

The Things We Firmly Believe

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STUDY ONE

Approaching the End Things

1. Instructions

Read *'The Things We Firmly Believe'* pp.245-249. See also *'Living Faith Study 31'*, *'The Doctrine of the Last Things'*. It would be good to read this study in one sitting, and then relate it, each study to TTWFB. A helpful book is *'These Cry Wolf!'* by Colin Weightman (NCPI), for it warns us against excesses in doctrine.

2. What Do We Mean by 'Eschatology'?

We mean 'the study of the last things'. What are the last things? They are the things of the 'last days', and the 'last day', i.e. 'the Day of the Lord'. From Acts 2:17-21 we see that 'the last days' commenced with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. We also see that they precede and culminate in 'the Day of the Lord'. Amos 5:18-20, Isa. 2:12f., Ezek. 13:5, Joel 1:15, 2:1, 11, Zeph. 1:7, 14, and Zech. 14:1 have direct reference to this Day. For some it was to be a day of terror and judgement, and for others, a day of joy, liberation and triumph.

The Day of the Lord was to be followed by all the things with which we deal in this third series of studies, namely the events and signs of the last days, the state of those who have died, i.e. Hades (death), Paradise, then Christ's coming, the ingathering of his people, the resurrection of both good and evil, the judgements, the fact and nature of heaven and hell, the glorification of believing man and the inheritance he will obtain, the establishment of God's kingdom, and the new royal priesthood operating for eternity.

3. The Influence of Eschatology

What people believe (or disbelieve) about the future strongly conditions them, not only in the way they see the future, but in the way they approach it, and it effects them. There is a secular eschatology, or rather there are both secular and religious eschatologies. Marxism is dynamically eschatological, but it has no place in its developing system for God or his Kingdom. The sects and the occult all have a view of the future, and this is why they attract so many to their groups. Man wants to know where he is going, and what will happen, especially to him. All human beings look to some future. Even the fatalistic eastern religions see at some point or other a time when karma, i.e. fate leads them to a pinnacle of ultimate being. Sadly enough the cycle begins over again, flowing this temporary triumph, for there is ultimate being.

Israel was the people it was because of the prophetic ministry. For Israel the future was not merely something predicted. It was both a revelation of the nature of God, and of the place He has for His people, as also for the world's history. Prophecy speaks of destiny, whilst it exhorts to true Godliness and obedience at the same time. It is both foretelling and forthtelling. It is predictive and hortatory. It speaks of judgement, and it encourages and builds up God's true people, for it also speaks of 'the grace that is to come at the revelation of Jesus Christ'. This grace breeds thrilling hope.

Wherever there is heresy or inadequate holiness, there will be weak or errant eschatology. Our understanding of the future is strongly linked with our understanding of

God. It is necessary for us to understand Biblical theology. We need to know, and live in God's true escatology.

STUDY TWO

*The Principle of Hope.***1. Instructions**

Read TTWFB pp.248-251, LFS 31, pp. 2-3, LFS 26, 'The Biblical Doctrine of Hope'. This should be read right through.

2. Hope is One of the Great Dynamics, or Constraints, for Living

Without hope we are hopeless. That may sound like a truism or a cliché, but it is nevertheless true. Human beings have to invent goals to reach or life becomes purposeless. True hope is a gift from God. He reveals the future He has for man, whether that be wonderful for His elect, and frightening for the impenitent rebel. Prov. 4 says, 'The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.'

In the N.T. faith, hope and love are inseparable. For this see '*Living in Faith, Hope and Love*' (G. Bingham, NCPI, 1983). Any one these cannot be thought of, or lived in, apart from the others. I John 3:1-3 (cf. II Cor. 7:1) shows hope is a great dynamic for holiness. Close reading of Scripture will show that all true moral and ethical living is motivated by hope. What one hopes one will be is based on the reality of God's promises, His work and His grace one now seeks to be.

3. Hope is Based on the Nature and Promises of God

God promised certain things from the beginning (e.g. Gen. 3:15) because He had planned history from before time (Ephes., 1:3-14). Within history He has fulfilled many of these promises. Christ is the one in whom, and by whom He fulfils His promises (see II Cor. 1:18-20). We can 'trust our souls to a faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19), and be sure He will fulfil all His promises at the time they need to come to pass. We see God's grace in what He has done, and also His (future) grace in what He has promised to do.

When we take hold of what He has done, we have confidence in what He will do. The text of our study shows us the various things promised as, and for which we hope. Heb. 11:1 says, 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' It then shows that by faith the people of God always hoped for the good end and conclusion God had stored up for them. Some of them endured horrific things because of the hope in what was ahead of them. See Heb. 11:32-40. We will all come simultaneously to the fulfilment of hope.

4. All Things Appear to Be Without Hope

This is because we have tried to build according to our own human understanding, aims and goals. All things fail us when they come from us (Jer. 10:23). Prov. 19:21 says, 'Many are

the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established.' Because of the fall we make our own laws, our own structures and goals, but in the light of God's plan they cannot succeed. They are 'hopeless'. It is good for us to place our hope not in ourselves or man, but in God. Jer. 29:11 has it, 'For I know the plans that I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.'

STUDY THREE

Christ and Creation

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp.252-253, and use LFS 20 'Creation and Reconciliation. See also 'The Person and Work of Christ'(NCPI, pp.45-47).

2. God and Creation

It is clear from the Scriptures that creation - and the sustaining of it - is the work of the three Persons of the Trinity. For convenience we may describe the Father as the Initiator of creation, the Son as the Mediator, and the Spirit as the Agent of, creation.

3. Christ in the Work of Creation

A number of passages in the N.T. refer to Christ by the terms 'Son [of God]', 'the Word', 'the Lord' and 'Jesus Christ'. It is obvious that the Son was not man (Jesus Christ) when he created, but refers the man Christ Jesus back to his eternal being as Creator (Creator-Mediator). The following are the passages:-

- (i) John 1:1-4 This passage is not saying that 'in the beginning the Word came to be', but, 'When the beginning began the Word already was, and was present for the work of creation.' It shows that the Word was God, although it does not say God was the Word. The Word must have had deity in order (a) to be the Word or 'communication' of God, and (b) to be able to create. The passage makes it clear (a) that all things created were created by him, so that he must be excepted as one who was being created, (b) that he did not have to receive life from God in order to create (cf. John 6:26-27 where the term 'Son of man is significant), and (c) that the Word was 'the light of men', i.e. they received not only life but direction for living from the Word. Note God's word or commands in reference to creation (Pss. 33:6-9, 148:5-6).
- (ii) Col. 1:15-20. Note that he is referred to as 'the beloved Son' (Col. 1:13). In v.15 the term 'first born' is a reference to the most pre-eminent in [and of]family. That is he receives the inheritance, i.e. is 'the heir' (cf. Heb. 1:2, Rom. 8:17), presumably because he has worked with the Father (John 5:17).Some sects take 'first-born' to mean he was created. This cannot be (as shown by John 1:1-4, Heb. 1:2-3, I Cor 8:6,etc.), because (v.16) all things were created by him (cf. John 1:3), and because 'He is before all things' (v.17). This passage shows that he not only created things terrestrial (earthly) but also things celestial (heavenly). Nothing created was outside his scope.
- (iii) Heb. 2:1-3. Here Christ is referred to as a 'Son' or 'Son' - the Greek does not have an indefinite article 'a'. The statement 'through whom he [God] created the world' can be translated 'the ages' which can mean 'worlds' or 'aeons'. It may refer not only to creation as an immediate whole, but also the 'series' of times (aeons).Note, too, that the same word which creates also upholds (sustains) the creation, cf. Col. 1:16.
- (iv) I Cor 8:6. Col. 1:16 says, (a) in him all things were created', and 'all things were created through him and for him' but here 'through whom all things were created and through whom we exist'. This makes him both Mediator-Creator and Mediator Sustainer.

STUDY FOUR

Christ and the People of God

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp.253-255, referring back to Section Two of TTWFB (pp.141-206). This should be sufficient but 'Christ's People in Today's World' should also be read.

2. Christ All in All

In our previous study we saw that the one we call 'Jesus Christ' was the Son and the eternal Word, prior to his incarnation. We saw that he was 'Cosmocrator' i.e. Lord over all by virtue of his deity and act of creation. We also saw that he 'upholds all things by his powerful word' and 'in him all things hold together', i.e. are sustained and have their purpose. All things are not only in him and through him but also for him, as indeed they are for the Father-Creator (cf. Rom. 11:36, I Cor. 15:24, 28, Phil. 2:11).

3. God's Plan For Creation

We must understand creation to be the primary purpose and matter of God. Even redemption - great as it is - is with a view to the new heavens and the new earth. Hence Christ upholds creation, and works in redemption for that final goal of God. This can be seen from (a) Eph. 1:9-10, 4:10, I Cor. 15:24-28, Col. 1:22, and 3:15), and (b) Eph. 3:9-11, Rev. 10:1-7.

3. God's Plan in Christ For His People

Christ was not only Mediator-Creator, but Mediator Redeemer in order that God's plan for His people might come to a successful conclusion. Because creation was with a view (a) to giving to man the riches of God's glory, (b) to redeem fallen mankind and show God's grace, and (c) to the ultimate restoration of all things, it follows that God's purpose as Creator-Father should relate especially to His true people, the accounts of whom we have seen in our previous studies on the church, the nations, the people of God and the Kingdom of God. Since Christ is God's wisdom in relation to creation (see previous study), redemption (see I Cor. 1:30-31, Col. 1:19, 2:3, 9, etc), and the final renewal of all things (see Section 2, above), then we expect Christ to be central in the plan of God for His people. This is shown in Christ's headship of the Body, the Church (Eph. 1:22-23, 5:23-24, Col. 1:18), and His Lordship over it, and his Lordship over history for it, and the people of God from the beginning to the end.

We may think that Christ only appeared at the incarnation but references such as I Pet. 1:11, Rev. 19:10, Luke 24:25ff., 44ff., show that he was both the mediator of prophecy, and its main subject. I Cor 10:1ff, with Isa. 6:1f., with John 12:37-47, and other references show that in conformity with the principle of John 5:17 (cf. Acts 26:22-23), Christ was always with he people of God, with the patriarchs and Israel. This people of God stretches from 'Abel to Zechariah', from Pentecost the Parousia. The wisdom of God has redeemed the 'multitude that no man can number', the martyrs, and the 144,000. Christ has always been with his people.

STUDY FIVE

Christ and Prophecy

1. Instructions

Read *The Things We Firmly Believe* pp.256-259, LFS 31:5-7. See also 'Christ's People in Today's World' pp. 88-94.

2. All History is Prophetic

We must keep seeing that whilst God sees the end from the beginning' He is also what we call 'the beginning' and the 'then end'. He is the Alpha and the Omega' the first and the last, the beginning and the end', and he is 'who was, and is, and is to come'. All of these statements about Him indicate that He is the 'living God', i.e. 'gives to all men life and breath and everything' (Acts 17:25).

Prophecy is not something which is only predictive, and what prediction there is intended to teach that what will happen (and is happening) is the action of the prophetic God. Prophecy is really God in action. God's action is prophetic, and God does nothing but what He first tells the prophets (Amos 3:6). Hence prophecy is dynamic because it is irreversible, indispensable, and inevitable. It flows from the very (active) nature of God.

3. Christ the True Prophet

Our study notes and wider reading show us that Christ was that prophet which was to come (Deut. 18:15-22). Whilst John was 'a prophet, yes, and greater than a prophet'; Jesus was 'greater than greater than a prophet'. All prophecy is contained in him (cf. I Pet. 1:10-12), and he was and is the subject and object of all that was and is prophesied, i.e. he was the one who moved all prophetic utterance, and he was the one who fulfilled and fulfils it.

4. Our Part in Christ's Prophetic Action

No one can be merely an observer of prophecy. He cannot really research it. He is the object of Christ's prophetic ministry - along with all humanity, and all history. We must come under Christ's prophetic ministry. Deut. 18:19 (cf. Acts 3:23) and this under pain of death if we ignore or reject him and his prophetic utterance and action. We fail his prophetic office and action if we ignore him and history. It is a solemn thing to come under the judgment of God on this score. Acts 2:17ff. shows the church receives the Spirit for understand and participating in Christ's action, all that this will proceed until 'that great and notable day of

the Lord. We are not in the bandstand but out in the arena of action. Hence the community knows that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit?] of prophecy, and acts accordingly

Along with Christ The Prophet, and his prophecy as the only true action, comes opposition from false prophecy (cf. Deut. 18:15ff. and Jer. 23:23ff.) and so the false prophet as seen in Rev. 13:11ff. and 19:20 . False prophecy endeavours to use the dynamic that lies within prophecy, and to exalt the 'lordship' of Satan, and his 'lords' and 'idols'. See I Cor 8:5-6.

All evil has its counterpart to the good of God, and seeks to utilise the power which is always in that which is ontological.

STUDY SIX

Christ, Lord of the Future

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB. pp. 259 to 260. LFS 31, pp. 6-7. Also read Section One of 'Christ the Conquering King!' (NCPI, 1985).

2. Christ's Lordship Has Always Been

The Son is at one with his Father. He and the Father are One, both in God's plan for time and eternity, and the practical outworking of it (John 10:30, 5:17ff.). As the Father is the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8) so is the Son (Rev. 3:15, 22:13). It is clear from the N.T. (see especially Eph. 1:3-14, 3:1-11) that God's plan is worked out through Christ. As Christ was Lord by creation (John 1:1-4, Col., 1:15-16, I Cor. 8:5, Heb. 1:2-3), so he is also Lord by the work of the Cross, in which he defeats Satan, the world powers, the world, the flesh, sin, death, and the law. Thus by virtue of his eternal being, and by virtue of his victory as a man (The Man), he has been, and is Lord of all history.

3. The Kingdom and Its King

The important theme of Scripture is the Kingdom of God. God is 'King over all the earth', and even though there are angelic and human rebels in God's Kingdom yet He is King. See I Chron. 29:10-13, Dan. 4:2-3, 34-37. Psalm 2 is important because it speaks of God saying, 'I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion', and indicates that this one is His Son, and will possess all the nations of the earth. Undoubtedly this one is he who is referred to in Gen. 49:10, i.e. the one to whom all the nations will come in obedience.

In the N.T. this King and Messiah is shown to be Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus himself enjoins prayer for the full coming (consummation) of this Kingdom, and teaches about it in the sermon on the mount, and in parables. He also promises and appoints it to his followers, and then tells the apostles in fuller terms concerning the Kingdom, and the coming of the Spirit, without whom the Kingdom cannot be authentic (Acts 1:1-8).

Again, Jesus is shown as the King of the Kingdom, from the attestation of the Father at his baptism and his transfiguration, to the statements of the Epistles of his Kingship (see Eph. 2:5, Col. 1:13). In the Revelation he is also shown as King. 'God and the Lamb' equal 'the kingdom of God and Christ' (Eph.5:5, Rev. 11:14)

4. Christ in His Present Kingship

The message Christ preached was that of the 'Gospel of the Kingdom' but he preached it by word and action, and words which produced action (cf. Matt. 12:28, Luke 9:1ff., 10:1ff.). This was the message the early church preached, but 'the gospel of the Kingdom' was now the 'salvation of the King'. This message was to bring about 'the obedience of the nations'. His action is going on now as seen (a) in delegating authority to his apostles and [so] the church (Mat. 28:19-20), (b) the action of Christ as King in I Cor 15:24-26 (cf. Phil. 2:9-11), and (c) the action of Christ as the Lord of the present and the future as shown in the book of the Revelation (cf. Daniel, Matt. 24, etc.). Thus we see Christ as 'Lord of the Future'. All history is in his hands.

STUDY SEVEN

Christ's View of the Future: The Synoptic Gospels

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp.261 to 264, and LFS. 31, pp.7-8.

2.Christ's Sense of History

Of all men Christ had the true sense of history. He said 'Before Abraham was I am. In John 17 he keeps referring to his presence with the Father, before time. In Luke 24:25f., and 44f. he sees himself as the prime object of all prophecy, as also of the law and the Psalms. He sees that he embodies the law, prophecy and true obedience to the Father. He is conscious of the Father's plan. This plan is creation-wide and time-wide. It embodies all that has been, and all that will be. We have seen that he is Lord of History, not only of his time and of the future, but also of the past - by his participation in the act of creation. All of this tells us that if we wish to have the correct view of the future then we must come to him, his teaching, his actions, and the future which he opens to his listeners.

3. Our Own Sense of History

We have observed that some students of Scripture, and some Christians who rarely read the Scriptures in a full way have little sense of true eschatology, so they take to various systems, and then fit their preconceived eschatological views into the Scriptures. It is best to allow the Scriptures to grow on us, and to develop a general sense of the 'things to come' which are described. Our notes which go with this present study will help us to develop a panoramic view of the future. Most of all we must see ourselves as being in 'the last days' and moving towards 'the Day of the Lord', but this with a mind which knows it is participating in the events which are happening. We must be 'people of the Eschaton'. We must live on the one hand in a sense of urgency - though not panic - and on the other in a full assurance of God's sovereignty in His world, and that He does nothing except in 'the fulness of time'. In this way we will interpret the times in which we are, and the world in which we live. We will see Christ's people as the eschatological community . [For this see 'Christ's people in Today's World' pp.124 to 131].

4. The Present Future and Suffering

By 'the present future' we mean that we are in the present moving into the future that Christ and the prophets predicted. Things eschatological are not bizarre. The future demands suffering now ! Jesus called it 'being persecuted for the Kingdom of heaven's sake' (Matt. 5:10-11), and Paul used similar terms (Acts 14:22, II Thess. 1:5). Ultimate glorification is linked with suffering (Rom. 8:17-25, II Cor. 4:16), so that being in the midst of the

eschatological ferment, action, and toil is working with Christ and is ultimately most fruitful. God's people are matured by the present and the future.

STUDY EIGHT

Christ's View of the Future: John's Gospel.

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 264-265, LFS 31.

2. Christ and His Kingdom

As is suggested in the notes, the Kingdom of God does not seem to be a great theme in the Gospel of John. However John's announcement of Jesus as the one who will (a) take away the sins of the world, and (b) baptise with the Spirit, i.e. pour it out on all, puts his ministry into that of the coming Kingdom. We saw in Acts 1:3-8 that the Kingdom and the outpoured Spirit cannot be considered apart. That is why Jesus told Nicodemous (3:1-14) that new birth - i.e. entrance into the Kingdom - could not happen apart from the Spirit. This new birth by the Spirit was also linked with the Cross, and so the gift of eternal life. All of this pertained to the Kingdom. His insistence that his signs were not mere miracles but related to the Kingdom shows that the Kingdom was in his mind. It was certainly so as he talked to Pilate in 18:33-38. The Jews suggested he saw himself as King, and Jesus did not deny this, but showed his Kingdom was of another order than that, say, of political Rome. That is why Pilate placed the inscription on the Cross, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'.

There can be no question but that the Kingdom was a coming event, and as such was linked with the Spirit. John 7:37-39 shows that the Holy Spirit was to issue from the new believers as a river or torrent of life-giving water. In chapters 14-16 Jesus speaks of praying to the Father for the sending from heaven of the Spirit. He says the father will send the Spirit, and also that he will send the Spirit. The inference can then be drawn that the Spirit and the Kingdom will be related in that event - yet to happen.

3. The Spirit and Things to Come

When the Spirit comes he will do two things, (a) lead the disciples into all the truth, and (b) 'he will declare to you the things to come'. Whilst these 'things to come' may have some reference to what will happen in regard to the formation of the church, its life and action, they must refer primarily to the full coming of the Kingdom. Even glorifying Christ and showing the things of both the Son and the Father must have to do with the events which will lead to the final day of the Lord, although this is not said explicitly. Christ had talked of his going to the Father, remaining with him, but eventually returning to take his followers to be with him in his Father's mansions or household (14:1-7).

4. The Spirit and Eternal Life

We have seen that eternal life and the Kingdom are linked ((3:1-14). Doubtless they are linked in John 4:13-14 and 7:37-39 (cf. 20:30-31). Symbolically they receive the Spirit in 20:19-23, for without him they cannot declare forgiveness (and retention) of sins, i.e. entrance into the Kingdom linked with new birth. Thus there is no future of eternal life and no place in

the Kingdom apart from the Spirit, but then that Spirit who is both the Spirit of Christ, of new life, and of the Kingdom - these 'things to come'.

STUDY NINE

The End Things - I: Preceding Events

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 266-270, and LFS 31.

2. Christ Preparing His People

In our last two studies we saw Christ's view of the future in both the synoptic Gospels, and the Gospel of John. By what he taught he was preparing his people for the 'end things'. However this was not a form of almanac, but a presentation of God's plan for all history. Sadly enough this sense of God's action in history ('Salvation History') is little known or thought about by God's people. In our portion of TTWFB this overall picture is described. Whilst it is essential to know that plan, it is equally necessary to realise where we are in history, and what God expects of us in the time in which we live. God's history is always dynamic, always moving forwards, always being opposed by the historic forces of Satan who seek to subvert God's plan (Eph. 1:3-14, 3:7-11, Rev. 10:1-7). We need to locate ourselves as the people 'upon whom the end of the ages has come' (I Cor. 10:11). We see in the notes that Christ is the creator of the ages or aeons (Heb. 1:2), i.e. the succeeding eras of history set forth and experienced in the creation formed through him. Only when we realise we are in the last days of the last era, and so moving towards the Day of the Lord will we know how to act in proclaiming the Gospel, 'waiting for and hastening the day of the Lord' (II Pet. 3:12). Eschatological things as foretold and explained to us are not merely to interest us and satisfy our curiosity, but to keep us alert in obedient action and holy anticipation, knowing the mind of God for our time.

3. Understanding of the Truth Given to us By God

John in his three Epistles speaks continually of truth. He also speaks of the things of the last days, i.e. 'it is the last hour and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour' (I John 2:18, cf 4:1-6). In the same breath (2:20-27, cf 5:7) John says that we have been given an understanding of the truth by the Holy Spirit. We saw in Study 8 that in John 16:12-15 the Spirit (cf.Pentecost) teaches us (a) the truth of the Son and the Father, i.e. the Gospel, and (b) the things which were and are to come. In his epistle John calls this 'an anointing by the holy one (2:20) and says that 'this anointing teaches you about everything' (2:27 cf. II John 2). It is essential then that we live consciously, deliberately and dependently by this truth. We must be alert to false teachers, confusing and false doctrines, strange practices, and deceitful demons. Whilst these things confirm the closeness of his coming, they are also dangerous to the church.

STUDY TEN

The End Things - II: The Coming of Christ

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 270-271 and LFS 31.

2. The Nature of His Coming

Before looking at this we need to read chapter 6 of 'The Things We Firmly Believe', where 'millennial' views are discussed. Often persons holding millennial views see and interpret the Scriptures in the light of their millennial views. Some see two returns of Christ, one being a return which is visible only to believers, in which they are caught up with Christ into the air, and without dying they are transformed or glorified. This has been called 'the rapture' or 'the secret rapture'. They then see a series of events happening before Christ's final return and appearing, after which the judgements take place, and the saints inhabit the new heavens and the new earth.

Others see only one return or appearing (see the material for this present study on pp.27-271 for the various terms connected with Christ's return). Without denying or affirming anyone of these views let us note some of things concerning his final appearing:-

(i) Rev. 1:7 says, 'Behold he is coming with the clouds and every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.' This is linked with Zech. 12:10. The idea of 'coming with [or, 'in'] the clouds can be seen in Dan. 7:13ff., where the Son of Man comes and is given rule over all the earth. This, again, is seen in Matt. 26:64 when Jesus tells the high priest he will come in accordance with Dan. 7:13ff.. In Matt. 16:27 -28 (cf. Matt. 19:28) Jesus had applied the Dan. 7:13ff. prophecy to himself, and in Matt. 24:29-31 the Daniel and Zechariah prophecies are both applied to the Son of Man (Christ).

(ii) I Cor. 15:51-54 Christ's coming is not announced as such, but when the trumpet is sounded the resurrection will take place and all believers will be changed 'in the twinkling of an eye'. In Matt 24: 31 there will be 'a loud trumpet call' and angels will gather in the elect. In I Thess 4:15-17 the Lord will descend with 'the archangel's call, and the sound of the trumpet of God'. In this case the believers will be caught up 'in the clouds' to be with Christ. In Phil. 3:20-21 Paul says we wait for our Saviour to appear from heaven, who will then change (resurrect, glorify) our bodies to like his 'body of glory'.

Doubtless all these prophecies can be shaped up to meet our various millennial ideas but the glorious fact of his appearing and our seeing him is what really matters.

STUDY ELEVEN

The Millennial Question

1. Instructions

Read TTWB pp. 272-277.

2. Christ and His Reigning

Whatever our millennial views we must always hold fast to the fact that Christ is now reigning. Eph. 1:22 (cf. Col. 2:10) shows that Christ has been made 'head over all things for the church'. As the Word of God (John 1:1-5), and as the Son (Heb. 1:2, Col 1:15-17) he has always been Lord and Head by reason of his being Mediator Creator (i.e. under the Father) of all Creation, as also Sustainer of it. By this we must mean there never has been a time when this One (named Jesus at his incarnation, and called 'Messiah, the Lord', at his resurrection and ascension) has not reigned. Any millennial view which does not take this into consideration, cannot be complete. All events are under his control

3. What Do We Know of the Millennial Reign?

The one clear reference is Rev. 20:1-6, and there is no other. It is inadvisable to build a significant system on any one part of Scripture. All millennial views must recognise the following facts, namely that,

- (i) 'The dragon, that ancient serpent who is the Devil and Satan' is bound in the bottomless pit (cf. Rev. 9:1-12). That is, Satan is under God's authority, and bound as He wishes. For 'bound' see II Pet.2:4, [I Pet. 3:19-20], and Jude 5-6.
- (ii) In this millenium there are thrones and those are seated upon them have authority to judge. These may be the martyrs if the word 'also' (Gk. kai) really means 'and', and not just 'also', and is related to the martyrs.
- (iii) The martyrs — alone of all true believers who had died — reign with Christ in the millenium. See Rev. 6:9-11, 18:24-19:2, cf. 14:12-13, for they have been resurrected in 'the first resurrection', and a later resurrection will happen. These martyrs are 'priests of God and Christ'.
- (iv) The very end things follow the millenium, restraint having been taken off Satan, God and Magog gathering against 'the camp of the saints' (the people of God), being destroyed by 'fire from heaven, after which the devil is thrown into the lake of the fire, and the final judgement proceeds.

4. Some Observations Concerning the Millennial Reign

- (i) Whilst Satan is bound the beast and the false prophet are not. Evil, in some sense can still be working, so speak, by proxy.
- (ii) The purpose of the binding of Satan is that 'he should deceive the nations no more', i.e. that the truth can be revealed without Satan's direct intervention or deception.

STUDY TWELVE

The Resurrection

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 280-283.

2. The Present Power of Christ's Resurrection

In TTWFB we discuss the resurrection from its eschatological point of view, 'in Adam all die: in Christ shall all be made alive'. What however is the present experience, benefits and power of Christ's resurrection for his people. The following should help us see these:-

- (i) Rom.6:1-10 (cf. Col 3:1-5) shows that Christ's resurrection is a power against sin because (a) the believer has been incorporated into his crucifixion (cf. Gal.2:20), and so guilt has been taken away because Christ rose, i.e. he was more powerful than sin, guilt, and its outcome, death, and (b) being freed from guilt the power of sin is broken in the believer (Rom. 6:10-14). Thus the resurrection means power over sin.
- (ii) All human beings are afraid of death, because of the ultimate judgement (cf. Heb. 2:14-15, I John 4:16-18). The fact that 'we may have confidence for the day of judgement' means we need not fear death. Fear of death influences much of our life, indeed all of it.
- (iii) I Cor 15:51-58 teaches us (a) we will receive a new body with our glorification, (b) the sting of death (sin) has been removed, so that we are not afraid of dying, since we will live, and (c) we can now live and labour in the Lord without feeling it is all useless.
- (iv) In John 11:25-26 Jesus said the believer will never die. He has already received eternal life (John 5:24), and so what others see as his death he will not see. He will simply pass on to a richer experience the life already given to him. Again, fear of death is thus totally abolished.
- (v) Phil. 3:10 speaks of the 'the power of his resurrection'. This power comes from and includes all we have said above. It also indicates that the risen Christ lives within believers (cf. Gal. 2:20), and that the present life of Christ operating in the world is a continuous saving power (cf. Rom. 5:10).
- (vi) Christ has risen and as Head of his church imparts life and direction to it. The believer grows up into the head (Eph. 4:15f.).
- (vii) The resurrection creates the goal for hope that keeps the believer living and moving towards his destiny (cf. II Cor 3:18, Heb. 12:1-2, Col. 3:1-2)). I Cor. 15:55-58 shows that the believer's stability and accomplishments arise from the fact of resurrection. Without the resurrection, the cross (atonement) is of no avail (I Cor. 15:12-19).

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STUDY THIRTEEN

Life Beyond Death - I

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 284- 288.

2. The Approach to Death and Beyond

Many persons are bewildered by the matter of death. There are two reasons for this, (i) since man was not created for death as we know it, then death cannot register in his mind. Another way of saying this is that it is provisional, and not ontological, i.e. had there been no fall of man through original sin, then there would have been no death, as such. The presence of the tree of life in Eden suggests man would have to eat of it to 'live for ever', but the matter is speculative. Certainly death would not have had the connotation it has because of sin, and (ii) man's sin has given death a dreadful visage. Death has 'the sting' which is sin, i.e. the dread of the law, of judgement, of facing God in His holiness and wrath. In addition man lives in shame and guilt for having forfeited true life. This is why he does not welcome death. The thought of the corruption and dissolution of his body is also a thing of shame for him.

2. The Need to Know What Happens After This Life.

Curiosity is part of human living. Often human beings do not want to do anything even if their curiosity is satisfied, hence curiosity may be no asset. It is practical to know what happens after death, so that we can prepare for it. If death presents no hope, but only the prospect of the 'second' death (Rev. 20:6,14) then people close off their minds to death. Even so all humans live in the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15, I John 5:19) and shape their lives in a useless attempt to escape premature death, trying by all means to secure themselves against it.

The person who faces death knowing, in fact, that in Christ it will not come to him (John 11:15, 5:24, cf. Rom. 8:1, I Cor. 15:55-56) is one who lives in Christian hope (Rom. 5:1-5, 8:17-25), so that death does not terrify him. Hope is an active power to live this life (Rom.5:5, I John 3:3).

3. Acceptance of the Fact of Death.

Rom. 8:10-11 shows two things, (i) that whoever lives in this age — whether a believer or not — has his body 'doomed to death because of sin', and (ii) that the believer now has the Spirit dwelling in him, and that same Spirit will raise his body from the dead. One, then, has no need for fear of death but has a rich assurance of the resurrection. This too is a great incentive for present living as shown in I Cor. 15:58.

STUDY FOURTEEN

Life Beyond Death—II

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 284-288.

2. The Problems of ‘Time’ and ‘Eternity’

Many of our problems in regard to the ‘future’ state of being as that we live in time. The word for ‘eternal’ in the N.T. is *aionios* sometimes expressed as ‘indeterminate as to duration; eternal; everlasting’, or ‘the ages upon the ages’. It is clear that we have difficulty in envisaging ‘non-time’. The footnote on pp. 286-287 shows that it is difficult for us to envisage something in eternity apart from a time concept. There is no reason that we should leave ‘time-reasoning’ for so-called ‘eternity-reasoning’. The Scriptures are all written for a time sequence, but the term ‘eternity’ is also there (Isa. 57:15, cf. 63:16) in the O.T. as it is ‘eternal’ many times in the N.T. God is neither locked into, or locked out of time. His word accommodates to our creatureliness, the dimensions of time and space in which we live. What we need to do is to see eternal life as a quality of life which is not only imperishable, but total. John 5:24 speaks of us having passed from death into life (cf. II Cor. 5:15). II Cor 4:16 to 5:9 shows that we live by faith in this life but living will be by sight in the life we call ‘future’. Rom. 8:28-30 shows us that in God’s mind all things are accomplished. From our point of view they are being established in, and through, a process of time.

3. The Oneness of Heaven and Earth

One problem that confronts us is again linked with times and states. For example Heb. 11:39-40 (cf. I Thess 4:15-17, 51-55) seems to indicate that those saints from the past will be one with those who are now and those who will become saints in the future, i.e. that history will climax at [the] one point, for all. Again, when we talk of the church, we look back to those who were in the church of Israel (cf. Acts 7:38), to those of the apostolic age, those from that time until now, as also those who will be — in time — in the church. We see the church in heaven as one with the church on earth. The church of the end-age is spoken of in Isaiah 2:1f., Mic. 4:1f., I Pet. 2:4-10, Eph. 2:18f., and Isaiah 56:6ff. There are not two churches, i.e. one in heaven and one on earth. The best we can say is that what is heavenly and what is earthly are the two sides of the one coin. These problems of time and space in relation to eternity and eternal life need not be solved at this point in our experience. It is best simply to use the language of Scripture for our thought patterns, and our life of faith, hope, and love.

STUDY FIFTEEN

The Judgement of the World

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 289-291. See also '*The Judgements of God*' by Deane Meatheringham (NCPI 1983).

2. Why Should the World Be Judged?

By 'the world' we may mean one of two things, (i) 'the world of human beings' (cf. John 3:16), or (ii) 'the world system'. The world of human beings would mean mankind, i.e. that human race which has as its father, Adam (cf. Rom 5:12ff.), and Eve as its mother ('the mother of all living'). The world of human beings is under death because of its rebellion against God (Gen., 2:17, 3:1-6, Ephes 2:1-3), but also within the race are those called 'the people of faith' (Heb. ch.11). The world is divided into 'the children of God', and 'the children of the devil' (I John 3:10f.).

The 'world system' is that system of evil as headed up by Satan who is called 'the prince of this world' by Jesus (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). Satan is also called 'the god of this world' (II Cor 4:4, cf. Eph. 2:3) and has within his self-devised system angelic powers (see Rev. 12:10) which are called 'principalities and powers' and which work against God and His faithful creatures both heavenly and earthly (see Eph. 2:12, Rom 8:38-39, Col. 2:14-15). Fallen man is also in Satan's world system as we see in I John 5:19, Ephes 1:3. In John's Gospel some of the leaders of the Jews are seen as 'the world'. See John 7:1-8, 15:18-15, 16:7-11. This system has always opposed God, and has wrought much evil. For this reason it must be judged. The primary judgement it met was in the Cross as is seen in Heb. 2:14-15, Col. 2:14-15, John 12:31, 16:11. The book of the Revelation, especially from chs. 11-20 shows the workings of the world system under the dragon, the first beast, the second beast (the false prophet), the image, and Babylon. Babylon especially epitomizes the world system. The secondary (and final) judgement of the world system is shown in Rev. chs. 18-20. In this Satan, the beast, the false prophet and Babylon, are judged and their sentence executed.

3. Why Should Mankind Be Judged?

God is holy, good and righteous, as well as love. Also He is the truth. He must, therefore, judge all that is evil and execute true judgements. Gen. 18:25 with Hab. 1:13 show why God must judge. He is 'angry with the sinner every day' (Ps. 7:11, cf. Ezek. 7:8-9, Rom. 1:18). He does not forgive the impenitent sinner (Ex. 34:7). Whilst He appears to have passed over sins (Rom. 3:25, Acts 17:30-31, Eccles. 8:11-13), yet this is not the case. Every creature that is evil must be judged.

STUDY 16

The Judgement of the Believer

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 289-291. Also *'The Judgements of God'* by Deane Meatheringham (NCPI, 1983).

2. The Doctrine of Pure Grace

Bonhoeffer's book *'The Cost of Discipleship'* is often read eagerly. His term 'cheap grace' seemed to take an immediate grip of people. He was speaking against the wrong idea of grace being a 'cover-up' for all sin. Theologically this is known as antinomianism, i.e. the believer is no longer under law, and may do as he wishes, since there is no judgement for a believer (cf. John 5:24, Rom. 8:1). Some, in reacting to 'cheap grace' developed 'costly grace' concept, insisting on law-keeping and tended to finish up in 'nomism' or legalism. There is no 'cheap grace' or 'costly grace'. There is only pure grace, which though costly to God is free to man. Grace does cover all the sins which a man commits. When he comes to repentance and faith (which are not 'works' but gifts of God) his whole life is that of grace. He is warned against 'receiving the grace of God in vain' ('in an empty way'), II Cor 6:1-2 (cf. Gal. 3:1-5), and is shown that grace teaches ('trains', 'disciplines', 'instructs') so that we come to true good works (Tit. 2:11-14, cf. Eph. 2:8-10). True works can only issue out of pure grace, cf. I Cor 15:10.

3. The Constraint and Obligation to Good Works

The believer has no power to do good works of himself. At the same time he must do good works. For doing these he will receive rewards (II John 8, Heb. 10:35, 11:6, 26, I Cor 3:8) although the rewards must never be thought of as 'payment', seeing they issue from grace (Eph. 3:1-11). Good works honour the Father (Matt. 5:16, I Pet. 2:12, Phil. 1:11, 2:15). Indeed the whole purpose of our being humans, and being in this world is to be to the glory of God (Eph. 1:3-14, I Cor 10:31).

4. 'Receiving Back the Things Done in the Body'

This is the literal translation of II Cor. 5:10(b). We will have losses or rewards according to what we have done of good or evil, done or failed to do. Gal 6:7-8 tells the principle. I Cor 3:10-15 (cf. 13:1-3) shows that all our works will be tested, and only those properly done (in love) will stand that test. The 7 statements in Rev. chs. 2 and 3, 'I know your works' shows that these works are either true or false. What we will be at the judgement will show what we have done.

STUDY SEVENTEEN

The Nature of Hell

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp.292-294.

1. Symbols and Realities

There is a natural dread of hell in all human beings. Some have said that Hell is God's 'rubbish dump'. This may not be a nice statement, but yet be true. We find it difficult to think that God would dump anything of what He has created. The word 'Hell' gets its origins for Gehenna, the valley of Hinnom which was the rubbish dump of Jerusalem(cf. Isa. 66:24). This symbol of Hell simply relates to 'where the worm dies and the fire is not quenched'. We must not make symbols the realities, anymore than we should explain away the reality for which the symbol stands as a dynamic sign. Anyone can understand 'the worms of conscience' and 'the inner fires of torment', especially the torment of conscience. We all understand the loneliess of separation, and the term 'outer darkness' is apt. So too is 'wailing and gnashing of teeth'. These are symbols of deep emotional, moral, mental and spiritual anguish. There is nothing crude about Hell. There is, however, something all too obvious, logical, and realistic. Many would say that the very guilt of sin, experienced here on earth, is indicative of the Hell to come for the finally impenitent. It is, of course, for none others.

2. Christ's Sayings on Hell

Matt.5:22 says the one who says 'You fool!' will be liable to 'the hell of fire'. This is for the expression of one's anger to one's brother. The fearful nature of hell is such that it would be better to lose an eye or cut off a hand rather than enter into it (Matt. 5:22,29). Matt. 7:23 states that those who think they are doing God's works but are not, will be cast out of his presence as evildoers. Apostasy (Matt. 8:12 will see the so-called children of Abraham cast into outer darkness. Those who prove to be tares will be cast into 'the furnace of fire', and there will be a similar fate for the bad fish (Matt. 13:42,50). In Mark 9:43,45 the terms 'unquenchable fire', and 'where the worm dies not' are used. These are taken from Isa. 66:24. The proselytizing Pharisees, make their converts twice the children of Hell, i.e. liable to greater judgement. See also Matt. 22:13, 25:30, Mark 12:40, Luke 12: 47-48.

STUDY EIGHTEEN

The Nature of Heaven

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 294-296.

2. Going Home

In John 14:1-6 Jesus speaks of going home. John 1:11 speaks of him coming into this world 'to his own home', i.e. Israel (cf. John 19:27) but not being received by his own. Now he thinks in terms of being again with his Father (cf. John 17:5, 24) praying that 'they may be where I am'. In Matt 25:34 pictures the King (Christ) welcoming his brethren into the Kingdom.

This is the natural way for the believer to think. It should be in all his thoughts, and the background to his thinking.

3. Heaven Not A Static Place or State

A common view of heaven is that it is a respite from the toil and suffering of this world, and a place of unending bliss. This may be one aspect of it, but in fact it is a dynamic situation. It is where God dwells (Isa 57:15), but not as within dimensions (I Kings 8:27). On earth God dwelt in Israel's tabernacle, but heaven is His essential dwelling (Heb. 8:2, 9:8,12, cf. Ps. 61:4-5). It is the true temple. Heaven is the place where God is enthroned, i.e. reigns over all creation (Jer. 14:21, Matt. 5:34, cf. Rev. 4:1ff.). Heaven is associated with glory: Jesus was taken up in glory (I Tim.3:16). The references to clouds of glory' are many and pertain to going, or coming from, heaven. The Book of the Revelation is especially free in its allusions to what happens in and from heaven. From the throne come the three sets of judgements. There 'God and the Lamb' reign and execute their plans of judgement and grace.

4. 'The Colony of Heaven'

In Phil 3:20 Paul speaks of us being a colony (outpost) of heaven. We belong where God is. It is our home. There we will be glorified (Note:- 'the hope of glory' is really the hope of heaven: cf. Rom. 5:2). It is because this body will be transformed into a body of glory that heaven is so beautiful to us, and beckons us on. To be with Christ, with the Father, the beautiful celestial creatures and the glorified saints is a mighty spur to present living. Without it we would be 'hopeless'. With it we can live dynamically.

STUDY NINETEEN

The New Worship and Service

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp.297-302 — ‘Conclusion on the End Things’. This study is not actually found — as such — in TTWFB but is essential to be understood, for it covers both the present new worship as also the ultimate worship and service.

2. The Present New Worship and Service

The Epistle to the Hebrews (chs. 7-10) makes it clear that with the Old Covenant was one kind of worship. It might be called ‘the Old Worship’ (cf. Rom. 9:4-5), by contrast to ‘the New Worship’, which is the worship related to the New Covenant. The first was in an earthly sanctuary, i.e. the Tabernacle of Moses later exchanged for the Temple of Solomon (etc.). The second was in the New Temple, i.e. the Church, the new true sanctuary of God (cf. I Cor. 3:16-17, Eph. 2:19-22, I Pet. 2:4-10, I Tim. 3:15, Heb. 3:1-6, 13:15-16. Jesus foretold the destruction of Herod’s Temple (cf. Matt.14:1-2). He told the woman at the well that a new worship was now beginning to happen (John 4: 19-26). He himself had pointed to the Jerusalem Temple as ‘the house of prayer’ which in Isa. 56:6ff. is called ‘the house of prayer for all nations’, thus making it the new temple for universal worship (cf. Isa. 2:1-4), though this temple would by no means be universalistic. The new worship began on the day of Pentecost, i.e. ‘in spirit and in truth’ ([Spirit] cf. John 16:12-15, I John 5:7). This can be seen from Phil. 3:3, Heb. 9:14, 10:19-25, 12:18-29, I Pet. 2:4-10 (cf. Rom. 1:9, 15:16. The word for ‘worship’ in significant references such as Rom. 12:1, Heb. 9:14 and Rev. 7:15 means also ‘service’. Worship and service are the one thing, particularly when addressed to God. The form or modes of this new worship is seen in passages such as Acts 13:1-3, Eph. 5:18-20, Col. 3:16-17, I Cor 14:2-36. Such worship was born of grace and love (cf. Rom. 12:1, Heb. 9:14, Rev. 7:14-15).

3. The Ultimate New Worship

The book of the Revelation shows the ultimate worship by the 4 living creatures, the 24 elders, and all celestial beings, with the redeemed. Sometimes the latter are on earth as they worship; sometimes in heaven. True pure worship can be seen throughout the Revelation with its emphasis on God’s holiness, His eternity, His creating of all things, His redemption of man through the Lamb, and the execution of His judgements, which vindicate the holiness and righteousness of God. Ultimately mankind worships as the new priest-nation as in Rev. 1:5-6, 5:10, 20:4, and 22:5. This new true worship by man is for the wonder of God’s grace and love.

STUDY TWENTY

The Triumph of God

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 297-302.

2. The God Who Acts

In the Scriptures God is called 'the living God'. This is not only because He is 'the Fountain of Living Waters' (Jer. 2:13, 17:13, Ps. 36:9, Rev. 7:17, cf. Rev. 22:17, John 4:14), i.e. He gives life to man (Gen. 2:7, Acts 17:25), but because He is the God Who acts, i.e. not only does He create but He causes all the events of history to happen (see Josh. 3:10, I Sam 17:26, Dan. 6:20, Matt. 16:16, 26:63, Heb. 9:14, 10:31). So then all history is the work of 'a faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19). What He has planned for creation (Eph. 3:9, Rev. 10:5-7) He has been fulfilling and will fulfil. We note that Israel always knew Him to be the God Who acts because He had acted for their welfare, and the fulfilment of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Joshua. Hence in the Psalms and other writings the people of Israel always find the basis of their faith in the God of promise and action. They never cease singing of the events which have happened. They live in the hope of the promises all becoming events in history.

His promises relate not only to Israel but to all the nations, and to all history. Nothing is outside its scope and the intention of God, however contrary it may appear to be to goodness and sanity. Evil appears to win the day so often, and it seems that darkness overcomes the light (cf. John 1:5, II Cor. 4:6), but this is not the case. Ultimately God as King is triumphant (see Zech. 14:9, I Cor. 15:24-28, Rev. 11:15-18, 12:10, 19:1-10). All evil is destroyed from His creation, which, itself, is purified (II Pet. 3:11-13, Rev. 21:1-5, Rev. chs. 18-20). God has never failed to act at every point of history, although it may have seemed to be that way (cf. Rom 3:25, Acts 17:30).

3. God's Ultimate Triumph

It would seem that the new heavens and the new earth are God's total triumph, and this is true. However, what is wonderful and amazing is His radical work of the re-creation of man. We have seen in our studies that man is the highest creation of God (Gen. 1:26f., Ps. 8:3ff., Eccles 3:11, 7:29, I Cor. 6:3), but yet so evil had he become that his rehabilitation or regeneration to total perfection and glory would seem to be an impossible task. Not so: God has triumphed in the renewal of His image in man. The predictions of Eph. 1:3-14 (cf. Isa. 43:6-7) have all come to pass. He is 'faithful Creator'. We — the redeemed — are secure in His holy triumph!

STUDY NINETEEN.

God's People From the Beginning.

1. Instructions.

Read TTWFB pp.2-16 to 220. See CPITW pp. 47-52. Also LFS 34 'The People of God: the True Community.

2. There Has Always Been the People of God.

There have always been men and women of faith. Hebrews 11 gives 'the roll-call of the saints', i.e. the people of faith. They are prior to Israel, included in Israel, and are the 'true Israel - both old and new. The book of Revelation shows these people as being 'out of every tribe and nation and people and tongue' and these are spiritually 'children of Abraham', and in the ultimate bring the glory of the nations into the Holy City.

Being people of faith they must primarily have come under grace, since, as we have seen many times, faith springs from grace. When we hear the word, and see the revelation of truth by the Spirit, then we know God is the God of grace. His grace does come to us as persons, but He is interested in 'the nations'. This is a constant theme of the Psalms and a whole principle of 'the peoples' is found throughout Scripture. That God's grace is not confined to Israel, or those in the church is a marvellous thing.

3. The Elect People of God.

The Scriptures do not set out to satisfy our curiosity, but to inform us of the truth. No one can settle the matter of 'election'. That is God's business. We often resent election for it seems that God alone has the right to determine the end, when in fact this is how it would have to be. We would like to determine our own end, if not the end, of others! That would be playing God, but we must let God be God!

The truth is that He concerns Himself with nations as well as persons. Acts 17:26 says, 'He has made from one (blood, man, i.e. Adam) every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him.' Everything, then, been determined. All the nations are in His hands.

STUDY TWENTY

The Gospel For the Nations.

1. Instructions.

Read TTWFB pp.221 to224. Also see (again) CPITW pp. 47-52.

2. Israel - 'After the Flesh' and 'After the Spirit'.

I Cor 10:18 should be translated literally 'Consider Israel after the flesh'. This means 'historical Israel' (cf. Rom. 1:3, 4:1) i.e. Israel as it practiced its given rituals, especially those linked with the eating of flesh (Lev. 10:12-15, I Sam 9:10-24). Yet it also implies there is an Israel 'after the Spirit'. This can be seen in Gal 6:16 'the Israel of God' and Phil 3:3, 'We are the true circumcision who worship God in the Spirit', i.e not 'a fleshly circumcision'. We have seen that the new people of God was born at Pentecost, but they were all Jews, and so true Israel had continuity as well as discontinuity (cf. Acts 2: 38-40). If the Gospel formed by Christ had to be confined to Israel, then it would mean 'the Israel of God' which Paul mentions in Gal. 6:16, could only be composed of Jews, in which case the Gospel would not be for the nations. The outpourings of the Spirit in Acts 8 and 10 showed that the Kingdom was open to all nations, and all baptised believers belong now to the church of God. Ephes. 3:1-11 is important because it insists that God's plan was always that the Gentiles who came to be part of the new people (cf. Ephes 2:11-22) were no less true Israel. In Gal. 3 Paul establishes the principle that all men and women of faith are true 'sons of Abraham', whom he equates with being 'sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus'. This principle can be seen in Rom. 2:25-3:2. Peter sees Exodus 19:5-6 being fulfilled in 'the new Israel' (my term) as he sets it out in I Pet. 1:1, and 2:4-10.

3. The Future of the People of Israel.

Our study notes take into consideration Paul's powerful chapters 9-11 in Romans. These are rarely studied, but they show that the elect of God will include that who are 'Israel after the Spirit' whether of the bloodline of Israel or not. It is clear in the O.T that God will never cast off His people Israel, but it is also clear that where there is apostasy those committing it will be lost. All must be justified by faith (Rom. 3:24ff.cf. Rom 10:1-3).

STUDY TWENTY ONE

The Ultimate People of God

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 225-227, and CPITW pp. to 131.

2. Knowing Our Identity in This Point of Time

We have seen the nature of the church, and find our identity in it as it is the family, the flock, the bride of Christ, the temple, the body: and so on. We must also see it as the world-wide and time-wide people who are moving towards the destiny fixed for them by God (Ephes 1:3-14, Isaiah 43:6-7). We must see ourselves as 'the true Israel' i.e. having continuity with the Israel of the O.T., but the true Israel not being limited to 'Israel after the flesh'. We must see ourselves in the light of Ephes. 2:18-3:11. Gal. ch. 3 shows that all people of faith are the children of Abraham, and we have one long line of continuity and identity with that people. We then need to read Heb. 11:39-40 to see that all people of God will come to the same point at the climax of history.

3. The People of God Have Always Been The People of the End Time

Right from Abel onwards the people of faith have looked to the end. See Heb. 11:10, 26 and see 11:5 with Jude 14-15. For this reason the people of God, whilst enjoying God's goodness to them, are 'strangers and sojourners in time and this world. They have been people gripped by love, having faith in God and all His promises, so that they are continually the people of hope. Hope is a great constraint upon them continually, never letting them get their roots into the things of this life, as is shown by I Cor. 7:31 and I John 2:15ff.

4. The People of God Have Always Been the People of the Plan

Gen. 1:28ff (cf. Psalm 8:3f.) indicates there will be some kind of a fulfilment or end to history. Gen. 3:15 tells of a 'salvation plan'. The prophets (cf. Enoch) from the very beginning think in terms of God's ultimate goal. Thus the people of God live in prophetic expectancy and in prophetic action. They also see history as a battle against the powers of darkness with the ultimate conquest of evil, and the establishment of God's Kingdom. This view did not begin at Pentecost but was already there, and simply grew in awareness and intensity.

The plan of God (see Ephes. 1:9-14, 3:9-11, Rev. 10:1-7) thus determines the mind and action of God's people. As we see in our notes, I Cor. 15:24-28 is the plan which is now being worked out. This picture is amplified in the book of the Revelation. The people of God share in the outworking of the plan.

5. The People Will Find Their Ultimate Destiny

This identity is corporate and is seen in the revelation under the 144,000, the martyrs 'whose deeds do follow them', and the 'great multitude' which is numberless. Identity is also personal as can be seen from Rev. 2:17, 3:12, and 21:7

STUDY TWENTY TWO

Introducing the Kingdom

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp. 228-231. See also LFS '*The King: The Kingdom of God: The Kingship*' and the book , CHRIST THE CONQUERING KING, (NCPI 1985).

2. Not Understanding the Kingdom of God

It is evident from the N.T that Christ's coming was a powerful theme with the people of Israel in Palestine. John the Baptist prophesied its immediate coming, and Jesus declared it was already there (Mark 1:14-15). There was no need to explain the fact of the Kingdom. All knew it. The question is whether mankind has not always known it, anyway. When we read the Book of Daniel which is almost wholly connected with the Kingdom, we see that a man like Nebuchadnezzar must have had the concept of the Kingdom in his mind.

All mankind must have it in mind. The Kingdom of God is really the reign and rule of God, and must not be thought of as having perimeters as do worldly kingdoms. God reigns over all: those of Israel were always saying or singing that truth. Their God was not merely a national god, but the One who reigned over all history. They did, however, look for that Kingdom to be manifested in time, and to have its core and centre in Palestine with its rule and control over the whole world.

Doubtless human beings know they are in rebellion against God, and they seek to establish their own personal kingdoms, and to group together against the reign and rule of God. This is powerfully shown in Psalm where the nations rebel against God and His Messiah, and are put down by Messiah who brings the nations to obedience (cf. Gen. 49:10).

3. Understanding the Kingdom of God

Jesus first of all manifested the Kingdom by His acts and teaching. This can be seen in principle in Matt. 12:28, Luke 9:1ff. and 10:1ff. with Acts 10:38. Even so it was not seen as the Kingdom by all. People saw miracles but did not understand them as signs (John 2:22-3:6). Jesus had to explain that without new birth man - born of the flesh - could not see the Kingdom of God until 'begotten from above'. In John 18:33-36 Jesus shows that the Kingdom of God is not political, and not worldly. It is a spiritual Kingdom, and in that sense is unseen. However it is an actual Kingdom, and is manifested in visible ways, e.g. Matt. 12:28.

The believer who is born again, born of the water (repentance) and the Spirit, has not only seen, but has entered into the Kingdom (Col. 1:13-14). He is now conscious that he is under the Kingship of Christ. His life is lived in the sense of this.

4. The King of the Kingdom.

In Psalm 2 the 'old' king gives the Kingdom to His Son. In passages such as Ephes 5:5, I Cor. 14:24-28, and Rev. 11:15 it is evident that the Father King gives all things into the hands of His Son. See John 3:35, and Matt. 11:27. The Lamb is seated at the right hand of God, and reigns under the Father. The Father helps to subject all things under the Son, whilst

the Son, too, works at this with his powers as Lord of all. He is one with the Father, and so it is the Kingdom of God and His Christ. To have a Father-King is of great comfort and a cause of security for the believer.

STUDY TWENTY THREE

The Kingdom of God in The New Testament

1. Instructions

Read TTWFB pp.232- 238, and LFS 14, and 'Christ The Conquering King' as background reading. Note:- It will be difficult for us to cover all this subject in Study 23, so that we will leave some of it for Study 24, which is quite brief.

2. Israel, the Church, and the Kingdom.

We might be forgiven for thinking that there was one Kingdom in and for Israel, of which God speaks solely in regard to Israel, i.e. Israel being the Kingdom, and almost another Kingdom which Daniel interprets through his visions. The primary message to Israel was, 'Thy God reigns!' That is, in the midst of attacks by other nations, God's judgements through exile of Israel, and His restoration of His people, Israel was to understand their their God was reigning though all appearances seemed to be to the contrary. Ultimately the Kingdom would come. Israel could be pardoned for thinking (Dan. 7:13) that 'the saints of the Most High' were only the people of Israel. This, then, would make it difficult for them to see the Gentiles in the Kingdom.

At the same time those who were understanding in Israel believed - according to the prophecies - that the nations were under God's rule, and that He would draw them to the Kingdom, - i.e. in obedience to God - but with Israel heading up that Kingdom.

When, then, in Acts 1:3-11 the disciples believed the Kingdom was now coming, they too would have these things in mind. However the nature of the Kingdom was different from that they had thought it to be. It was not to be national, it was to have no elements of the political. It was to be 'not of this world'. It was to be powerful, though not a 'power structure', and it was to be 'righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit' (cf. John 18:36-37, Rom. 14:17, I Cor. 4:20).

Where, then, does the church come into the matter of the Kingdom? The answer is (a) every believer is brought into the Kingdom (Col. 1:13-14) by new birth (John 3:3f.). He is now not a part of 'the the kingdom of this world' (Rev. 11:15). At the same time he must be alert lest he live in any other way than 'the Kingdom way': he must not be deceived. The church is to proclaim the Kingdom - that can be seen from the book of the Acts.

Not only does it proclaim the Kingdom, but it is part of the outworking of the triumph of that Kingdom as is seen in I Cor. 15:24-28, the book of Daniel (as a whole), and the book of the Revelation with other OT and NT prophetic statements.

3. The Need to Think Clearly and Largely

If there were those in Israel who thought in an insular way, there can be those in the church who think in a limited way, also. We may think of the church, and the activities as believers as being the whole of the Kingdom in operation. The church is not the Kingdom. The Kingdom is not the church. The church is in the Kingdom, the church proclaims the Kingdom, and the church works in the service of the Kingdom, which it is not the church. Thus we have to see that God is working on a vast scale with the nations, with history, and in

the whole range of time. The Kingdom did not begin with Christ's coming, was not completed by His work of the Atonement, and will not be completed until the plan of God comes to fulfilment, in and by Christ. If we keep this larger view then we will not try to 'possess' the Kingdom and bend it to our desires and uses. This larger view of the Kingdom will humble us keep us reverent and in awe, and greatly encourage us.

STUDY TWENTY FOUR

Conclusion Concerning the Kingdom.

1. Instructions

Read pp. 239-241, and the background material recommend in the two previous studies. We include part of Study 23 in this Study.

2. The Present Action of the Kingdom

The practical value of our course is that we see how the truth works out in the life of the church, and in our personal life. When we have the 'panoramic view' of history and the working of God, especially as we see it related to the church, the historical people of God, and the Kingdom of God, then we realise that there is no point, or no time in history which is not of God, and not of the action of God. This is what we call 'the sovereignty of God', i.e. His good rule over all things, and all time. Most people do not think God is active in His creation, and in their sight they do not see that rule as intimate, personal, and of holy love. Even Christians think that God's rule is often indifferent, remote, and even harsh. Romans 8:28 says otherwise, 'We know that in everything God works for good for those who love him, who are called according to his purposes'. With that is also Abraham's statement, 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' (cf. Dan. 4:34f.).

When Jesus came he came as King, and hence all his actions were those of authority, command and consisted of ruling over the powers of darkness for the good of his people. Thus we see him command demons to come out of people, sicknesses to depart from some, and the healing of persons as a whole to be effected. He came to disarm 'the strong man' and to dispossess him of ill-gotten spoils, and so to release those who were enslaved to him, imprisoned within the evil Satanic kingdom (Luke 11:14-26). He sealed this victory by the Atonement, taking away the power of evil by bearing the guilt of sins. Now his church is in present action doing just what he did. In a way it has an advantage that he (Christ) did not seem to have in quite the same way. As King he was delegated authority over the sabbath, over evil powers, and to forgive sins. By the work of the Cross he won - so to speak - the right to have and do all these things, without delegation.

In this age the church is in action under the delegated authority of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20) for Christ is over all things both in this age and the age to come for the church (see Ephes. 1:19-23), i.e. so that it can carry out the actions of the Kingdom under the control of Christ (see Ephes. 3:9-11). Christ does not merely delegate. He, too, directs the action and is involved in it.

3. Personal Responsibility in the Kingdom

It is clear from Mark 1:14-15, Luke 12:32, 22:28-29, Acts 1:3-8, Acts 14:22, Col. 1:13-14, Rom. 14:17, I Cor. 4:20, II Thess. 1:5 with Matt. 5:10-11 that each member of the church, - being in the Kingdom of God, and working with the King in His plan for history - has personal membership of the Kingdom, and personal responsibility for working with the King. As we have seen we are many times warned to keep alert, and not to presume upon our ultimate inheritance of the Kingdom (I Cor. 6:9-10, Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 5:5). Our personal task, then, is to proclaim the Kingdom, to use the delegated powers of the Kingdom to

overcome evil, to work with Christ as he overcomes the contrary powers, to live commensurate with the Kingdom, and to anticipate the climactic coming of the Kingdom. This will mean recognising the judgements of God in the world, and the refusal of any forms of pressure to conform which come from 'the beast' and 'Babylon'. It is to keep in view, all the time, the climactic coming of the Kingdom, and not to lose heart.