses the sin of intense commercial preoccupation, a sin which afflicted the people who had returned from Babylon. They were serving Mammon rather than God, and the vision designates such an attitude as wickedness. The nation must be purged of it, and symbolically the wickedness was conveyed back to Babylon. That was God's way of teaching the people in the days of Zerubbabel that worldly pursuits should be left to men of the world, a lesson needed in our generation.

Babylon is the symbol of commercial worldliness, and its spirit has always been percolating through to the people of God. It was the sin of the church in Laodicea. It is the sin which has characterized every prosperous community. It is the sin against which our Lord warned His generation- Mammon worship. It is the sin which the Apostle Paul denounced, "The love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Few of us are immune from this, so let us fix our mind on things above, and lay up treasure in heaven.

Men Who Slept --Part 9

Men Who Slept

Part 9

Andrew Borland

Jonah

The story of Jonah is well-known and has been a center of controversy for many generations, special attention being given to the fact that the prophet was swallowed by a great fish, and after three days vomited alive on to dry land. He is one of the men in Scripture who slept when he should have been awake, his sleep giving evidence that he was indifferent to the strange surroundings in which he found himself. Rehearse the story briefly.

The Story Itself

Jonah, a servant and prophet of the Lord, had been commissioned to go to Nineveh with a message of warning, but he was displeased and not disposed to go. Instead, he made his way to the port of Joppa and boarded a ship sailing westwards to Tarshish. In the providential intervention of God a tempest arose and the ship was in danger of foundering. The mariners in desperation cast their cargo overboard, fearing for their lives. "But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship, and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the ship master came to him, and said unto him, what meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not."

When lots were cast to determine upon which of them the blame should rest for the disaster, the lot fell upon Jonah, and he requested that he should be thrown into the sea that the storm might subside. The mariners knew that he was endeavouring to escape from the presence of the Lord and from his duty as a prophet who had been sent to preach the message of God to Nineveh. Yet Jonah was sound asleep, unconscious of the danger in which he lay.

Why was Jonah asleep in such a storm as would keep most men awake? It was the experience of seeing some Moravians calm and self-possessed in a storm on the Atlantic which ultimately led to the conversion of John Wesley. In a storm which terrified the disciples our Lord was asleep in the hinder part of the boat because he was tired after his incessant toils. He had no bad conscience and was able to speak a command of power which stilled the wind and calmed the waves. Ordinary men don't usually sleep in circumstances like those in which Jonah found himself, unless they are very tired. Jonah had been fleeing from the presence of the Lord, in all probability from Gath-hepher of Zebulun in the north to Joppa many miles away. That flight indicates how determined Jonah was in his disobedience. That he slept soundly through the tempest perhaps proves that he was not in the least perturbed by his reluctance to go to Nineveh. Perhaps, too, he went down to the sides of the ship, because, being a land-lubber he was afraid of the storm and wanted to consider himself safe from a watery grave. Whatever the reasons, his action endangered the lives of the mariners. When he was wakened, conscience-smitten, he admitted that he was to blame, saying, "I know that for my sake this great

tempest is upon you.” What a pity it is when a servant of the Lord by his disobedience brings the lives of others into jeopardy, if not physically, then spiritually, the latter being the greater calamity! God often has to intervene, as He did in the case of Jonah, to prevent His servants from following a course of self-will which would be to the hurt of others. Had Jonah reached Tarshish, Nineveh would not have had the message, obedience to which meant the preservation of the city.

Some Schools of Thought

The personality of the prophet cannot be assessed apart from a general understanding of the contents of the book. There are difficulties of interpretation.

1. Is he mythological, like so many heroes in stories of the ancient world in which a man is swallowed by a fish and regurgitated on to dry land? There are so many small incidental details which take the story out of the realm of mythology.
2. Is it parabolical? Some see in it an arresting parable intended to teach the Jewish nation that their proud conservatism was all wrong. They were being taught that the God who had chosen them had interest in other people, and that the message He had committed to them was to be shared by others. The story of Jonah does not read like a parable; it is too matter of fact.
3. Is it historical? Jonah is said to have lived at the time of Jeroboam II. His father and place of birth are named, and the inferences about Nineveh are true to history. Again our Lord, and we can rely upon His Word, referred to him as an historical person who carried a message of repentance to Nineveh. A reading of the

book gives the impression that the events happened as narrated. The parabolic or mythological sense is never apparent.

The Significance of the Story

The story of Jonah is remarkable for various reasons. 1. It reveals the love and mercy of God in His concern for even the most wicked and rapacious city of that time. Nineveh, although notorious for its unrestrained violence, was given a message of warning to repent before judgment from God would descend upon it. 2. It is a story of one of the most remarkable revivals in history. The entire city repented and was spared. The people of Nineveh believed God (Jonah 3:5). "This is one of the most remarkable statements in the story. But it never seems to make the impression the whale does. The swallowing of a small man by a big fish is merely a matter of size ... But for that little prophet to walk into New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, London, or any other city and bring that city to repentance and belief in God is some achievement! Why doesn't the professor get funny about that—which is really the point of the story?" 3. When Jonah recovered himself and preached so that the king on the throne to the peasant in his mud hut repented, the lesson is being taught that the way to escape divine judgment upon wicked deeds is repentance. The grace of divine mercy is manifest in the fact that forty days were given before the stroke would fall. That is a divine method. "God is not willing that any should perish," yet the preaching that calls for repentance must not be neglected. Jonah must have been a strange figure as he moved into the city preaching "repentance or doom." 4. The story is

remarkable because of the evidence of divine intervention. A great storm, a natural phenomenon sent by God, frustrated Jonah in his attempt to escape his duty. The fish which swallowed Jonah was on the spot by divine direction. Jonah was preserved in the stomach of the fish for three days; and the gourd, the worm and the wind of which we read in chapter 4 were the means by which God taught the unhappy prophet a salutary lesson. God is still the same, Lord of natural phenomena which He can manipulate to fulfil His own purpose. 5. One of the most remarkable features in the story is Jonah's repentance when the Word of the Lord came to him a second time. When the command came "Go, preach," despite his reluctance because he believed that a message of judgment was contrary to his conception of the God whom he knew, he went, making a long journey to warn the people of a city whose reputation was well-known for cruelty and wickedness. Moreover, such a message as he was given was contrary to his very nature. His name "Jonah" means "a dove"; and the closing scene is one of the most moving in the Bible. The prophet's reaction to the response to his message reveals his belief in the goodness and mercy of God: "I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live" (4:23). He had gone to preach in obedience to the divine command, although, as had he thought, that was against his better judgment. The divine argument was this: If Jonah was grieved because the sun had withered the gourd which had sheltered him, should not God "spare Nineveh, that great city in which are more than sixscore thousand persons who cannot discern between their

right hand and their left; and also much cattle?" (4:11) Jonah's argument was effectively silenced because God had convinced him that even the wicked people of Nineveh were far more valuable in His sight than was a perishable gourd in the reckoning of a selfish prophet.

Some Practical Applications

Numerous lessons may be learnt from the story of the prophet who fell asleep in the sides of a tempest-tossed boat. Here are a few of those lessons:

1. Christians need not be afraid to accept the story as genuine. There are records preserving the stories of sailors who have had an experience similar to that of Jonah. Our Lord's endorsement of it is sufficient guarantee of its historicity.
2. It is the duty of the preacher to, "Go...preach... the preaching that I bid thee" (3:2) The message must be balanced. Repentance or judgment must be preached on the understanding that God is merciful and gracious.
3. There is the danger that racial prejudice or religious conservatism will interfere with the desire to witness to other peoples of the goodness of God. Even in Christian circles racial prejudice dies slowly.
4. Prayer is the resort of a man who discovers himself in a desperate situation. Of Jonah in his plight it is recorded, "Then Jonah prayed"; and he recognized that salvation is of the Lord.
5. It is the business of every local church and of its individual members to be missionary-minded. A pertinent question, Are you?

The Observance of the Lord's Day

As the sabbath was instituted to celebrate the old creation, so the Lord's day celebrates the New Creation. Throughout this age the most Spirit-filled, devout believers to whom the will of God has been clearly revealed, have kept the Lord's day apart from any sense of responsibility to keep the seventh day. It is reasonable to suppose that had they been guilty of sabbath breaking, they would have been convicted of that sin.

Since it is all of grace, a written requirement for the keeping of the Lord's day is not imposed, nor is the manner of its observance prescribed. By this wise provision, none are encouraged to keep the day as a mere duty; it is to be kept from the heart. Israel stood before God as immature children under tutors and governors and needing the commandments which are given to a child (Gal. 4:1-11); while the Church stands before God as adult sons. Their life under grace is clearly defined, but it is presented only as the beseechings of God with the expectation that all shall be done willingly (Eph. 4:1-3; Rom. 12:1,2). There is little question as to how a well-instructed, Spirit-filled believer (and the Scripture presupposes a normal Christian to be such) will be occupied on the day which commemorates Christ's resurrection and the New Creation. If perchance the child of God is not yielded to God, no unwilling observance of a day will correct his carnal heart nor would such observance be pleasing to God. The issue between God and the carnal Christian is not one of outward actions, but of a yielded life.

The Observance of the First Day is Indicated by Various Events. In addition to the fact that the sabbath is nowhere imposed on the children of God under grace, there are reasons for their observance of the first day of the week.

1. On that day Christ arose from the dead (Matt. 28:1-7; Lk. 24:1-6).

2. On that day He first met His disciples in the new fellowship (John 20:19).

3. On that day the Spirit descended from Heaven (Acts 2:1-4).

4. On that day the Apostle Paul preached in Troas (Acts 20:6,7)

5. On that day the believers came together to break bread (Acts 20:6,7)

6. On that day they were to "lay by in store" as God had prospered them (1 Cor. 16:2).

7. On that day Christ appeared to John on Patmos (Rev. 1:10). (Lewis Sperry Chafer)

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight (Acts 20:7).

This is evidently something to which the Holy Spirit desires to draw our attention in a special way; otherwise it would not be mentioned so definitely. They arrived in Troas, remained there seven days until the first day of the week rolled around. And what is the first day of the week? The day that we call Sunday. And on this day, not on the Jewish Sabbath, but on the first day of the week,

already it had become customary apparently for the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ to gather together for a specific purpose, and that purpose is called here "to break bread". (Harry Ironside)

In 1825, J. G. Bellett, who had met Anthony Norris Groves in Dublin, wrote these memorable words of his friend: "It appeared to him from Scripture that believers, meeting together as disciples of Christ, were free to break bread as their Lord had admonished them, and that in so far as the practice of the apostles could be a guide, every Lord's Day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord's death and obeying His parting command." To those who are accustomed now to meet in that simple, unpretentious way, such a discovery means nothing, but to men who were wedded to Church systems it was momentous, captivating. This reversion to the Scriptures has had repercussions in the furthest corners of the world. Gatherings for the breaking of bread are now an integral part of that witness which derives its virility from its simplicity. The oneness of the Body of Christ is recognized and opportunity to display that oneness is given in the weekly gathering to break bread. (Andrew Borland)

The Second Advent --Part 1

The Second Advent

Part 1

Andrew Borland

Mr. Andrew Borland, M.A., is the Editor of The Believer's Magazine published by John Ritchie Company, Kilmarnock, Scotland. We strongly recommend that you give earnest attention to this article, the first of a series by this capable writer on the Second Advent of Christ.

Christ Will Come Again

Divine history may be summarized in three outstanding features preserved for the intelligent reader of the Bible.

(1) The First Advent of the Son of God. Is it not significant that these expressions are used about that advent and its purpose? (a) "When the Fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son" (Gal. 4:4). (b) In the parable of the householder a similar expression occurs. After introducing "servants" and "other servants," the parable continues, "Last of all He sent unto them His Son" (Matt. 21:37). (c) Summing up his teaching about the finality of the death of Christ, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews states, "Now once in the end of the ages hath He appeared to put away sin" (Heb. 9:26).

It is apparent that the inspired record is drawing attention to the fact that past history was inexorably leading up to a long predicted event, the coming of the Deliverer promised so far back as the time of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15). However else we may read the Old

Testament story, our paramount interest should be in the discovery that events recorded therein were preparatory for the singular event of the arrival of the promised Seed of the Woman. The period covered by that Advent is almost incomprehensibly short, only some thirty-three years, but it was sufficiently long to disclose the inveterate hatred of the human heart toward the purpose of God, and to accomplish the will of God in providing in the planned death of the Son of God a means of escape from God's wrath. That First Advent was completed and fittingly brought to a God-appointed end in the ascension—the return to heavenly glory of the Man of Calvary.

(2) The Absence of the Son of God from the Earth. The scene of His victory over death and Satan is a period of undisclosed duration. Already it has extended two thousand years, and no one knows how long or how short its future duration will be. It will be ended by another divinely appointed event.

(3) The Second Advent. There need be no hesitation in accepting as authentic and reliable the promise of the Son of God on the eve of His departure from this scene of His redeeming activity, "If I go I will come again" (John 14:3) The analogy of the high priest of Israel on the Day of Atonement is fittingly used in the hymn about the return of our Great High Priest:

And though a while He be
Hid from the eyes of men,
His people wait to see
Their Great High Priest again.
In brightest glory He will come

And take His waiting people home.

The present interval has been circumscribed in a most impressive manner. The Lord's Supper is stated to be a proclamation of His death "till He come" (1 Cor. 11:26). During the Lord's absence His servants are expected to respond to the directive, "Occupy (be busy) till I come" (Luke 19:13). In a world, corrupt and hostile, it is imperative for the true disciple to heed the word of advice from the glorified Lord of the churches, "Hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2:25).

The Importance of Constant Study

The constant study of the Second Advent is important for various reasons, three of which may be mentioned.

First, it is important because the subject occupies an outstanding place in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the former volume, in both the major and the minor Prophets, there are glowing predictions of the blessings attendant upon the coming of Messiah to set up His kingdom (Isa. 11:3-9f.; Zech. 8:20-23). Psalm 72 inspired James Montgomery to write his heart-stirring hymn, "Hail to the Lord's Anointed." It hardly needs to be remarked that no subject receives more attention in the New Testament than that of the Second Advent. The Epistles to the Thessalonians deals almost exclusively with the theme, and one interpretation of the Book of the Revelation sees therein depicted events at and subsequent to the Lord's return.

Second, neglect of its study has brought incalculable loss to the Church. In the early Christian centuries the hope burned brightly, but when worldliness and materialism gripped the minds of people, and

unconverted masses were incorporated into a spurious church, the truth of the Second Advent was lost. Only fitfully and in a few localities did the light shine in the prevailing darkness and it was not until the nineteenth century that the truth of the Lord's return began to engage the serious attention of Bible scholars. Even since this renewed interest began, there have been periods when the light of the hope has been dimmed by other concerns.

Third, interest in the Second Advent should produce certain evident results.

1. It should create a longing for the establishment of the kingdom of God, when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of the Lord and His Christ (Rev. 11:15). How ardently the exercised and instructed Christian should pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in Heaven"! A knowledge of the divine intention both for the Jews and the Gentiles should keep alive interest in passing events which may shed some light on the development of God's plan working itself toward the appointed end.

2. It should encourage interest in the spiritual welfare of others. A genuine realization that the coming of the Lord is sure, and may be drawing nigh, cannot but create concern for others. Communities of Christians have been revived, and individual lives have been truly dedicated to the service of the gospel when it was believed "that the Lord Jesus will be revealed from Heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:7-8). How does such a thought affect us?

3. It produces a true perspective of life. Two worlds claim our attention and interest, this world and the next. The teaching about our Lord's return should quicken our desire for the heavenly country. Where one's treasure is, there one's heart is directed. As the Apostle Paul says, "Set your affection on things above" (Col. 3:2). The exercised Christian lives "looking for that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13). The things of earth lose their grip upon the believer in proportion to the intensity of his conviction that "Jesus is coming again."

Some Reasons For Believing

There are good reasons for believing in the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.

1. Attention has been drawn to the numerous prophetic announcements in the Old Testament. Many of those prophecies had their fulfillment in the birth, life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many others await fulfillment when the King comes to set up His Kingdom.
2. Christ's statements assure us. In many of His parables the Lord spoke of His return in power and great glory. Chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew's Gospel are sufficient proof of that. To His distressed apostolic band the Saviour said, "If I go ... I will come again."
3. Angelic declaration nerved the bewildered disciples when they heard the words, "Why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus who is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven" (Acts 1:11).
4. Apostolic corroboration. Without collaboration all the writers of the New Testament epistles agree on that one

point that "Jesus is coming again." Trace the recurring references thereto in the writings of Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude. It was "the hope of His calling" (Eph. 1:18) which carried them on and through the opposition which was encountered at the commencement of the church age.

5. Apocalyptic assurance is given in the last book of the Bible. The announcement occurs several times, "I come quickly." Revelation 19 describes how He who is called Faithful and True descends from Heaven on a white horse, followed by the armies of Heaven, to smite the nations and rule them with a rod of iron. His victory will be complete, for he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is of that triumph we think when we sing, Look, ye saints! The sight is glorious;

See the Man of Sorrows now;

From the fight return victorious,

Every knee to Him shall bow.

Crown Him, crown Him,

Crowns become the Victor's brow.

The Second Advent --Part 2

The Second Advent

Part 2

Andrew Borland

Mr. Andrew Borland, M.A., is the Editor of The Believer's Magazine, published by John Ritchie Company, Kilmarnock, Scotland. We strongly recommend that you give earnest attention to this article, the second of a series by this capable writer on the Second Advent of Christ.

Five Periods of Divine History

The study of Biblical prophecy is necessary and absorbing. It is necessary because without it we cannot understand the methods which God has been employing to carry out His purpose for the Jewish nation, for the Church and for the entire universe. It is absorbing because it is a faithful means of confirming faith in a number of directions. It confirms faith in the reality of the existence of God. If prophecies have been fulfilled, there is evidence that there is a superintending Providence working according to a definite plan.

It confirms faith in the reliability of the Bible. The writers of Bible prophecies did not follow cunningly devised fables. They wrote under divine guidance, for "the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). One of the evidences of the inspiration of the Scriptures is fulfilled prophecy.

It confirms the believer's confidence in the Deity of Christ. A great many of the prophetic utterances, like Psalm 2:2 and Isaiah 53, had literal fulfilment in the experience of the Son of God. He was the One of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. So impressed was Peter by what he saw and heard on the holy Mount of Transfiguration that he wrote, "We have also a more sure Word of Prophecy," i.e., the Word of Prophecy made more sure or confirmed. He had heard the voice from the excellent glory say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:17-18).

As "an infallible interpretation of prophecy is indeed hard to come by," it is unwise to be dogmatic about minor details. Facts have to be collected from so many scattered portions of Scripture that it is extremely difficult to be certain that events are being placed in their proper order. That, however, does not mean that we should not give diligent application to acquire some knowledge of the methods by which God will carry out His Program. Patient study will be amply repaid.

One of the most fascinating books of the New Testament is the Epistle to the Ephesians because it contains a complete scheme of events in the divine program without the introduction of minor details which could distract the attention from the grander objective of God. The Epistle has a self-contained revelation of broad outlines which require very little interpretation.

The main idea which comes through the Epistle is that movements in history are not a number of unconnected, haphazard events, but a series of items under divine control working uninterrupted towards an appointed consummation. Note these statements:

Chapter 1, Verse 5; “Having predestined us unto the adoption of sons, — according to the good pleasure of His will.”

Chapter 1, Verse 9; “Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He had purposed in Himself.”

Chapter 1, Verse 11, “Being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.”

Chapter 3, Verse 11; According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Words in these quotations suggest design, power, objective. How significant and instructive are the expressions “will,” “good pleasure,” “purpose,” “counsel,” and “worketh all things!” They impress us with the fact that God is not quiescent, but active in His own universe, controlling, directing, superintending. He is LORD of Heaven and earth.

That divine control extends to “all things,” the infinitesimally small and the infinitely great. “Nothing moves with aimless feet.” The God who has revealed Himself in creation, in providence and in the incarnation is the Almighty, a title which occurs several times in the Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 19:15).

The grand objective is stated in simple unambiguous terms. It is that “in the dispensation of the fulness of times,” God will “gather together in one all things in Christ Jesus” (1:10), for He has been made “head over all things (1:22).

The Epistle to Ephesians, moreover, gives a panoramic view of divine activities from eternity to eternity. It

treats of history in its broadest sense and views events not from the angle of the secular historian, but from the standpoint of divine revelation. The mind is taken backwards beyond the remotest past of recorded time into eternity in a statement like the following: “chosen — before the foundation of the world” (1:3). The forward look is just as staggering to the “glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end” (3:21). Events in time are viewed as taking place between these two extremes, two mountain peaks with the vale of time marked by “other ages,” “now,” and the “ages to come.”

Thus five divisions in the divine scheme emerge—

1. Before the beginning of time as we reckon it, antecedent to Genesis 1:1. That beginning is undated, and has reference to God’s “eternal purpose.” It is comprehended in the expression “before the foundation of the world.”

2. Time in past history. The Apostle refers to “other ages,” that is to dispensations other than the one in which he himself lived, the gospel dispensation introduced by the advent of the Son of God.

3. Time now present. Paul thinks of the present time as being one of peculiar honor. It is the time during which the activity of God is directed towards the calling out of the Church which in a future time will be presented in Heaven “a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (5:27). Three times there occurs the dispensational “now” which distinctly marks off the period during which the gospel of the grace of God in His Son is being proclaimed.

4. Time future. Attention is focussed on “the dispensation of the fulness of times” (1:10). That is the ultimate objective of God for the vindication of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one far-off divine event towards which the whole creation moves, when “Jesus shall reign where’er the sun, doth his successive journeys run.”

5. Beyond the “fulness of times.” God’s designs stretch into the limitless future, into periods called “the ages to come,” only slight hints of which are given in the Scriptures. Such a scheme as the inspired Apostle has outlined in the Epistle of Ephesians was not the product of human speculation. It was the result of divine revelation. Only those with exercised spiritual understanding can appreciate the meaning and the ultimate objective of the divine movements from “before the foundation” until they reach their consummation in the “world without end,” that is FOR EVER AND EVER!

The Second Advent --Part 3

The Second Advent

Part 3

Andrew Borland, M.A.

Before the Foundation of the World

The five periods of divine activity already outlined may now be studied more closely in their contextual setting in the Epistle in which they are described, the Epistle to the Ephesians.

1. Before time began. That is a conception beyond human comprehension for the mind of man is circumscribed by the ideas of time and space. This Epistle takes the reader beyond both. We read God has “chosen us in Him (Jesus Christ) before the foundation of the world,” in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children” 1:6-5). Again the Apostle refers to “the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (3:11).

Certain great facts emerge from these quotations. (a) Ideas about God. His eternity is inferred. He existed before, and, therefore, outside of time. Such an idea baffles the finite mind. Man cannot think of a “time” when “time was not.” He lives in time; but God being eternal, existed before the foundation of the world. Yet the amazing fact revealed in Scripture, is that the eternal God exists also in time directing the processes of history, and especially manifesting Himself as the God of grace, made known in time by the appearing on the stage of earth of the “Saviour of the World.” This

conception of the eternal grace of God has been nobly captured in the lines of a hymn frequently sung:

Before Thy hands had made the sun to rule the day,
Or earth's foundation laid, or fashioned Adam's clay,
What thoughts of peace and mercy flowed, in Thy great heart of love O God! A monument of grace, A sinner saved by blood, The streams of love I trace, up to their fountain, God; And in His sovereign counsels see Eternal thoughts of love to me.

God's infinity is to be inferred. He is not only eternal, He is also infinite and unchangeable. He has eternal existence beyond and outside of space. Yet He has moved actively in space since the foundation of the world. That world is His world, and He works within it for His own glory. Such a God, infinite and eternal, has a plan which affects the entire universe. He controls and diverts "all things" for the accomplishment of His purposes.

Notice, too, the ideas which are patent about the universe. It had a definite beginning; it had a foundation. It is the product of the activity of the Creator, whose designs for it have always been beneficent. There is not a vestige of confirmation in the Bible for the atheistic contention that the universe has evolved, and that there is no scientific reason why the necessity of a Creator should be postulated. Blind chance could not have produced the universe, discoveries within which are being made with bewildering results. Magnitudes are amazing. Distances within the special deeps are staggering. Speeds at which light and the heavenly bodies travel are incomprehensible. Yet the Bible assures us that God is

over all; He is the ruler even in the remotest parts of this universe. It is one, a whole, controlled by its Designer for His own eternal purpose.

Note, too, the ideas about election. Those who are to form that glorious Church which will be presented to Him have been “chosen” in Christ. The context implies that the divine purpose is unaffected by time. The choice was made “before the foundation of the world.” Such a statement is surely a very strong confirmation of the assurance of final salvation. Election, moreover, is an integral part of the gospel message understood only by those who have accepted the terms upon which the gospel is offered. They are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet. 1:2).

Of course, there are the two almost antagonistic interpretations of the doctrine of election. The Calvinist emphasizes the sovereign will of God. It is He who chooses. Salvation is all of grace, “not of works lest any man should boast.” The Arminian puts stress upon the free will of man, asserting that man must accept, must obey the gospel. Endless, and oftentimes unprofitable controversy has gathered round those two seemingly antagonistic conceptions of divine truth. Yet both aspects are taught in the Epistle to the Ephesians, although it seems impossible to reconcile the two ideas, the sovereign will of God, and the responsible free will of man.

Election is always by God “in Christ.” Yet there is nothing arbitrary in God’s doing. On the other hand human responsibility is suggested. “By grace are ye saved through faith.” “Ye heard the word of truth, the

gospel of your salvation; in whom also ... ye believed" (1:13).

Election cannot be divorced from predestination — for, declares the passage, we have been predestinated unto the adoption of children, that is, to the status of sons, being reckoned as "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8). Predestination points forward to that end, when Christ who is our life shall be manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3:4).

Election and predestination have the same end in view, namely, "that we should be holy and without blame before Him." The ultimate objective is expressed in similar terms, for when the completed Church is presented in its glory, it will be "holy and without blemish" (5:27). Such a consummation implies the Rapture of the Church, to be caught up to meet the Lord, who will be neither defeated nor diverted from His purpose.

All the above, and a great deal more, is involved in the declaration that believers have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. How we should revel in the truth of it, and, in measure as the Holy Spirit enables us, live worthy of the calling with which we have been called (4:1).

The Second Advent --Part 4

The Second Advent

Part 4

Andrew Borland, M.A.

Mr. Andrew Borland, M.A., is the Editor of The Believer's Magazine, published by John Ritchie Company, Kilmarnock, Scotland. We strongly recommend that you give earnest attention to this article, the fourth of a series by this capable writer on the Second Advent of Christ.

Other Ages

The second of the great periods in divine activity may be styled as Time Past. Paul wrote: "By revelation He (God) make known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men" (Eph. 3:3-5). Again, he wrote that he had been called of God "to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God" (Eph. 3:8-9).

The expression "from the beginning of the world" covers all human history from the very beginning up to the commencement of the Christian dispensation, and the calling out of the Church. That long period, the length of whose duration it is almost impossible to assess, has been divided into "other ages;" that is, distinct times with their own characteristics. Paul may have been

thinking of the age of innocence before the Fall, the age of conscience after the Fall, and the age of Law after the Decalogue was promulgated from Mount Sinai. During those ages there was silence from God regarding that part of His purpose which it was not His will to reveal. That purpose is wrapped up in the words "the mystery of Christ." It is a common-place of knowledge now that a "mystery," the New Testament sense of the word, does not imply something mysterious or magical, but is used to disclose the fact that there are truths which can be understood only by those who have the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. It is the disclosure of a secret which has been kept hidden until the time was ripe for its revealing. The mystery to which Paul refers in the passage quoted is called "the mystery of Christ," a new teaching associated with the revelation which God had given in Christ That was something which could not be understood in "other ages," not even by those who were most enlightened in the "ages" of preparation for the unfolding of the purpose of God "when the fulness of the time had come" (Gal. 4:4). The Revised Version translates Ephesians 3:9, "To make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God."

The expression "the mystery of Christ" occurs again in Colossians 4:3, but in that Epistle the Apostle is dealing with "the fact that the indwelling Christ is, for Gentiles as well as for Jewish believers, the hope of glory; the aspect on which the Apostle dwells here is the fact that in Christ Gentiles are fellow-heirs with Jewish believers" (F. F. Bruce). Besides being "fellow-heirs" with their Jewish brethren, Gentile believers were "fellow-members of the Body, and fellow-partakers of the

promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). The mystery was concerning the Church, the One New Man of which Christ in glory is the Head, and all who believe are members of His Body, the mystical term for the Church.

Gentiles as "fellow-heirs" are joint-heirs with Christ who is heir of all things. They are, equally with believing Jews, sharers in the inheritance, "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Moreover, they are "of the same Body," for there is only "one Body." All, whether Jews or Gentiles, are united to the same glorified Head, deriving life from Him as the common source of all spiritual blessings. Further, Gentiles are "fellow-partakers of the promise," made fit by divine grace to enjoy the blessings of the New Covenant, although they had been excluded from "the covenants of promise" under the former dispensation.

Such divine purpose was not disclosed in Old Testament times, and in vain do we look for direct teaching about the Church, "the mystery of Christ," in the Old Testament writings. Consequently, there is considerable danger in spiritualizing features contained therein to find information about the Church. True, many scholars have found illustrative material there, but such material has significance only in the light of what has been revealed in the New Testament. Fanciful flights of imagination are to be deplored.

In a slightly different aspect of "Time Past" we have been considering, are the references to the past of those who by grace have been incorporated into the "One New Man." With regard to Gentile believers certain statements are made:

They were “in time past Gentiles in the flesh,... called Uncircumcision” (Eph. 2:11).

“At that time ye were without Christ ... having no hope, and without God” (Eph. 2:12). They did not have the promise of the coming Messiah, they did not have the knowledge of the living and true God, and they had no hope, such as the Jews had, of a Deliverer who was to come. They “were afar off,” reckoned to be “strangers and foreigners” (Eph. 2:17-19). So far as the national status of those Gentile believers was concerned, they were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12). Paul thought it was spiritually good for them to be reminded of what they had been “in time past.”

Nor should any of us forget that we, too, had a past, a time when in nature’s darkness we walked in our own way, serving our own will. It may serve a useful purpose if, instead of the familiar Authorized Version, quotation is made from one less familiar, but most suggestive: “To you, who were spiritually dead all the time that you drifted along on the stream of this world’s ideas of living, and obeyed its unseen ruler (who is still operating in those who do not respond to the truth of God), to you Christ has given life! We all lived like that in the past and followed the impulses and imaginations of our evil nature, being in fact under the wrath of God by nature, like everyone else” (J. B. Phillips).

That was the kind of material God had to work upon when the purpose, which was in existence before the foundation of the world and kept hidden during the long ages of human history, was about to be put into

execution, and “the mystery of Christ” was about to be revealed.

The Second Advent --Part 5

The Second Advent

Part 5

Andrew Borland, M.A.

Mr. Andrew Borland, M.A., is the Editor of The Believer's Magazine, published by John Ritchie Company, Kilmarnock, Scotland. We strongly recommend that you give earnest attention to this article, the fifth of a series by this capable writer on the Second Advent of Christ.

What we have read in previous papers has much interest for us, but perhaps of even more interest are those passages in the Epistle to Ephesians which deal with the time now present. Consideration of such passages touches us most intimately because they reveal the purpose of God as it affects men and women living in the gospel dispensation. That dispensation was ushered in by the revelation given in the Son of God.

It should be of interest to notice the two distinct uses of the word "now" in this Epistle. Two different expressions are used in the original, one signifying the "deductive now," the other the "dispensational now." The former of these words is used when a logical conclusion is reached in the argument. One good example is as follows. In chapter two the Apostle has been at pains to describe to his Gentile readers the hopeless plight that they had been in before the grace of God transferred them from the place of distance to the near place in Christ. He concludes as he reaches the climax of his argument, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and

foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). That introductory word is a "deductive now," leading to the statement which was to follow. The "dispensational now" is meant to indicate the contrast which exists between the present dispensation and the "other ages" which preceded.

The following are three occurrences of that "now." "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). In the present dispensation, Gentiles, as well as Jews, who believe, are reconciled to God by the sacrifice of Christ. The enmity has been slain, and both may sing:

"So near, so very near to God,

Nearer I cannot be,

For in the person of the Son

I am as near as He."

To use words from Ephesians 1:7, they have both been made "accepted in the Beloved." It is one of the surpassing glories of the gospel of this dispensation that it has a message which takes no cognizance of racial barriers or national aspirations. All who believe are "one in Christ Jesus." That is the true ecumenical declaration, and it does not need a World Council of Churches to make an organizational attempt to prove its significance. Were the truth recognized, and simply followed, as in New Testament times, the need for human attempts to convince the world of unity would not be needed. Those of us who profess to have abandoned a denominational outlook, should be concerned lest we deny that unity of spirit by developing a sectarian attitude towards others and toward one another.

In Ephesians 3:5, Paul had written about his “knowledge in the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men,” and he asserts that “it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” It has been noted in a previous paper that “the mystery of Christ” refers to the nature of the Church into which have been incorporated Gentiles who believe. That is a truth which in other ages was not revealed, and we look in vain for it in the Old Testament.

The understanding of the mystery is attributed to the revelation which has been brought to men by the Holy Spirit. It is frequently asserted that it was to Paul exclusively that the revelation was given. He himself admits that the truth was made known to “holy apostles and prophets.” The apostles were the divinely appointed few who were eyewitnesses of the resurrection, and Paul as one “born out of due time,” was included in that number. The prophets were those men in the early Church, before the completion of the Canon of Scripture, who were capable of receiving from God and communicating to men, truths which had not been previously revealed in their finality.

Paul is the only writer of the New Testament who deals with the mystery of Christ, but the understanding of it was not limited to him. When the Canon of Scripture was completed, there was no need for prophets as media of communication. When they cease to function, their place was taken by “teachers” who were to be able to instruct others.

Paul, as the teacher of the unsearchable riches of Christ, states that it was his calling “to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the

beginning of the world has been hid in God who created all things by Christ Jesus, to the intent that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:9-10).

How little do we realize how great is the interest of the invisible world in the progress which the gospel makes upon the earth! Principalities and powers from the vantage point of heavenly places witness more than dwellers on earth are aware. They see outworking itself among the nations "the manifold wisdom of God." The word translated "manifold" has been variously rendered "many-hued," "multi-coloured," "variegated." These words attempt to describe the magnificent display of the grace of God in redeeming out of "every kindred and tongue, and people, and nation" men and women who will in the ages yet to come fulfil the purpose of the divine programme. The New Society of redeemed men and women is the most wonderful exhibition of the beneficence of our God this Universe has witnessed.

That dispensational "now" covers all the present era of grace. Already it has run on uninterrupted until now since its inception on the day of Pentecost. How long it will continue has not been disclosed, and it is unwise to attempt to predict. It will terminate at the rapture when the united and completed Church will be presented before the presence of divine glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24).

What an honour it is to be living on the earth now, living in the middle one of the five great periods! For two thousand years the period has continued, and the instructed believers know the truth of the hymn:

“In Him it is ordained to raise
A temple to Jehovah’s praise,
Composed of all the saints who own
No Saviour, but the Living Stone.
“View the vast building, see it rise;
The work how great, the plan how wise!
O wondrous fabric, power unknown
That rests up on the Living Stone.”

There are evident practical issues for those who are blessed of God in the present dispensation. In the first place, the Epistle to the Ephesians insists that every individual in the New Society is part of the divine workmanship, and should show that he has been “created unto good works” (Chap. 2:10). In the second place, the individual is reminded that he is part of a community, “an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21-22), and that he should walk worthy of the calling by which he has been called (Eph. 4:1).

The Second Advent --Part 6

The Second Advent

Part 6

Andrew Borland, M.A.

Mr. Andrew Borland, M.A., is the Editor of The Believer's Magazine, published by John Ritchie Company, Kilmarnock, Scotland. This is the sixth and final article in the series. "The Second Advent." We appreciate this excellent ministry and hope for further contributions by our brother.

It cannot be too frequently repeated that all God's purposes centre on the Son. Before the incarnation, men instructed of God looked forward wistfully for the arrival of "the Seed of the Woman." Abraham rejoiced to see His day, Moses wrote of Him, and to Him all the prophets gave witness. Since the incarnation and the return to Heaven of the risen Saviour, men have been looking forward to the establishment of the kingdom of God when "a king shall reign in righteousness." but the hope is vague, and only partly comprehended, where there is no understanding of the declarations of the Bible.

The Epistle to Ephesians has a most explicit statement about God's intention for the future. God has made known the mystery of His will ... "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven and which are on earth, even in Him" (1:10). A corresponding statement is made in the end of chapter one. God raised Christ from the dead and "set Him at

His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church" (Vs. 20-25).

Those statements should fill the believer's mind with confidence and assurance. However perplexing and depressing passing events may appear, however chaotic men and nations seem to be, God cannot be diverted from His predetermined purpose. He has set His Son "Head over all things," and He is working out His plan not in accordance with human conceptions of progress, but according to His own infinite wisdom and by His own infinite power. The universe is not drifting like a rudderless vessel in an uncharted sea; it has the divine Master in control, and will ultimately reach its destined goal. That will be at "the fulness of times."

That God is working according to a definite time-plan is evident from a variety of expressions in the Bible.

"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son" (Gal. 4:4). History had been preparing for such an event, but it was history the events of which were under God's control. It was "in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). Christ "gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:6). It was in the end of the age that Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26). The advent and death of Christ were pre-arranged in the divine counsels, at "the fulness of the time."

When our Lord was predicting the occupation of Jerusalem by alien forces, He determined the time-

extent in these words: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). Backwards the times of the Gentiles take us to Nebuchadnezzar's occupation of the city, and Jerusalem has been "trodden down" ever since. One foreign power after another has raised its flag over Mount Zion, and only within recent years has there been any semblance of Jewish rule again. Some think the occupancy of the whole city by Israeli forces is a presage of the end of the times of the Gentiles, and an indication that the present dispensation is running out toward its close.

"The fulness of the time" of which the text speaks projects us into the far distant future, how far it is impossible to tell. It relates to the purpose of God when Christ, the Son, who has been appointed Heir of all things comes into His own. "The kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). God is the greater dispenser of events, and He will see to it that His plan for the honour of His Christ is worked out to its predetermined end. That "fulness of the times" takes us beyond the rapture of the Church, beyond the millennium and into the ages to come of which the Bible says little and about which it is unwise to speculate.

It is the divine intention that all things in Heaven and on Earth should be headed up in Christ. This ultimate totality is to be brought under Christ as Head ... Thus will be brought to an end the discordances and confusions of earth ... The broken unity is to be at last restored, and its restoration is to be effected through Christ — Even "the Saviour of the world" is not a great enough designation for Him: He is Saviour of the

Universe. Thus the Heir of all things will enter into His heritage. Jews and Gentiles saved by grace are part of that heritage, "His inheritance of the saints" (Eph. 1:18). The Holy Spirit is the Guarantor of such blessing, for all who believe are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13).

Beyond the "fulness of the time" there lie "the ages to come," for we read "that in the ages to come He (God) might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:7). The extent of that limitless future baffles imagination. During those coming ages there will be displayed the exceeding riches of God's grace in associating redeemed sinners with the glorified Heir of all things.

"Joyful now the new creation

Rests in undisturbed repose;

Blest in Jesus full salvation,

Sorrow now nor thralldom knows."

Even beyond "the ages to come" the inspired Apostle carries the bewildered mind, for he writes, "Unto Him (God) be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:21). The Revised Version renders those last words, "Unto all generations, for ever and ever." Beyond that the mind cannot penetrate.

What a panoramic view the Epistle to Ephesians gives, from before the foundation of the world, through the other ages of past dispensations, into the present reign of grace, on to the fulness of the time, into ages to come which merge with all generations for ever and ever!

"This is our God forever and ever" (Psa. 48:14).